

Digital channels for attraction and hiring generation Z: Research results from Serbia

Digitalni kanali za privlačenje i zapošljavanje generacije Z: Rezultati istraživanja u Srbiji

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to point out on the key digital channels for attraction and hiring Generation Z. During 2021 and 2022 a total of 339 members of Generation Z that study economics, finance, management, and marketing in Serbia participated in research. Results showed that the largest number of members of Generation Z use digital channels during job seeking, such as: social networks (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), job boards, online reviews, and company websites. Furthermore, results showed that only a small number of members of Generation Z are oriented toward employment agencies, student and youth employment organizations, career centers at faculties, radio, TV, and career magazines. Generation Z is entering the labor market and employers should consider its characteristics and expectations if they want to be adequately prepared to attract, hire, and retain members of this generation.

Keywords: human resource management, recruitment, Generation Z, digital channels, digital economy

Sažetak

Cilj ovog rada je da ukaže na digitalne kanale koji se koriste u procesu privlačenja i zapošljavanja Generacije Z. Tokom 2021. i 2022. godine sprovedeno je istraživanje u kojem je učestvovalo 339 pripadnika Generacije Z koji studiraju ekonomiju, finansije, menadžment i marketing u Srbiji. Rezultati istraživanja su pokazali da najveći broj pripadnika Generacije Z prilikom traženja posla koristi digitalne kanale među kojima su: društvene mreže (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), portali za zapošljavanje, onlajn recenzije i vebsajt kompanije. Pored toga, rezultati su pokazali da je mali broj pripadnika Generacije Z orijentisan ka agencijama za zapošljavanje, omladinskim i studentskim zadrugama, karijernim centrima na fakultetima, radiju, televiziji i poslovnim časopisima. Generacija Z postaje sve prisutnija na tržištu rada, zbog čega je neophodno da poslodavci uzmu u obzir njene ključne karakteristike i očekivanja i da se adekvatno pripreme kako bi privukli, zaposlili i zadržali pripadnike ove generacije.

Ključne reči: menadžment ljudskih resursa, regrutovanje, generacija Z, digitalni kanali, digitalna ekonomija


1. Introduction

By reviewing the literature, it can be found many studies that deal with key characteristics, values, ideas, attitudes, skills, and knowledge toward employment of a Generation Y. As time goes by, there is a new generation that slowly enters the labor market and has its own characteristics and expectations that should be considered (Grow & Yang, 2018). Worldwide, there are more than two billion people that represent the Post-Millennial Generation also known as Generation Z, which is according to the most authors born in the period from 1995 to 2010 (Bencsik et al., 2016;

Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). Projections show that by 2025 year, this generation will make up about 27% of the workforce (Koop, 2021). Each employer that wants to attract, hire, and retain members of Generation Z must be adequately prepared. One of the key points that should be considered is the fact that Generation Z has many characteristics that make it different and unique, and consequently more difficult for employers to create an adequate value proposition for it. It is very challenging or even impossible to attract the attention and interest of Generation Z through traditional hiring channels such as radio, TV, career magazines, newspapers, specialized

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employment events (job fairs), employment agencies, and student and youth employment organizations. In practice, job search habits and attitudes have changed significantly due to advancement and massive use of the Internet, computers, and smartphones. In the time of digital economy, candidates who search for a job do that mainly through search engines, online portals, or social networks (Karacsony et al., 2020). Employers need to be aware that Generation Z is truly digital - it has had the Internet and smartphones since birth and according to that they need to reposition hiring channels to social media, job boards, online reviews, and company websites. In that sense, employers need to put a lot of effort to make job application process fast and simple, having in mind that Generation Z prefers to apply for a job using its mobile phone, with application forms that require no more than fifteen minutes to be filled, with option to save filled data and return to them later (Paggi & Clowes, 2021). More than a half of members of Generation Z will not complete the job application if it is outdated or too complex and time consuming (Kiesewetter, 2019). Furthermore, Generation Z prefers quick information that they successfully applied for a job, and it wants to be informed about the next steps in the selection process. Employers who are not oriented toward contemporary digital technologies and social media may lose the battle for talented members of Generation Z.

