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ORIGINAL PAPER

# YOUNG GENERATION DIGITAL BEHAVIOR (THE EXAMPLE OF BELARUS)

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**Abstract.** All aspects of modern life have been affected by digital transformation, with a particular focus on the business and promotional realm. Internet users globally have shown significant changes in their purchasing habits during and after the Pandemic, particularly the younger generation, which is quickly adapting to the new environment. Research has focused on Generation Cohort Theory and Age-Period-Cohort Theory, which focus on consumer behavior on one side and workplace behavior on the other. According to statistics collected by McKinsey, GfK, Datareportal, and Statista, young generations are having a greater impact on e-commerce, labor market, advertising market, and the digital environment in general. The systematic examination of young individuals' perspectives on digitalization, their utilization of digital tools in various aspects of private lives has not been conducted. A significant amount of attention is given to the aspects of conscious behavior, digital security, the impact of social networks, and the interaction of young people with brands in the realization of the necessity for collaborative creativity. The goal of this article is to investigate the young Belarusian audience to determine their involvement in digitalization processes and their level of digital maturity. To achieve this goal, a theoretical review of the characteristics of digital behavior and requirements of young audiences in different countries for 2020-2024, statistics on Internet use by representatives of the younger generation were conducted, the results of previously conducted studies of digital literacy of Belarusian users, reports of the sociological research center on issues of personal information protection were studied, an online survey of 300 students and graduates of economic specialties aged 17-24 on the topic of digital inclusion and digital requirements was conducted, conclusions were given on the need to improve the digital practices of Belarusian companies. The results have led to conclusions about young people's recognition of the high role of digital environment in the life of the ordinary user and their own lives; existence of clear digital requirements for brands; and the use of different digital channels to solve the challenges of interaction with brands.
**Keywords:** digital demand, digital environment, digital requirements, omnipresence, young generation

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ОРИГИНАЛЬНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

# ЦИФРОВОЕ ПОВЕДЕНИЕ МОЛОДОГО ПОКОЛЕНИЯ (НА ПРИМЕРЕ БЕЛАРУСИ)

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**Аннотация.** Цифровая трансформация затронула все сферы деятельности современного человека, особое воздействие оказав на бизнес- и маркетинг-среду. В период пандемии и после нее Интернет-пользователи во всем мире продемонстрировали серьезные изменения своих покупательских привычек, особенно быстро к новым цифровым реалиям адаптировались представители молодого поколения. К текущему моменту накопилось большое количество исследований особенностей поведения молодых людей в контексте двух теорий – Generation Cohort Theory и Age-Period-Cohort Theory, ориентированных, с одной стороны, на поведение покупательское, с другой – поведение на рабочем месте. Статистика, собранная исследовательскими компаниями McKinsey, GfK, Datareportal, Statista, демонстрирует возрастающее влияние подрастающих поколений на e-commerce, рынок рабочей силы, рекламный рынок и в целом цифровую среду. Однако пока не предпринято систематизированных попыток изучения мнения молодых людей относительно феномена цифровизации, использования цифровых инструментов в различных областях их жизни. В статье значительное внимание уделено аспектам осознанного поведения, цифровой безопасности и влиянию социальных сетей, взаимодействию молодых людей с брендами в реализации потребности в совместном творчестве. Целью статьи является изучение молодой белорусской аудитории на примере студентов экономических специальностей для оценки ее включения в процессы цифровизации. Для достижения поставленной цели проведен теоретический обзор особенностей цифрового поведения и требований молодой аудитории в разных странах за 2020-2024 гг., статистика пользования интернет представителями молодого поколения, изучены результаты ранее проведенных исследований цифровой грамотности белорусских пользователей, отчеты социологического исследовательского центра относительно вопросов защиты персональной информации, проведен онлайн-опрос 300 студентов и выпускников экономических специальностей в возрасте 17-24 лет по тематике цифровой включенности и цифровых требований, предъявляемых к брендам, приведены выводы по необходимости улучшения цифровых практик белорусских компаний. Полученные результаты позволили сделать вывод относительно признания молодыми людьми высокой роли цифровой среды в жизни обычного пользователя и их собственной жизни, наличии четких сформированных требований к бендам, представленным в цифровой среде, и привычек использования разных цифровых каналов для решения задач взаимодействия с брендами.

**Ключевые слова:** цифровая потребность, цифровая среда, цифровые требования, омниканальность, молодое поколение

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## Introduction

The shift in consumer behavior has become a significant subject of study for marketing analysts. This has resulted in a reassessment of the marketing strategies employed by the classical school of marketing, with a particular emphasis on traditional business models that initially focused on the product and then on the brand. In marketing theory, the dominant role of the consumer is important, but in practice, this role hasn't been as visible. The target of advertising and other efforts was the consumer, but his passive role (the consumer of commercial information and the purchaser of value offered in the form of goods and services) determined the leading role of the company, and the goal, contrary to the wishes of the classics, was that sales continued to rise, and financial performance remained solid.

The digitalization of business has brought fresh realities and new perspectives, presenting the world with business models that allowed not only to see the target consumer's profile more clearly and to craft more efficient methods of influence, but also to entice him to engage in effective interactions with the firm. The digital consumer is considered a person who requires an individual approach and is interested in sharing value creation. The specialists' vision is gradually being reconstructed in the direction of the consumer-object to the consumer-subject, the consumer effect to the consumer interaction, the consumer's passive-active, consumer-consumer influence, and creativity. It is evident that the use thesis has replaced the acquisition and ownership thesis, especially in the digital products and services category. The client-company relationship does not end with transactions but rather begins with a clear orientation, personalization of the client's experience, and opportunities for interactivity and joint creativity. This approach is also applicable to traditional enterprises interested in transforming their business models and taking full advantage of digitization. Digital interactive platforms and software products increase the company's customer focus and transform their business models into B2B2C (business to business consumers), which increases the number of customers and their involvement in the company's interactions [1]. An instance of this is the study conducted by S.K. Roy, G. Singh, S. Sadeque, P. Harrigan, K. Coussement [2] in 2023, wherein the authors were able to establish a correlation between a subjective perception of customer well-being and an affective and behavioral disposition when utilizing digital interactive retail platforms.

