

YOUNG ADULTS AND VIEWING HABITS OF VIDEO CONTENT

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Abstract: Ever since its transformation into a modern media system, traditional television has had a huge challenge ahead to provide the content capable of keeping and attracting digital natives on the Internet. A prerequisite for the strategy development is familiarity with this population's viewing habits and, in particular, their needs based on the condition that the content should be available at any place at any given time. The aim of this research was to use basic descriptive statistics and quantitative analysis regarding the population of young adults in Serbia, to recognise current trends and affinities related to relevant content, devices and platforms used for following, along with the duration length of their contact with the content, binge-watching and especially – if at all and where they follow it live and delayed. For this research, two surveys were conducted among current and former students of two Belgrade Faculties, which indicated the trend of increasing presence on digital video streaming platforms, particularly on YouTube platform for sharing and video streaming, where they followed classic formats, foreign series and movies, but also UGC (user-generated content), while on social networks they were mostly drawn to short video forms, especially on Instagram. On the Serbian media public service OTT RTS Planeta, domestic action series and comedies are followed. However, while following feature serial programmes, the majority of survey respondents did not watch only one episode, but more of them continuously. Bearing in mind the growing presence on video streaming platforms and social networks, and the necessity for short formats and delayed content viewing, modern media systems should reinforce their presence where young adult population tends to be - by motivating them to follow live content and by bringing them to their platforms where live TV channel streaming is available.

Keywords: *young adults, viewing habits, video content, video streaming platforms, short video.*

Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

Although they address the most private aspects of our lives, mass communication media today connect us with the global Internet network. The local has become globally available, therefore the trends of content consumption on the Internet platforms can be linked through a local analysis with the world movements. The majority of media perceive the newly created media scene, which has become by far more dynamic and complex due to the emergence of the new media, as more competitive and thus, content placement selection became more critical. In the battle for acquiring more viewers and modern programme content consumers, the media are facing the challenge of discerning which content should be offered to the public and how it ought to be presented. The first requirement is to know the audience well. One thing goes for all age groups, apart from the youngest: “Researchers have discovered that people adjust the use of mass media to fit their own needs. Generally speaking, we could say that people use the media in four ways, such as: enjoyment, socialising, following and interpreting.” (Tjurou, 2012, p. 2)

According to the research, the trend of transitioning to video streaming platforms since 2015 has spread through all age groups and areas in media industry, and it specifically reflected on the areas of entertainment, education, marketing and journalism. By 2017, videos made for over 70% of total Internet traffic. “Globally, IP video traffic will make 82% of the entire IP traffic (both business and consumer-oriented) by 2022, in comparison to 75% in 2017. Global IP video traffic will increase four times from 2017 to 2022, with the complex annual increase rate of 29%. The Internet video traffic will grow four times from 2017 to 2022, with the complex annual increase rate of 33%. Live Internet videos will make 17% of all Internet video traffic by 2022. Live video will grow 15 times from 2017 to 2022.” (Cisco, 2019)

The target group of this paper belongs to the category of digital natives. Those are the persons born and raised in the era of digital technologies, since their early age exposed to computers, smart phones, the Internet and social networks. They instinctively use digital devices that are the integral part of their everyday lives, if not the most important one. The phrase digital natives was coined in the early 21st century, referring to our target group, aged 18 to 30, also known as young adults, the population of the young whose world is teeming with technology, while that may easily be the only world they know of. Their parents presented them with cell phones at quite the young age, primarily for the sake of establishing urgent communication. Even then, they used their first “connected” smart phones to view video content. They were the first to grow up both online and offline. “From listening to recorded music and messages in the

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mother's womb, then watching TV and videos to playing games on iPad, the Internet and mass and digital media serve as the early agents of socialisation." (Čejko, 2019, p. 147) Nowadays, this population spends most of their Internet time on social networks watching video contents via YouTube, while according to the latest global survey, they spend daily on average up to 3 hours and 20 minutes on TV. In all distribution formats, the Internet users worldwide on average spend 3 hours and 13 minutes on watching TV every day, which includes the time spent on linear, streaming platforms and TV shows saved on their recording devices." (Kemp, 2025) While the most watched clips on YouTube are those with up to 15 billion views, there is Netflix as the largest video streaming platform globally with over 300 million registered users at the end of 2024. The report on the last quarter of 2024 showed that the users on average watched seven movies a month. "Carry-On", the popular movie starring Jason Bateman and Taron Egerton, was offered to the users worldwide in that period and by the year end it had already gained 160,1 views. (Netflix, 2025)

Predictions concerning content consumption on the Internet and digital platforms go in favour of video contents. "It has been estimated that in 2025 video will make 82% of the entire Internet consumer traffic. (Cisco) Every day people watch over a billion hours of videos only on YouTube. In 2025, an average person will spend 100 minutes a day watching video recordings, in comparison to only 67 minutes in 2018. (Zenith)." (Austin, 2024) These are the trends that instigated the research that was carried out in Serbia on the viewing habits of the population aged 18 to 30.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this research, young adults were defined as the persons aged 18 to 30. Two survey questionnaires were created for the purpose of this research. The first survey had the topic "Young and Video Content" and the second "RTS Planeta – Affinities and Habits of the Young Viewer Audience".