Having in mind that Generation Z enters the labor market and that its characteristics and preferences about hiring are not yet deeply researched and examined (Nguyen Ngoc et al., 2022), the aim of this paper is to point out on the most frequently used hiring channels among members of Generation Z. The first title is dedicated to Generation Z and its key preferences when searching for a job. The second title is focused on hiring channels, with special emphasis on digital economy and contemporary digital channels that Generation Z dominantly use. The third title points out the research methodology, while the fourth title presents the research results and discussion of research findings.

2. Generation Z on the labor market: The key expectations from employers

Employers must be prepared if they want to attract, hire, and retain members of Generation Z. To succeed in that, they need to examine and analyze the needs, habits, expectations, and lifestyles of this generation (Lukić Nikolić, 2021; Chomatowska et al., 2022). The results of a study conducted by the Workplace Institute at Kronos Incorporated (2019) and review of existing research showed the following:

- The key factors that impact on members of Generation Z when deciding about employment are: salary, job meaningfulness, and benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, private pension fund, and life insurance.
- Members of Generation Z prefer job security (Maurer, 2016). Most of them have only one job (75%), but do not intend to work for the same employer for more than two years.

- One third of members of Generation Z expect from their employer to provide them the latest technology and tools for work. They do not tolerate slow Internet, computer, smartphone, software, and applications.
- Members of Generation Z want to work for employers who have fair reward systems and treat all employees with respect (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018).
- Members of Generation Z choose employers who place emphasis on employee well-being, work-life balance, and vocation with open and transparent communication (O'Boyle et al., 2017).
- Members of Generation Z give their maximum contribution when they know that their ideas, proposals, projects, and suggestions are valued and fit into the organizational mission.
- Flexibility of working hours is something that is almost mandatory for members of Generation Z - they want to be the owners of their time.
- Almost one third of members of Generation Z want to have a manager who provides support, instills trust, and truly cares about employees.
- Almost 63% of the worldwide population of Generation Z are characterized as highly focused on achievements. The members of this generation have strong desire for ongoing professional development and opportunities for promotion (Schroth, 2019).
- Although Generation Z is well known as truly digital generation, research has shown that 75% of them prefer to receive feedback from managers directly, face to face. Furthermore, they want to be informed about everything that happens in organization (O'Boyle et al., 2017).
- Half of members of Generation Z are motivated by work that gives them enjoyment, fulfillment, and inspiration. Almost 2/3 of members of Generation Z expect to be promoted at least once a year, while 44% of them measure success by salary, 35% by promotion opportunities, respect, and recognition.

One of the most important characteristics of Generation Z is dependence on smartphones and Internet - it uses them as a connection between offline and online worlds (Fromm & Read, 2018). For that reason, Generation Z is frequently called tech-savvy, globally connected, and agile (Dobrowolski et al., 2022). Having in mind that members of this generation live during the fourth and fifth industrial revolutions, it is clear why they are oriented toward newest technologies and tools, especially modern collaborative robots. Contemporary technological advancement in the fifth industrial revolution will lead to increasing automation of work tasks and activities, which is especially important for tasks that are mostly routine, standardized, repetitive, and monotonous. In this way, employees will be freed from boring jobs and will be able to devote themselves to creative and challenging jobs. Automation will be particularly important and welcome in jobs that are dangerous to human health and safety (Demir et al., 2019). Furthermore, the fifth industrial revolution will lead to increased opportunities for flexibility in all fields - working time, employment type, location, salary, and employee functional flexibility which means that the employee can quickly adapt to the emerging

circumstances (Dündar et al., 2020). All these characteristics impact hiring strategies and channels of employers that operate in the digital economy and want to attract and hire talented members of Generation Z.