During the pandemic, the role of digital technology has increased significantly, with empirical evidence of the positive impact of ICT and Industry 4.0 data processing technologies on data series and innovation in manufacturing. In marketing, promoting new products, entering new markets through e-commerce and social media, and facilitating interaction with clients, ICTs play a key role. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced people to spend more time online, and companies are expanding the use of digital channels to interact with them. Investing in digitalization is a strategic decision for growth and innovation [3]. It was imperative to restructure business models and place greater emphasis on the digital realm. Digital marketing tools began to exhibit impressive outcomes, and the e-commerce sector experienced a significant expansion during the post-crisis period. Digital marketing strategies enhance consumer loyalty, while e-customer relationship management, content marketing, website quality, e-site, and e-MOM have a significant impact on customer satisfaction and buying intent in the digital economy [4]. Adopting fresh digital business standards like those of Google, Yandex, Amazon has bolstered its superior client care by constructing its digital ecosystem platform around continual customer enhancement and contentment. The most active and buying youngsters are deeply rooted in this standard. Individuals who were born after the year 2000 and have reached the age of 17-24 will soon exert a greater influence on companies, necessitating that they adapt and uphold the requisite high standards and requirements for digital services. For some reason, there are so many publications and studies devoted to the study of consumer behavior among the growing audience that we address in this article.

*Generation Cohort Theory vs. Age-Period-Cohort Theory.* The description of the younger generation's digital behavior and consumption is currently mainly based on two theories: the cohort theory of generation and the age-cohort theory. The former emphasizes the similarities in attitudes, beliefs, values, and use habits of one generation that has grown up in similar social, economic, and communication environments. The latter emphasizes the similarities in views, beliefs, and values of people of equal age.

Modern research by adherents of the theory of "generation" centers on the examination of millennials (representatives of generation Z) in comparison with their predecessors. According to their perspective, individuals from diverse generations possess distinct abilities and tendencies in utilizing digital technologies [5] L. Alkire (née Nasr), G.E. O'Connor, S. Myrden, S. Köcher [5], exhibit divergent behavior in acute life situations [6], utilize media differently and relate to online shopping differently [7], and possess divergent perspectives on security and the necessity to safeguard personal information in a digital environment [8]. According to S.M. Gainsbury, M. Browne, M. Rockloff the younger generation exhibits a higher level of customer privacy by actively engaging with new media that heavily rely on the Internet and sharing their consumer experiences through social media and e-commerce trust platforms. Generation Z actively uses mobile payments (m-pay) [9], requires personalization in service and advanced digital marketing technologies [7], differs from their predecessors by the behavior of managers and employees of the company, adheres to responsible hedonic consumption [10], and pays more attention to ecology and sustainability [11].

The findings were largely confirmed by McKinsey's research. Experts from this company highlight pragmatism (complex idealism and anxiety for the future), a lower level of social and emotional well-being, belonging to an inclusive and supportive community, individualism with greater expression, and social and political activism as significant traits that have emerged during the advancement of Internet technologies among Americans (digital natives). Young people are more Internet-oriented, demanding, looking for impressions, and committed to environmental practices when it comes to shopping. According to a McKinsey study, seventy-three percent of the Z generation reported that they tried to make purchases from companies they considered ethical, and nine out of ten said that companies were responsible for solving environmental and social problems [12].

Within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior, multidimensional perception of environmental value is considered to be an essential component of consumer perceived value, as it is directly related to the recognition of consumers and the assessment of environmental benefits derived from the green product [13]. Nonetheless, the disposition towards environmental issues and sustainable development is contingent upon the cultural context in which these concepts can be interpreted in a diverse manner based on accepted practices and implementation characteristics within a nation. Abu Dhabi Young Generation Z survey shows limited attention to brand adherence to sustainable behavior, for example. Young individuals perceive the conformity of fashion, price, and modesty as crucial criteria for brand evaluation [11]. By conducting a survey of young Chinese audiences regarding environmental services, H. Wu, W. Wang, Y. Tao, M. Shao, Ch. Yu discovered that despite the elevated emotional and social significance of environmental behavior, as a result of active public environmental policy, the influence of opinion leaders, and social networks, Chinese young people place a significant emphasis on the service functionality criterion [14].

The Age-Period-Cohort Theory criticizes the generational theory for lacking a strong empirical base and for confirming the commonality of values and interests of people born at the same historical time. It also demonstrates the similarity of values and other attitudes among young people of similar age [15]. For instance, this theory has demonstrated greater validity in the examination of tourist preferences [16] and the characteristics of employees' behavior in the workplace [17]. The social constructionist and lifespan development perspectives offer alternative ways to study age and age at work that don't rely on the explanations of generations [18]. A qualitative review of the last ten years of published research has revealed four main conclusions suggested by generations: (1) organizations must adopt individualized human resources policies; (2) intergenerational conflicts are inevitable; (3) generations should be led in different ways; and (4) the benefits of exploiting the strengths of generations. These conclusions are criticized through various methodologies, including legal, methodological, practical, and theoretical [15]. Any changes that occur with people as they age or develop, or any differences that exist between demographic cohorts, are much more likely to be attributed to other reasons that are both theoretically and empirically valid.

A demographic is one of the criteria used to allocate target groups (segmentation) in the field of marketing theory. In this case, it is not so much the adoption of the theory of generations as the need to consider the characteristics of the behavior of different age groups, within which marketers also call for the identification of subgroups on several other criteria, for example, behavioral and psychographic. In this article, we will adopt this approach, recognizing the significant differentiation of behavior among people at the same age. The commonality of young people's digital needs has become the focus of our attention. Despite the average of the sample, it is evident that there are distinct perceptions and safety needs, the advancement of novel technologies, and the evaluation of the digital activities of companies in the structure of responses. Consider some Internet statistics and the primary research directions for the young audience to identify aspects of digital behavior and their integration into the digital practices of contemporary companies.

To examine the digital impact on daily life and the requirements of the younger generation, we devised a questionnaire that encompassed various aspects of digitalization and complemented prior research, ranging from a common understanding of the digitalization phenomenon to the delineation of requirements for companies in the digital environment. As a result, the survey contained several blocks: A. the perception of digitalization; B. the advantages of utilizing the internet for private purposes; C. attitudes towards digital security and personal information; D. the requirements for digital branding activities and the use of various digital channels. The criteria for evaluating digital behavior in this survey are based on previously studied aspects of digitalization in the article "The double-layer digital needs model in marketing for sustainable digital development" [19].