174 respondents formed the sample for the first survey, recruited via an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms app, mainly to the students of undergraduate, master and doctoral studies from two Faculties from Belgrade (The Faculty of Sport and The Faculty of Social Sciences), as well as to the former students. The respondents received the questionnaire from their mentors, Student Parliament viber groups, and by the student forwarding. Among the respondents, there is an equal number of male and female examinees, who were categorised into four groups based on their age: aged 18-21 (31,2%), aged 22-23 (28,3%), aged 24-25 (13,9%) and aged (26,6%). The vast majority of respondents were the students of undergraduate academic level (75,7%). The questionnaire contains three demographic questions (gender, age and education) and 17 questions related to the research topic.

The second survey was borne out within a smaller sample group of 105 respondents, who were dominantly current and former students of one Faculty, with the aim to roughly observe the 18-30 target group interests concerning their viewing affinities and habits in regard to OTT platform (Over-The-Top service of distributing video, audio or other media contents over the Internet) of the media public service in Serbia. Out of total number of respondents, there were mainly the students of: undergraduate academic studies – 81%, master studies – 6,7%, doctoral studies – 2,8% and graduates who did not continue with their postgraduate education – 9,5%. The survey questionnaire consists of three demographic questions (gender, age and years of studying) and 20 questions related to the research topic. Both surveys were conducted in July 2025..

Since the respondents of both surveys were of different gender, education and age within the same target group, while the majority of them were students, this sample enables the basic descriptive statistics and quantitative analysis owing to the acquired data regarding young adult population in Serbia.

3. RESULTS

As previously stated, the aim of this research was to gain insight of the affinities and viewing habits of those digital natives born between 1995 and 2007, to map their interests in diverse video formats, where, how much, when they follow them and finally to recognise their interests primarily regarding the contents of domestic production and use of the domestic digital platform related to global video streaming platforms. Judging by the research results, Serbian viewers dominantly spent time following live content at the moment of broadcasting – totally 43,4% respondents (i.e. live on TV 34,7%, live streaming 8,7%), more than delayed where TV again took the lead because 18,5% respondents, in case of having missed some content, saw that with delay on TV, and only 9,2% saw that on stream. It is a worrying fact that up to 28,9% respondents stated that they did not follow live programme. This result was in line with the worldwide trend of reducing the number of hours that target groups spent on linear following TV programme, which was also evident from the responses to the questions regarding digital platforms and

following videos on demand, i.e. the interest in non-linear video services. Namely, the research on the youth affinities has shown that this digital service is mostly used via YouTube (57,2%), Netflix (24,9%), followed by HBO Max (9,3%), RTS Planeta (5,2%), Amazon Prime (0,6%) and others. At the moment of conducting the survey, up to 70,5% respondents had some subscription on video streaming platforms, out of which 36,4% had their own, while the others were using shared family or someone else's subscription (for example – a friend's). Almost one third of the respondents had no subscription (29,5%). Recently, on video streaming platforms they have mainly followed drama series (26,6%), feature movies (22,5%), YouTube videos (20,8%), educational contents (13,9%), TikTok clips 10,4% and other. Domestic drama series were mainly followed by only 15% of respondents, while 42,8% followed foreign drama series regardless of the language and 42,2% followed primarily foreign drama series in English.

Figure 1. Affinities based on drama series programme

Origin/language	Mainly followed by
Domestic series	15%
Foreign series in English	42,2%
Foreign series regardless of language	42,8%

Source: Author's research

It is typical that digital natives, who have grown up with smart devices, mostly followed video streaming platform content (series, movies) on their cell phones (52,6%), using laptops or computers (26,6%) and via smart TV apps such as YouTube, Netflix, HBO Max, RTS Planeta, Amazon Prime Video (19,1%). Almost half of the respondents watched 1 to 2 episodes of a drama series in continuity, while 37,6% were binge-watched 3 to 4 episodes, 6,9% watched connected 5 to 6 episodes and 8,7% of the respondents watched more than 6 episodes in a row. They prefer dramas (67,4%), comedies (51,4%) and a bit less they prefer animated feature content (12,7%).

Almost two thirds (61,3%) stated that on YouTube they spent 3 to 5 hours a week, 23,1% claimed spending 5 to 10 hours, 12,1% from 10 to 20 hours, and 3,5 % claimed over 20 hours weekly, with half of them having the custom to see the whole show, i.e. initial video, and 36,4% only the parts of the shows they were interested in. Merely 9,2% respondents followed short video formats on YouTube, but for this content format they mostly used Instagram (staggering 45,7%), TikTok (43,9%) and only 1,2% named Facebook as the primary social network for following short video contents.