3. The key characteristics of hiring channels in digital economy

Digitalization, viewed through the prism of the development of new business processes in companies, implies the use of numerous technologies for the purpose of changing the business model and generating new added value (Brkljač et al., 2022). Apart from the business model, digitalization leads to changes in all activities and phases in human resource management. In addition to the new ways and methods of work such as remote and flexible working, there are also changes in the processes of recruitment, selection, hiring, training and development, evaluation and rewarding of employees (Oncioiu et al., 2022). Contemporary digital technologies have reshaped the entire hiring process in all organizations, not only in those who are oriented to digital businesses.

In digital economy, recruiting sources are numerous and include: employee referrals – recommendations from current and previous employees, job fairs – organized events where employers and potential candidates can meet each other at defined place and time (many job fairs are becoming virtual, especially during Covid-19 pandemic), executive search agencies – recruiting firms that specialize in particular types of industries or jobs, career center at faculty or high school, career magazines, radio, TV, billboards, professional associations or networks – members of those associations or networks are potential applicants, company websites – especially dedicated career page on company website with all information regarding career and open jobs; social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), professional networks (LinkedIn), online job boards, online reviews, etc. The practice has shown that internet recruitment is faster compared to newspaper advertising and other traditional methods. Internet and social networks have many advantages such as access to the local and global labor markets, large pool of diverse and highly skilled candidates, and simple search for preferred jobs. On the other hand, there are also disadvantages such as: discrimination of marginal groups which do not have access to internet and the fact that human resource departments may be overloaded with inappropriate applicants which have not required education and/or experience (Klikauer, 2022). However, following contemporary technological advancements and preferences of Generation Z, organizations largely experiment with new hiring channels. They are oriented toward digital media channels with the aim to spread the knowledge about the organization and to enable real-time interaction with potential candidates (Gilch & Sieweke, 2021). Yello (2019) showed that Generation Z prefers e-mail communication with potential employers, text messaging, and video calls. Employ (2022) pointed out that 76% of members of Generation Z prefer to receive e-

mails from recruiters, 70% prefer phone calls, while 50% prefer text messages.

Digital hiring channels have the aim to establish the first impression between candidates from the labor market and potential employers. HireHive (2022) pointed out on the importance of multi-channel recruitment with the main aim to use various channels to attract the best talents from the labor market. IsoTalent (2022) focused on the importance of social channels which are intended to enhance employer brand, organizational culture, and overall vision. A special emphasis is on professional networks such as LinkedIn and contacts established on various networking events – conferences and panel discussions. Regarding hiring channels, research results from Employ (2022) showed that:

- 59% of respondents use online job boards;
- 39% of respondents use social media, for example LinkedIn or Facebook;
- 33% of respondents use employer career sites.

Gallup (2017) pointed out on research results which showed that candidates from labor market look for jobs on the following channels:

- 77% on company websites;
- 58% on online job sites;
- 57% on publications or online sources in a field;
- 55% via general web search;
- 47% on professional networks (LinkedIn);
- 39% on news media.

Manatal (2021) provided a list of eight most popular channels to recruit Generation Z: Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Job Boards, and Employee Referrals. The growth of users of social networks around the world impacted on companies to explore how to use those networks to better position themselves, their culture, vision, mission, products, services, and corporate social responsibility (Đuričanin et al., 2021). Digital media has become an important marketing tool for social interaction and decision making (Alkier & Perić, 2021). Generation Z rather research, collect and analyze all information about the company - various comments and reviews of its current and previous employees, salary reports and ratings (Dessler, 2020). For that reason, an advertisement must grab the attention of a job seeker and instigate its interest and desire to apply for the job. Implementation and usage of modern technologies in the hiring process, such as video interviewing or online tests will help employers to attract and hire talented members of Generation Z. Survey results by Capgemini consulting showed that 70% of organizations were concerned about the ability to hire and retain talents in the current environment, especially those who lag with adopting digital technologies and tools (Spitzer et al., 2013). In Table 1 are shown digital hiring channels grouped into three categories, according to their impact on search for a job (actively or passively search) and the impact on decision to apply for a job. The most frequently used digital channels for active search for a job are: LinkedIn, job boards, company website, university platform, recruitment agencies and Facebook. The most