This survey was a search, the questionnaire was distributed directly and eventually followed with the second survey, the results of which will be published in the next article. The survey was distributed to students and graduates of economic faculties aged 17-24 years old using a Google form by direct link posted on social networks of the Belarusian Economic University. 315 questionnaires were sent out, of which 10 were rejected because they did not meet the selected demographic parameter. All questions and answers of the questionnaire are developed independently, using studied sources of statistical and scientific information. The test version of the questionnaire was sent to 10 students who answered and responded. It was conducted between November 2023 and February 2024. Because the survey was a search, the results cannot be extrapolated to the general population.

## Results and Discussion

### *Digitalization in the young people lives*

*General Digital Segment Statistics*. According to an annual report, "Digital 2024," there are currently more than 1.2 billion people in the 15-24 age group of the world's population (more than 15% of the world's population). Rising generations from 0 to 14 years comprise about 2 billion individuals, or 24.8% of the world. 62% of Earthlings are under the age of 40 years, recognizing the significant purchasing potential both in the present and in the upcoming 5-10 years [20]. GfK Consumer Life Global 2022 report presents some characteristics of Gen Z and Millennials [21]. The researchers inquired about the degree of optimism regarding the economic prospects in 18 nations. Among the Z audience, 48% and 53% of Millennials globally are the most confident in the future of their economy, followed by young people of developing Asia (58% and 64% in each group), while the least confident are developed Asia (16% and 18%), Latin America (20% and 25%), and Western Europe (25% of both groups) [22]. 32% of US buyers in 2022 will consider environmental protection (26% in 2010 and 31% in 2021).

The average daily duration of Internet usage in the 16-24 age group is 7:32 in the female segment and 07:07 in the male segment, while the 25-34 age group experiences 7:03 and 7:13, respectively. Young people spend more time on the Internet than in the 35-44 demographic group, 1 hour more than in the 45-54 demographic group, and 1.5 hours more than in the 55-64 demographic group. The 16-24 age group has a higher proportion of internet time spent on mobile devices than other age groups: 64.1% female and 59.7% male. 84% of girls and 81.2% of guys in this age group use search engines monthly, only 1-2% more than other age groups. The proportion of voice assistant users who seek information is comparable to the following demographic group, namely 25-35, and does not exceed 20%. There are still minor differences: in this group, especially girls, more often use image recognition tools on mobiles (32.9%) and online translation tools (35.1% females, 32.8% males). However, they spend less time daily watching TV (not more than 2.5 hours compared to more than 3 in other categories), preferring streaming TV content via the Internet (95% users). More than 45% of them consider online video as a source of learning (41% in groups 25-34 and 40% in groups 35-44). 57% of 16-24 users are watching online music videos each week, and 42 are listening to stream music [19]. The GWI has also investigated the tastes of the newest generation. The report focuses on the use of artificial intelligence technology, which is especially popular among young people. 55% of Z employees use ChatGPT to find information, 53% use AI in the workplace, 49% to strengthen their skills in a certain area, 49% to improve the work they have already done, and 44% to analyze text and data [23].

*Social networks influence*. The phenomenon of the rapid spread and active use of social networks is discussed separately. According to the theory of Uses and Gratifications (Katz, Gurevich and Haas), people are actively seeking certain media and content for specific purposes and meet five categories of needs: cognitive, affective, personal-integrative, and social [24]. 62.3 percent of the world's population (5.04 billion) are users of social media, with a growth rate of 5.6 percent in 2023, according to statistics. Users spend 2 hours and 23 minutes daily on social networks. In ages 16-24, girls spend 2 hours, 23 minutes per day, and guys spend 2 hours, 32 minutes per day. Users aged 25-34 spend an average of 2.48 and 2.31, respectively. 96.9 percent of young people aged 16-24 attended social networks in the last month and 95.7 percent in the 25-34 age group, slightly lower in the older groups. The largest social media platforms accumulate more than 2.5-3 billion users, for example YouTube – 2.491 billion, WhatsApp – 2 billion, TikTok – 1.562 billion and WeChat (1.336 billion). Young audiences have increased their use of social media by a significant amount. WhatsApp, and TikTok are the most popular social networks among the 16-24 demographic. The new generation of Gen Z report presents data for all users, excluding India and China. The study indicates an increase in the utilization of these networks in various domains, including TikTok for following or acquiring information about products and brands (+104%), up to keep the World (+90%), messaging friends and family (+69%), sharing photos and videos (+38%), discovering amusing entertainment content (+9%), and for messaging family (+28%) [23]. Approximately 56% of girls and 46% of boys aged 16-35 utilize social media to locate brands. 80% of the young audience used social media to research brands intending to make a purchase. Within the 16-24 age group, 32.5 girls and 25.8% of guys track opinion leaders on social networks, with a much lower proportion in older groups and 22.6% on average for all social media users. 29.2% of people this age use social media for news, which is lower than the average of 34.2%.

*Confidentiality is a key requirement*. The impact of companies on the behavior of subscribers on social networks, such as privacy and anonymity, has been extensively researched [25]. Researchers also examine the veracity of the written material and the tendency of subscribers to disseminate accurate details about the firm or significant happenings. Digital privacy issues are especially important to a young audience.36% of social media users worldwide and 39% of the Z generation use false names when registering to avoid leaking personal information. They also take personal accounts very seriously [23].

Privacy is an important security feature that companies must provide in their digital resources [8]. According to G. Rejikumar, V. Gopikumar, K.G. Sofi Dinesh, A. Asokan-Ajitha, A. Jose, privacy is the attitude of individuals toward the disclosure of personal information voluntarily and at their discretion to obtain material or emotional benefits [26]. From the customer's perspective, the issue of confidentiality largely overlaps with the issue of improper use of personal data and losses caused by financial and personal information leakage. Privacy management should include the development of innovative products with increased levels of privacy protection in the most sensitive aspects for customers (for example, the preservation of payment information) and the introduction of new information security technologies to minimize perceived risks of information leakage in the service process. It is also important for the personalization of marketing communications with the simultaneous preservation of received personal data; the development of different approaches to the preservation of client information on different devices and in different channels of communication and sales [27].