impactful digital channels when making a decision to apply for a job are: LinkedIn, company website, university platform, and job boards. On the other hand, digital channels that are dominantly used in the process of passive search for a job are: notifications via email, direct offers via email or LinkedIn, Facebook groups, and job advertisements (Rodrigues & Martinez, 2020).

Table 1. Digital hiring channels

Active search for a job	Passive search for a job	Most relevant channels for decision making
LinkedIn	Notifications via email	LinkedIn
Job boards	Direct offers – via email or LinkedIn messages	Company’s website
Company’s website	Facebook groups	University’s platform
University’s platform	Job advertisements	Job boards
Recruitment agencies		
Facebook		

Source: Adapted from Rodrigues, D., & Martinez, L. F. (2020). The influence of digital marketing on recruitment effectiveness: a qualitative study. *European Journal of Management Studies*, 25(1), 23-44.

4. Methodology of empirical research

With the aim to find out which hiring channels Generation Z prefers in the digital economy, the research was conducted using specially designed questionnaire for that purpose. Apart from the questions regarding demographic nature of respondents, one of the questions was related to the frequency of channels that members of Generation Z use when seeking for a job. The following options were available: (1) Employment agencies; (2) Student and youth employment organizations; (3) Career center at faculty; (4) Radio / TV; (5) Career magazines; (6) Job boards (eg. poslovi.infostud.com); (7) Company website; (8) Social networks (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn); (9) Online reviews. Above-mentioned hiring channels were grouped in traditional (from number 1 to number 5) and digital (from number 6 to number 9). For each hiring channel, respondents needed to choose one of the four options which demonstrate the frequency of using those channels when seeking for a job: never, once a week, several times a week, everyday. Having in mind the key preferences of Generation Z and necessity for physical distance during Covid-19 pandemic, the questionnaire was realized online. During 2021 and 2022, a total of 339 members of Generation Z who study economics, finance, management, and marketing in Serbia completed the questionnaire. The collected responses were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences - SPSS 21.0. (Armonk, NY: IBM Corporation).

5. Research results and discussion of research Findings

Almost 78% of members of Generation Z that participated in research are female, while the other 22% are male. The largest number of members of Generation Z is not employed (68.7%), while 24.3% of them work for less than three years. Those results indicate that in sample are dominant members of Generation Z who actively search for a job.

Table 2. Research results regarding traditional hiring channels

Channel	Frequency	N	%
Employment Agencies	Never	215	63.4
	Once a week	68	20.1
	Several times a week	32	9.4
Student and youth employment organization	Everyday	24	7.1
	Never	141	41.6
	Once a week	86	25.4
Career centre at faculty	Several times a week	62	18.3
	Everyday	50	14.7
	Never	182	53.6
Radio / TV	Once a week	66	19.5
	Several times a week	44	13.0
	Everyday	47	13.9
Careers magazines	Never	232	68.4
	Once a week	63	18.6
	Several times a week	27	8.0
Job boards	Everyday	17	5.0
	Never	241	71.1
	Once a week	63	18.6
Company website	Several times a week	21	6.2
	Everyday	14	4.1
	Never		

Source: Author's calculation

Research results showed that the largest number of members of Generation Z when searching for a job do not use career magazines (71.1%), radio or TV (68.4%), employment agencies (63.4%), career center at faculty (53.6%), and student and youth employment organizations (41.6%). It should be taken into account that Generation Z was also confronted with Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences. That implies that career centers at faculties, employment agencies, and student and youth employment organizations were not open and functional during lockdown, so they were oriented toward other hiring channels – digital ones.