*Interaction with brands and co-creation*. Further investigation into digital requirements focuses on ways to exploit the potential of digital channels for attracting and enhancing online brand-related activities. C. Buzeta, P.D. Pelsmacker, N. Dens identified three distinct phases of brand interaction, namely consumption of brand content, brand contribution (brand contribution), and joint creation [24]. They analyzed their characteristics across various social platforms, including profile- or content-based platforms, as well as customized or broadcast messages. Snipp observed that American young audiences are more likely to use social media to view news and search for brand information. This audience is influenced by online reviews and ratings for 67.4%, and 18.2% are important influencers' opinions. This share exceeds 40% for categories such as apparel, cosmetics, health, and beauty items. They consider high-quality products (56%) and reasonable prices (55.6%) as the most important brand characteristics [28].

Digital marketing platforms have the potential to unlock various forms of creativity and knowledge, but they also have the difficulty of carefully linking them together. This has strategic implications for customers' interactions with brands beyond transactions, a concept known as “customer engagement behavior” (CEB). For example, customers can create (destroy) value for an organization through buying-related behavior as well as by influencing others by generating knowledge sharing and collaborative creation/development of behavior with brands [29]. Involving young people in the process of building together contributes to three types of needs: cognitive (better knowledge or understanding), social relations, social integration, social influence, and interpersonal communication; self-presentation (creating the image itself and being able to influence the perception of other subscribers).

*Omnichannel and personalization requirements*. Young users are confronted with a multitude of digital channels in their digital lives, requiring a consistent approach and seamless transitions from one channel to another, commonly referred to as the “seamless omnichannel client experience”. The omnichannel experience is provided through social communications, product value, personalization, customer service level, consistency on the availability and price of the product across different channels, information security, delivery terms, product return conditions, and the function of loyalty programs [30]. Customers should be researched at all stages of their travel, from finding digital information to evaluating alternatives to buying and forming a relationship [31]. Personalization and accommodating customer differences in real time are becoming increasingly important at each touchpoint.

*Digital Maturity*. The data and review of scientific publications confirm that young people are well-informed about the digital environment, can quickly explore their products and services using extensive digital information, and prefer social media and online video consumption [32]. The active use of digital technologies by young people in everyday life is characterized by the term “digital maturity”. According F. Laaber, A. Florack, T. Koch, M. Hubert, digital maturity is defined as the autonomous utilization of digital technologies to facilitate personal growth and social adaptation, as digital technologies offer opportunities for learning, recreation, and communication with others [33]. The concept of digital maturity suggests that mature use of technology can have a positive impact on the overall well-being of young people by reducing frustration with meeting needs [34]. Digital maturity is the ability to use digital technology to support individual development and integration into society, according to Teresa Koch, Franziska Laaber and Arnd Florack. The socio-economic situation, influence of parents, and personality traits of the young person are important to understand the development of digital maturity in the young person segment.

*Digital maturity and digital needs of young Belarusian users.*

*Government efforts and digital business maturity.* For Belarus, digitalization is a priority of the country's development, and several documents have been adopted by the government to promote its growth. The State Program of Development of the Digital Economy and Information Society 2016-2020 has already been implemented, the main blocks of which were: Information and Communication Infrastructure, Information and Communication Infrastructure, and Digital Transformation. The «Digital Development of Belarus» program for 2021-2025, aimed at achieving digital transformation, is currently being implemented. It provides infrastructure development and implementation of 5G technologies; development of electronic public services and mobile digital signature; implementation of e-education, healthcare, employment, logistics, trade, and other projects; and scaling up of technologies in Industry 4.0 and 'Smart City.'[State program “Digital Development of Belarus” for 2021-2025 [35]. The program addresses issues related to digital governance, education, medicine, security, and literacy. The Head of State signed Decree 136 on the state administration body in the sphere of digital development and information technology. The legislative act made it possible to show the main landmarks in Belarus' digital development and gave the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology new powers to manage the digital development processes. Key implementers of the new digital agenda are the Digital Development Center and the Advanced Digital Development Studies Centre. At the start of 2024, the internet penetration rate in Belarus stood at 89.5 percent of the total population. Internet connection speeds for mobile and fixed internet connections are 11.94 MBPS and 62.06 MBPS, respectively. 51.7% of the internet traffic goes to mobile phones [36]. The proportion of individuals accessing the Internet on a daily basis is 77.4%, while the proportion of individuals using the Internet for financial transactions is approximately 50%. Sixty-six percent of Belarusian Internet users are social users. The number of mobile cellular telephone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants reached 101.3, and the number of subscribers and users of fixed broadband Internet access per 100 inhabitants reached 34 in 2022. The share of organizations using the Internet through fixed broadband access is 95.3%, while the share of organizations interacting with consumers is 76.7%. More than 5.4 thousand enterprises operate in the field of information and communication technology in Belarus, accounting for 6.6% of the gross domestic product [37].

Belarus has achieved a good level of digital literacy. The NAFI Analytical Center found that Belarusians have a digital literacy score of 62 out of 100, while Russia has a score of 64. It shows the level of citizens' ability to search for information on the Internet, assess its validity, create and edit digital photos, audio, and video files, recognize online fraud, monitor the security of personal data, and independently solve problems when using mobile applications and programs on the computer. In both the Russian Federation and Belarus, the proportion of individuals possessing a basic literacy level is equal, namely 3% each. In contrast, there are more people in Belarus with a basic level of digital literacy (73% in Russia) and fewer with an advanced level (24% vs. 27% in Russia). Russians are more likely to actively use mobile devices for communication (78% against 71%), better understand e-commerce, banking, and payment services (66% against 59%), and protect digital equipment (77% against 69%). Belarusians have higher skills in searching for information on the Internet (65% vs. 62%), working with documents in mobile applications (70% vs. 66%), and are more aware of the impact of digital devices on the physical and psychological health of the person (62% vs. 57%) [38].

The Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Belarus conducted a survey in 2023 to identify problematic aspects of personal data protection. Consequently, the majority of respondents (75.8%) hold a high regard for the significance of personal information. Among them, 45.7% hold the belief that personal data can be safeguarded, whereas 30.1% are concerned that it cannot be safeguarded in the present setting. 15.3% of respondents do not realize the importance of personal data protection, as they perceive it as mere information about themselves (12.2%) and do not attach any value to it (3.1%). Over half of the respondents (57.5%) have given consent to the processing of their personal data within the past 12 months, and one third (33.3%) have not given such consent. Nearly one out of ten individuals (9.5%) encountered difficulty responding. One in four respondents (25.8%) used their right to refuse to provide their personal data [39].

The priority of Internet purchases in different product groups, attitudes toward prices, and preferences of sales channels were studied by Belarusian research companies in the post-pandemic period. No attempt was made to study the attitude of Belarusian youth towards digitalization or to identify the most important digital needs and requirements for companies in the digital environment. The young generation of Belarusians actively uses various digital technologies and does not fall outside the presented world trends in digital consumption. The average age in the country is 40.9 years old. The 17-24 age group includes approximately 7 percent of the population who can already meet solvent demand and demonstrate self-reliance in digital behavior. The most active group is 25-34, or 11.6 percent of the population.

*Survey results*

More than 67% of respondents believe that digitalization is the use of digital technologies to facilitate companies access to the Internet and improve the level of services provided to users. Approximately one-third of the respondents attributed digitalization to the process of online shopping. The younger generation of Belarusians is enthusiastic about the role of digitalization in safeguarding life's quality; 97.4% of those surveyed said that digitalization enhances life in some or even all aspects (*Table 1*).

*Table 1 / Таблица 1*

**Description and Structure of Responses to Block A "The Importance and Presence of Digitization in the Lives of Respondents" / Описание и структура ответов на блок вопросов А относительно важности и присутствия цифровизации в жизни респондентов**

| Item number/ № вопроса | Item Reason / Для каких целей задан вопрос | Items / Суть вопроса | Measures / Варианты ответов | Frequency, % of Total Respondents (305) / Частота ответов в % от общего количества респондентов (305) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | To clarify the understanding of digitization and its spheres of influence | Digitalization, from your point of view – is the use of digital technologies for | 1.1. Facilitating companies' access to the Internet | 67.9 |
| | | | 1.2. Improving the level of services provided to users | 67.5 |
| | | | 1.3. Promotion of enterprises, organizations | 43.6 |
| | | | 1.4. Client data gathering | 43.9 |
| | | | 1.5. Building business in Internet | 57.0 |
| | | | 1.6. E-commerce | 46.6 |
| | | | 1.7. Internet communication | 51.1 |
| | | | 1.8. Shopping on the Internet | 31.8 |
| | | | 1.9. Other | 6.6 |
| 2. | To study the young generation attitude to digitalization | How does digitalization affect the quality of life of a person? | 2.1. Improves in all aspects | 30.2 |
| | | | 2.2. Improves in some aspects | 67.2 |
| | | | 2.3. Has no effect | 1.0 |
| | | | 2.4. Worsens in some aspects | 1.6 |
| | | | 2.5. Worsens in all aspects | – |
| 3. | To find out the impact of digitization on the respondent's life | How does digitization affect your life? (7-point scale) | 3.1. '1' (has no effect) | 0.0 |
| | | | 3.2. '2' | 1.6 |
| | | | 3.3. '3' | 3.3 |
| | | | 3.4. '4' | 17.4 |
| | | | 3.5. '5' | 35.4 |
| | | | 3.6. '6' | 22.3 |
| | | | 3.7. '7' (has the strongest effect) | 20.0 |
| 4. | To identify the areas most in need of enhanced digitalization | In which areas of human life should be enhanced digitalization? | 4.1. Medicine, health | 74.8 |
| | | | 4.2. Communications | 23.6 |
| | | | 4.3. Commerce, business | 51.8 |
| | | | 4.4. Finance | 43.0 |
| | | | 4.5. Ecology, climate | 35.4 |
| | | | 4.6. Manufacturing | 41.0 |
| | | | 4.7. Entertainment and leisure | 32.8 |
| | | | 4.8. Education | 73.1 |
| | | | 4.9. Transport | 46.2 |
| | | | 4.10. Traveling | 24.6 |

*Source:* compiled by the author according to research conducted by the author */ Источник:* составлено автором по данным проведенного исследования

Regarding the impact of digitalization on their daily lives, respondents were more cautious; however, a significant impact of 6-7 points was felt by 42.3%, compared to an average impact of 4-5. More than 70% of respondents believe that areas such as medicine, health, and education need to strengthen digitalization. For about half of the respondents, it was commerce, business, and transport. It is noteworthy that studies conducted by other authors in other nations, such as Italy, also highlight the absence of digitalization in education systems, particularly in higher education.

The next set of questions dealt with the peculiarities of online interaction among young Belarusians. From the previously collected statistical information, it is evident that the level of Internet consumption and the use of social networks and messengers is high, but we also aimed to determine the priority of the online environment in the most important areas of a modern young man's life. So, we added a question called "In which category do you prefer to work offline or online?" The response structure is depicted in *Fig. 1*.

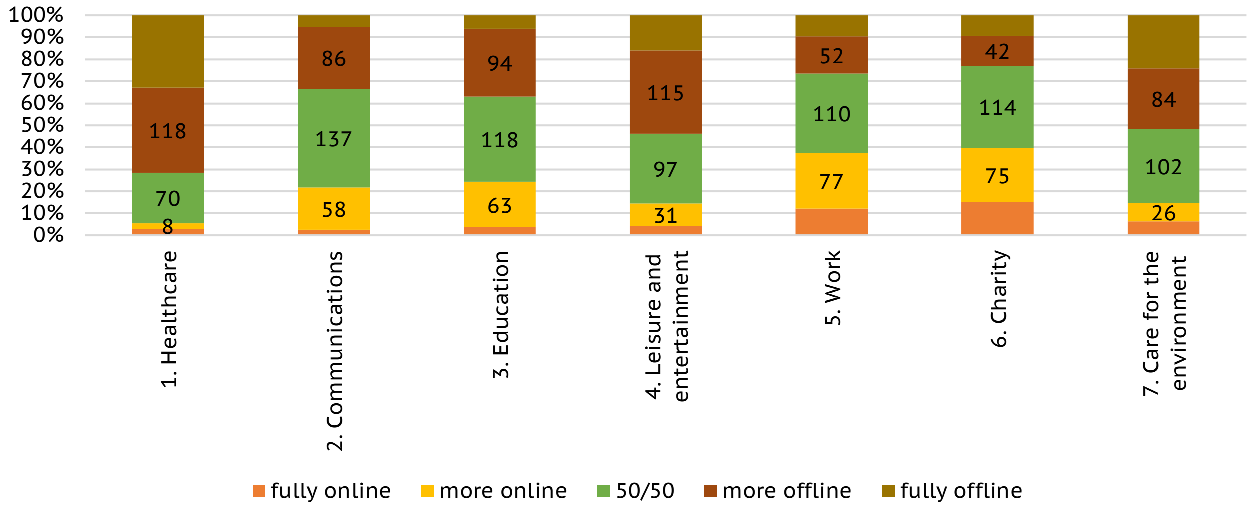


*Fig. 1.* **The Preferences of the Young Audience Online in Different Areas of Life (Frequency)** / *Рис. 1.* **Предпочтения молодой аудитории онлайн в разных сферах жизни (частота ответов)**