In the digital economy, there are several options regarding hiring channels which correspond to the preferences of Generation Z. Those channels are: job boards, company websites, various social networks, and online reviews. Research results regarding the frequencies of used digital hiring channels among members of Generation Z are presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Research results regarding digital hiring channels

Channel	Frequency	N	%
Job boards (e.g. poslovi.infostud.com)	Never	97	28.7
	Once a week	58	17.1
	Several times a week	74	21.8
	Everyday	110	32.4
Company website	Never	114	33.5
	Once a week	89	26.3
	Several times a week	69	20.4
Social networks (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)	Everyday	67	19.8
	Never	90	26.5
	Once a week	63	18.6
Online Reviews	Several times a week	82	24.2
	Everyday	104	30.7
	Never	111	32.8
Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)	Once a week	90	26.5
	Several times a week	86	25.4
	Everyday	52	15.3

Source: Author's calculation

Research results showed the following:

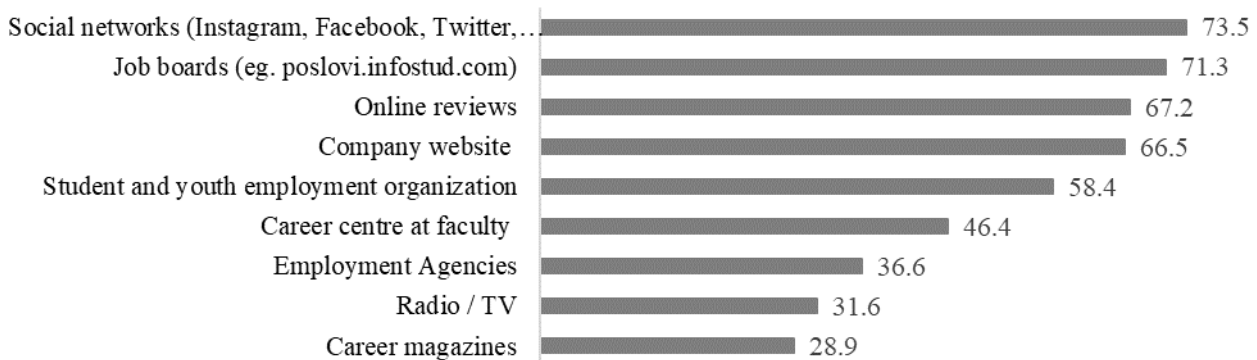
- 73.5% of members of Generation Z use social networks (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram);
- 71.3% of members of Generation Z use job boards (e.g. poslovi.infostud.com);
- 67.2% of members of Generation Z research and examine online reviews when searching for a job;
- 66.5% of members of Generation Z use the company website of their desired employer.

As research results showed, the main characteristics of Generation Z are reflected in their job-seeking behaviour. Generation Z has grown up with the search engines on which it likes to discover and analyze content that may be helpful in decision making about employment (Dospinescu et al., 2019). This generation is hyperconnected and can communicate its *sight, sound, and motion* from any location in the world with Internet access (Fromm & Read, 2018). A very early usage of modern technologies has impacted the opinions, behaviors, and communication manner of Generation Z. In the past, candidates have collected information about the company in publicly announced reports or from

friends and/or family who work or worked in it. Nowadays, when considering a place of employment, the most likely source that candidates look for before accepting a job are the social media and networks, as well as the job boards. This is followed by searching what other people are saying about the organization, using online reviews and national agencies for top employer brands (e.g., The Employer Branding Agency). Also, Generation Z investigates the organization's social media and looks for its goals, mission and vision, photos and especially the workspace and working environment to get a more realistic picture of the potential employer. In the digital age, members of Generation Z actively collect information about the company, its working conditions and reputation on online reviews such as Glassdoor, Yelp, OgleđaloFirme (in Serbia), etc.

In Figure 1 are presented the overall results regarding the usage of hiring channels among members of Generation Z that participated in this research. Answers of respondents regarding following frequencies *once a week, several times a week* and *everyday* were summarized for easier analysis and interpretation of obtained results.