*Source:* compiled by the author / *Источник:* составлено автором

*Fig. 1* depicts a significant level of activity among contemporary young individuals, both online and offline. Cronbach's alpha on this question was 0.61; Pearson's correlation coefficient was 1 – 0.49; 2 – 0.6; 3 – 0.62; 4 – 0.52; 5 – 0.59; 6 - 61; 7 - 0.51, which indicates the reliability of the data. The most common responses in almost all areas of life, with the exception of medicine, entertainment, and leisure, were "50/50." Nearly 40% of respondents acknowledged the significance of online charity and work. In the category 'communication,' which according to earlier information from other studies is the main purpose of using the Internet, 8.2% of young people expressed preference for the Internet, 44.9% realize this need and prefer online and offline, and 33.4% prefer offline. The category 'entertainment, leisure' exhibits a significant proportion of offline activities, with the highest proportion occurring in the category 'health'. Most people also prefer to care for the environment offline, which is natural. The online functionality facilitates the search and support of environmental initiatives, financial assistance, and the organization of volunteer environmental movements.

We have proposed that users' behavior in the digital environment may differ from their offline behavior. In order to verify or refute this assumption, respondents were posed with direct question 6, and the responses were distributed as follows: 116 respondents responded with the answer "same" (38%), 107 (35.1%) selected the answer "depends on the purpose of remaining in the network", 61 (20%) responded with the response "online behavior more liberated", and 21 (6.9%) responded with the response "more restrained than offline." The assumption was partially supported by 62% of respondents.

In Block B, we also inquired about the frequency with which the Internet is utilized to address various issues in daily life. The list of tasks includes utilitarian and socialization. The response structure is illustrated in *Fig. 2*.

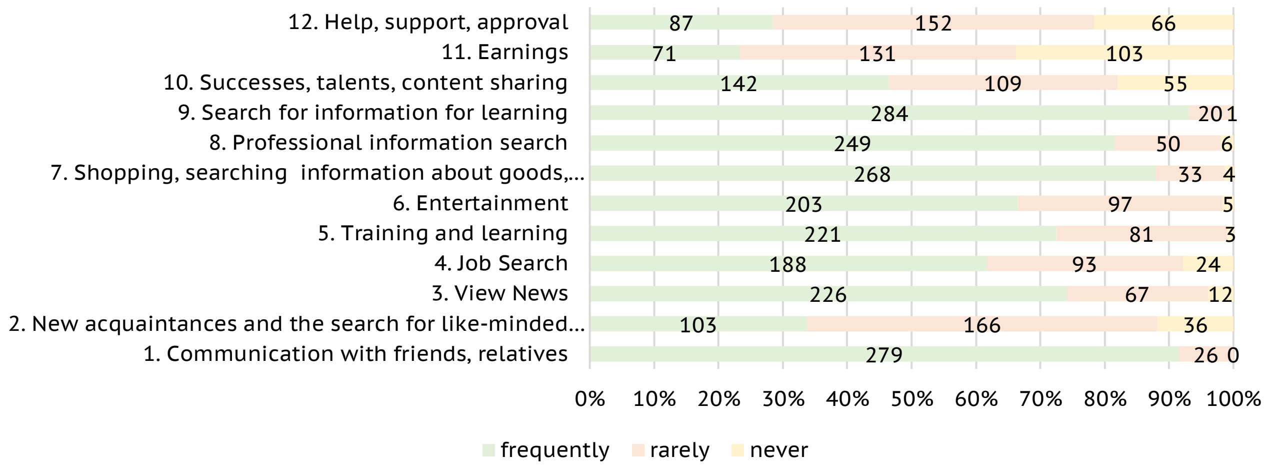


*Fig. 2.* **The Frequency of the Internet Usage to Address Utility and Socialization Needs** / *Рис. 2.* **Частота ответов респондентов относительно частоты использования Интернет для решения утилитарных и задач социализации**

*Source:* compiled by the author / *Источник:* составлено автором

According to the frequency of Internet usage for their performance, the tasks of searching for information (more than 80% of respondents often seek professional, information for study, information about goods and services), watching news, training, entertainment, and job search are among the most common. But to earn money, the Internet is often accessed by only 23.3% of young people, rarely 43%, and never 33.8% of them. 93.1% of respondents use the Internet to communicate with friends and relatives (the need in socialization), while to share content and success often go to the Internet 46.6% of respondents, rarely 35.7% and 18% never. 33.8% of young people use online dating to find like-minded people, rarely 54.4%, and rarely 11.8%. The Internet is often used for help, support, and approval by 28.5% of respondents, rarely 49.8 and never 21.6%.

There are several questions in Block C that focus on the need for security and confidentiality (*Table 2*). We chose questions 8-10 for blocks C and D based on what we learned in a paper [40].

*Table 2 / Таблица 2*

**The Structure and Description of the Responses to the C Question Block "Internet Security and Privacy"/ Описание и структура ответов на блок вопросов С относительно безопасности и предоставления информации в Интернет**

| Item Number / № вопроса | Item Reason / Для каких целей задан вопрос | Items / Суть вопроса | Measures / Варианты ответов | Frequency, % of Total Respondents (305) / Частота ответов в % от общего количества респондентов (305) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **8.** | Determine the perceived level of security on the Internet | Do you feel secure online? | 8.1. Yes, always | 12.1 |
| | | | 8.2. Yes, often | 44.3 |
| | | | 8.3. Yes, sometimes | 35.7 |
| | | | 8.4. No, never | 8.2 |
| **9.** | Identify the importance of information risks | What risks of Internet presence are important for you? *Cronbach's alpha 0.85. Pearson's correlation: 9.1 – 0.52 9.2 – 0.75 9.3 – 0.83 9.4 – 0.84 9.5 – 0.79 9.6 – 0.72* | Response scale: “Very important”, “Important”, “Neutral”, “Irrelevant”, “Absolutely irrelevant” | Frequency. % of total respondents: “Very important” or “Important” / Частота вариантов ответов респондентов в %: «Очень важно» и «Важно» |
| | | | 9.1. Leak of information about my payment cards | 78.7 / 15.4 |
| | | | 9.2. Leaking of my personal information, including photos and videos | 58.4 / 25.9 |
| | | | 9.3. Leaking of my contacts | 41.3 / 30.5 |
| | | | 9.4. Leaking information about my purchases | 24.9 / 22.6 |
| | | | 9.5. Leaking of information about my actions on the web in the form of comments, likes, reposts | 32.5 / 23.6 |
| | | | 9.6. Other | 23.6 / 20.7 |
| **10.** | Determine the attitude toward requests for personal information | How do you feel about collecting personal information on commercial platforms (Internet shops, websites, and information portals)? | 10.1. I provide information only to sites I trust | 36.1% |
| | | | 10.2. I agree to the privacy policy of the site and the information, which is very important to me | 20.3% |
| | | | 10.3. Accept more than 80% of requests for personal information, regardless of the site | 13.8% |
| | | | 10.4. Agree in almost 100% of cases | 6.2% |
| | | | 10.5. I try to keep my personal information off the Internet whenever possible | 23.6% |

*Source:* compiled by the author according to research conducted by the author/ *Источник:* составлено автором по данным проведенного исследования

Only 8.2% of the younger generation felt secure on the internet, and another 35.7% answered "yes, sometimes". The most important information to protect against unauthorized distribution is personal information (84.3%) and information about payment cards (94.1% of respondents). About half of respondents are concerned about the leakage of their purchases and activities online, although these risks are important to them. Question 10 (confidentiality) revealed a serious attitude for about 60% of respondents who chose the answers 10.1 and 10.5. Twenty percent of respondents who chose answers 10.3 and 10.4 are still very open about giving personal information. 23.6% try not to provide personal information on the Internet, which is almost the same as the results of the research of the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus (25%). It is worth noting the high level of digital maturity of Belarusians in terms of security and confidentiality. Several people believed that this issue was not important. The response rate for question 9 was as follows: 9.1 – 1.6%; 9.2 – 4.9%; 9.3 – 7.5%; 9.4 – 16.1%; 9.5 – 16.1%; 9.6 – 13.1%. The largest share is noted in the categories of information about purchases and actions of users in the form of reviews, which is quite open. Users do not see a threat in obtaining this information on trading and other platforms. We note a selective and informed approach to the issue of confidentiality.

The characteristics of brands that are trustworthy according to the opinions of the respondents were asked in block D. The work Mulcahy R. et al., 2024 [41] devoted to assessing the level of plausibility of content and its impact on the level of trust of brand-community subscribers enabled us to incorporate three criteria: "to conduct high-quality social networks," "to provide quality and useful content," and "to have honest reviews and reviews." The Cronbach's alpha for question No. 11 was 0.88, and the Pearson correlation was: 11.1 – 0.74; 11.2 – 0.77; 11.3 – 0.48; 11.4 – 0.59; 11.5 – 0.44; 11.6 – 0.76; 11.7 – 0.75; 11.8 – 0.7; 11.9 – 0.77. The data obtained demonstrates the validity and reliability of the information gathered. The average scores for the criteria presented in *Fig. 3* were to:

- category 1: have honest reviews and feedback (4.37), provide quality and useful content (4.11), accept ideas and criticism of subscribers (4.04), make cool products and services (3.93);
- category 2: succeed in brand communities managing (3.78), be a reliable taxpayer (3.58), apply the latest technologies (3.55), be as much as possible digitally oriented (3.53);
- category 3: be discreet in communication (3.14), be green (2.96), engage online celebrities (2.6), and have a legendary history (2.55).