Figure 1. Hiring channels that members of Generation Z use (in percentage)



Source: Author's calculation

Summarized research results showed that members of Generation Z are mostly relied on social networks (73.5%), job boards (e.g. poslovi.infostud.com) (71.3%), online reviews (67.2%), and company website (66.5%) when searching for a job. Similar results are obtained in research conducted in March 2020 in Hungary, which showed that members of Generation Z mostly used social media, job boards, and company websites when searching for a job (Karacsony et al., 2020). Furthermore, research findings correspond to Lin et al. (2021) conclusion that advertising through social media is more effective in comparison to print media, and that traditional hiring methods are becoming less popular among the newest generation of job seekers. It is obvious that employers which want to attract, hire, and retain members of Generation Z should reposition their hiring channels from traditional to the newest, digital channels which are based on modern information and communication technologies. Bearing in mind the fact that Generation Z grew up in an uncertain and very complex environment where the virtual world is a natural phenomenon, where the technical knowledge and skills are at a very high level, and rapid

career development with professionally high ambitions in the workplace are important, employers are confronted with many new challenges. One of them is how to fully understand the purpose and advantages of each digital hiring channel when trying to attract the attention and interest of Generation Z. The other challenge is to become familiar with technologies that are currently popular among Generation Z and to make the job application process more mobile-friendly.

6. Conclusion

In the previous period, employers mostly used traditional and low-tech hiring channels such as: newspapers, magazines, referrals, job fairs, and services from employment agencies. In the digital economy and the fifth industrial revolution, this situation is changing. There are a variety of new hiring channels shaped by modern information and communication technologies and tools.

Generation Z is unique and truly digital. It has multiple expectations of employers and their organisations. Clear

job descriptions, constant training and development, career advancement opportunities, flexibility, diversion, inclusion, benefits, and organizational culture must be perfectly suitable and aligned with their preferences. Employers need to be adequately prepared if they want to attract, hire, and retain members of this generation. The aim of this paper was to point out on key hiring channels that Generation Z dominantly use when searching for a job. Results from research conducted in 2021 and 2022 in which participated 339 members of Generation Z that study economics, finance, management, and marketing in Serbia showed that the dominant hiring channels are: social networks (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), job boards, online reviews, and company websites. Research results furthermore showed that only a small number of members of Generation Z use traditional hiring channels such as employment agencies, student and youth employment organizations, career centers at faculty, radio, TV, and career magazines.

The research is accompanied with certain limitations which refer to the used statistical methods that are based on descriptive statistics and the absence of reality analysis of the measured attitudes of Generation Z. In research participated members of Generation Z that study economics, finance, management, and marketing, so the obtained results are valuable to employers who will need candidates with those educational backgrounds. Therefore, obtained results cannot be generalized to the entire Generation Z. That is one of the recommendations for some future research on this topic – to encompass different structures of Generation Z, and to spread focus not only at those members who attend faculties, however high schools. Another proposition for future research is to deeply examine the usage of various social networks (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), and to encompass the newest networks that are currently popular among Generation Z.

Apart from the above-mentioned limitations, the paper has valuable practical implications. Firstly, Generation Z is entering the labor market, and consequently it is the newest generation in the workplace whose characteristics, attitudes, and preferences regarding hiring channels are not yet deeply researched and examined. Changes in the human resource management activities, which concern candidate planning, recruitment and selection, communication, motivation, and organizational culture are now in the digital age more than necessary. Managers and human resource experts must adopt the new generational communication values and habits and accept social media as an inseparable part of the recruitment policy and practice. Secondly, obtained results can be of importance for employers and human resource managers which need to adjust existing and prepare new hiring strategies oriented toward digital hiring channels. Each time a new generation enters the workforce, employers need to be agile and prepare themselves for different generational preferences, attitudes, needs, and desires.

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