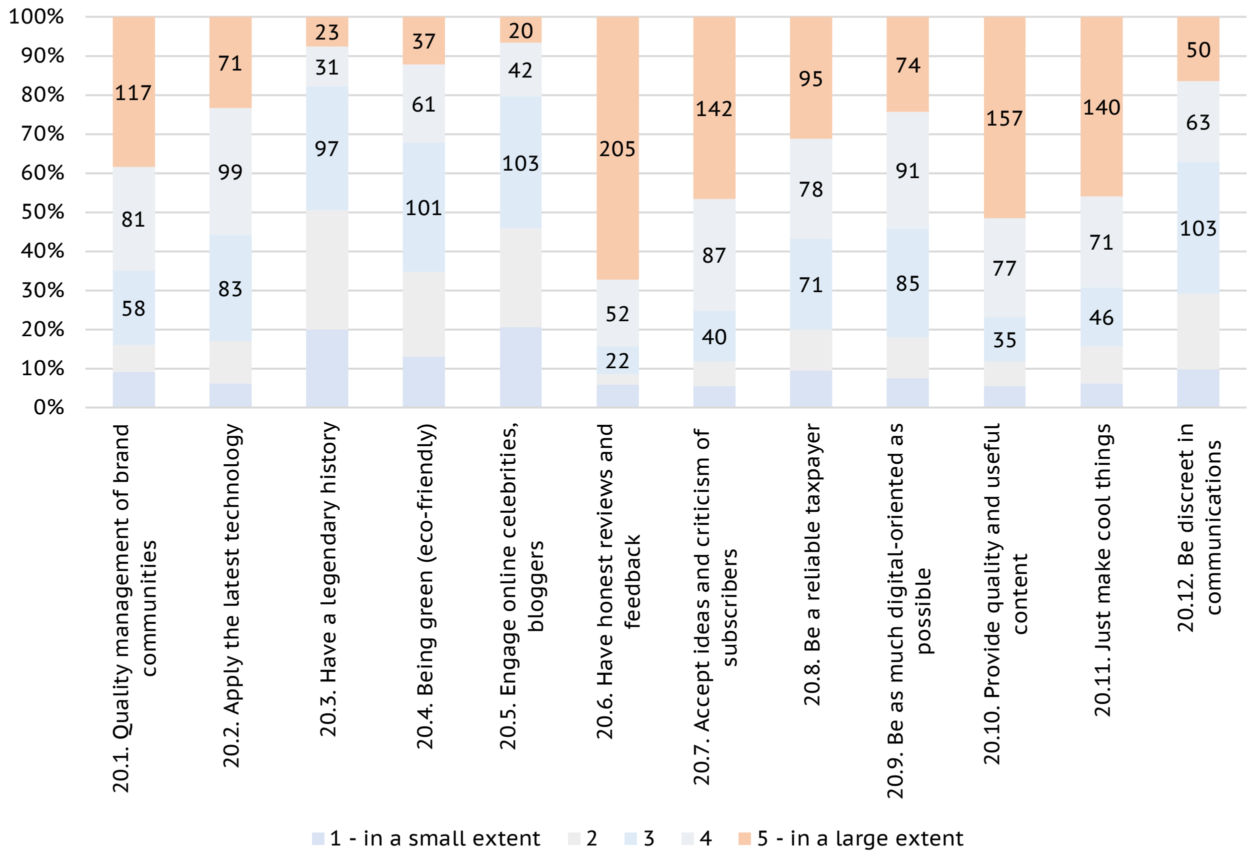


*Fig. 3.* **The Frequency of Answers to Question 11: “Which of the Specified Characteristics Should Correspond to a Brand Worthy of your Trust?” (‘1’ - in a small extent and ‘5’ - in a large extent)** / *Рис. 3.* **Частота ответов респондентов на вопрос 11: «Каким характеристикам должен соответствовать бренд достойный вашего доверия?» («1» - в незначительной мере и «5» - в значительной мере)**

*Source:* compiled by the author / *Источник:* составлено автором

Through the answers to this question, we observed a high value for the younger generation of content provided by companies, with the main requirements being truthfulness, quality, and usefulness. The primary criterion for evaluating the brand was the availability of authentic reviews, which largely emphasizes the necessity for companies to engage with users to generate common content.

The use of various channels for crucial tasks for users has been discussed in Block F. In this survey, this is the only question related to omnichannel, which is planned to be investigated separately in the future. The structure of the responses we present in *Table 3.*

*Table 3 / Таблица 3*

**Respondents' Structure Regarding the Use of Different Digital Channels for User Tasks / Структура ответов респондентов относительно использования различных цифровых каналов брендов для решения различных задач**

| Rank / Номер | Channels of Communication with User-Interested Brands / Каналы коммуникации с брендами, интересующими пользователей | User Needs / Нужды потребителя | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Leave Feedback | Learn about New Products, Services | Find out about Discounts | Clarify the Order Information | Clarify Information on Return Goods |
| 1. | Social Media Pages | 30.8% | 30.8% | 11.8% | 23.3% | 3.3% |
| 2. | Email | 15.7% | 19.7% | 24.9% | 29.2% | 10.5% |
| 3. | Mobile app | 20.7% | 16.4% | 17.7% | 41.3% | 3.9% |
| 4. | Personal Account on the Site | 24.6% | 16.1% | 11.1% | 39.3% | 8.9% |
| 5. | Online Assistant on the Site | 16.4% | 15.1% | 12.8% | 32.5% | 23.3% |
| 6. | Chat Bot in Messenger | 14.1% | 22.3% | 10.8% | 37.4% | 15.4% |
| 7. | Phone | 11.8% | 8.9% | 6.2% | 46.6% | 26.6% |
| 8. | Selling Point. Office | 9.5% | 11.1% | 5.6% | 40.3% | 33.4% |

*Source*: calculated by author */ Источник:* рассчитано автором

There is a marked difference in the use of different digital channels for communication with companies. The omnichannel aspect has not been thoroughly explored before. It is evident that the selection of channels is determined by the user's convenience, development, and specificity of the task at hand. Users are more likely to use the brand page on the social network or to do so on the site through their account so that the review is available to other users. Users will use pages in social networks to learn about new products and services, look at information in the chat rooms of companies, and look at the email from the company. According to users, the company should use a more suitable email and mobile application to distribute information about discounts. When solving tasks related to the user's order or return of goods, it is important to see other priorities in the channels. These tasks are of utmost importance, and to address them, users are prepared to utilize all digital channels more extensively. They prioritize the phone call, personal accounts (often with the ability to track the order), the mobile application, and visiting the selling points (for example, when selecting the mode of delivery). If they wanted to return the product, the obvious choice would be to contact the retailer. But users are equally ready to resolve this issue by contacting them by phone, employing an online assistant on the site, or submitting a message via chat.

## Conclusion

*Theoretical findings*. Social networks play a special role in the lives of the young generation. Conscious behavior should keep the products and services provided by companies functional. AI technologies are seen by the new generation as new opportunities. Interactivity and transparency have become more important than brand identity. The safety and security of personal information are key requirements for the young generation in the digital environment. Young people's values are being challenged by the digital environment, creating new opportunities and new ways of achieving them. Digital creativity is one of them, including closer interaction between the user and the company. When describing the young generation, it is possible to mention its digital maturity, which manifests itself in a significant immersion in the Internet environment, extensive experience with a few digital technologies, awareness of the primary digital challenges and opportunities, and articulated requirements and expectations for digital maintenance and digital products.

*Practical findings.* About 70% of the students and graduates of economic specialties surveyed consider digital technologies an important tool for Belarusian companies to access the Internet and improve their level of services provided to users. More than 97% of respondents recognize the role of digital technologies in improving the quality of life of Belarusians. Areas that need to be digitalized are health and education. About 60% of respondents indicated that their digital behavior differs from the behavior in the offline environment. More than 80% of respondents use to search for various types of information, including professional, news and related to purchases, which coincides with the global statistics. For more serious purposes, such as earning online are willing to consider no more than 24% of respondents. Regarding security and confidentiality, 44% of respondents feel always or sometimes protected on the internet, making high demands for unauthorized disclosure of personal information – this is important to more than 80% of respondents. 20% are still very open about giving personal information.

Companies and brands represented in the digital environment must meet several requirements, the most important of which are "honest reviews and feedback", "quality and useful content", "acceptance of ideas and criticism from subscribers" before "creating cool products and services". The choice of channels of interaction with the company is determined by the user’s convenience and the specificity of its tasks and proves the necessity of a channel approach for young users.

In general, young Belarusian users demonstrated similar to the theoretical results of the review on other countries aspects of digital behavior regarding recognition of the importance of digital technologies in improving quality of life and realization of a number of life tasks. There is also a clear commitment to digital security and privacy, with the formation of a set of clear requirements for companies' digital presence and interaction with users.

The presented research data, complementing the previous ones, allows for the formulation of a holistic vision of the young audience as a digital segment and several recommendations on the adaptation of business and marketing strategies by Belarusian companies.

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