Figure 2. Binge-watching series

Number of episodes	Followed in continuity
1-2 episodes	46,8%
3-4 episodes	37,6%
5-6 episodes	6,9%
6+ episodes	8,7%

Source: Author's research

Because artificial intelligence and algorithms on social networks recognise the shifts in viewing habits during video content scrolling, they are measured in seconds, even in the tenth parts of a second. With that in mind, it is distinctly peculiar that young adults have the patience to spend longer periods of time on such video contents as podcasts. Exactly that was the reason for asking them how much that format attracted them and what theme they found the most gripping. In fact, the podcasts were at least once a week followed by 54,9% respondents, and 34,1% followed them even less frequently. As many as 28,9% respondents emphasised sports topics (which should come as no surprise since some respondents studied at the Faculty of Sport), 16,8% pointed out human and life stories, 12,1% accentuated interviews with public persons (actors and singers), 9,2% selected various topics relevant to the young. Additionally, they expressed their interest in the podcasts related to physical activity and fitness (6,9%), current political themes (5,2%) etc. One of the questions concerned whether they followed the social network accounts of the RTS Planeta OTT platform with short videos, most commonly the inserts from domestic drama series. The answer was negative by 77,5% respondents, which was in alignment with their interest in domestic serial programme.

The second research concretely referred to RTS Planeta OTT platform and in a more precise way it pointed at the viewing affinities of the respondents aged 18 to 30. RTS Planeta has available streams of 12 TV and 9 radio channels of Radio-Television of Serbia (live and delayed), as well as the base of approximately 30,000 video and audio contents on demand (VoD and AoD). Beside the catalogue

of foreign movies (about 100 titles) and foreign drama series (about 10 titles), all other contents are of domestic production. Although this digital platform has existed for seven years, since March 2018, only 20% used it regularly, whereas 57,1% heard of it, yet seldom visited it, but 22,9% neither heard of nor used RTS Planeta. The platform was accessed daily by 5,7% respondents, a few times a week by 9,5%, and a quarter of the respondents several times a month came to the digital platform of the media public service of Serbia. Out of those RTS Planeta visitors, the majority only took a look at the content that they purposefully wanted to see, while the others were curious about finding out the other available contents. The affinities of young adults visiting RTS Planeta to watch mostly domestic drama series differed depending on the selection of the offered foreign series, which was indicated within the results of the previous survey. Among domestic series, they were mostly interested in comedies (55,2%), dramas (49,5%) and thrillers (46,7%), more than action and romantic contents, which had the equal level of interest, each of 43,8%. The best ranked series were: Južni Vetar, U Klinču, Radio Mileva, Ubice Mog Oca (season 1), Sablja, Vojna Akademija etc. The least interest was shown regarding animated series and musicals. For example, the Sablja series was watched by 53,3% respondents, out of which only 1% in live broadcast.

As far as documentary movies are concerned, the greatest interest was in history (42,3%), faraway countries (40,4%), relevant global topics (30,8%), animals (27,9%) and sports (26,9%). Considering RTS Planeta, foreign movies were more appealing than domestic ones, but affinities were similar when it came to movie production year, thus implying that content was of primary significance. When asked how they chose the movies to watch, as many as 70,5% respondents claimed that friend and family recommendations mattered most, then there were the Internet search and reviews (55,2%), then the recommendations from social networks and forums (44,8%). The potential of RTS Planeta to attract this target group is obvious if we keep in mind that 46,7% of respondents would watch the content on that platform even if they had previously been informed it existed on Netflix or HBO Max (SVoD subscription platforms).

Figure 3. Content watching on RTS Planeta if the same exists on other platforms

RTS Planeta vs. Netflix, HBO Max etc.	Platform choice
Yes, I would definitely use RTS Planeta instead of other platforms	37,1%
Maybe, depending on the movie and available contents	46,7%
No, I would rather use other platforms	3,8%
No opinion	12,4%

Source: Author's research

The responses that refer to following RTS Planeta music contents have shown that young adults had different habits, i.e. music was listened via audio platforms, whilst music content on this video platform was followed by only 17,3% respondents. Those accustomed to listening and watching music programmes said they missed punk, San Remo and Eurosong. Furthermore, the questions on following live sport events via live stream received more negative answers from this population. That proved that sports were more followed on TV than on cell phones, which goes in favour of the further development of sport TV channels.

4. DISCUSSIONS

For two and a half decades, since the widespread use of the Internet and development of new multimedia services, there has been a noticeable increasing trend of dividing user attention between traditional and new media, and consequently between watching TV and following video contents on digital platforms. Two large consumer groups can be discerned there, as recognised by Mark Prenski in 2001, when he made the distinction between digital natives and digital immigrants. While the older population, who grew up in the analogue world, more slowly adopt innovations and novelties imposed by the new media, digital natives have grown up with the Internet and digital devices, which has made them capable of quickly receiving the information and being ready to do multiple activities simultaneously. (Prenski, 2001, p.4). According to Prenski, digital natives love to process and do more tasks parallelly and simultaneously, they prefer graphics to text, they adore exploring and surfing the Internet. They function best within a network. The recognition of characteristics typical of digital natives from the early 21st century turned out to be a good indicator of the upcoming phenomena. It was they, as early adopters, who became the

leaders of all the ensuing multimedia innovations, the use of all video formats included, which started to develop rapidly and took hold of the dominance on the Internet. Video streaming services responded to the user need for the content to be available at every moment everywhere. Nevertheless, they influenced the further creation of viewing habits, decreased interest in traditional linear following of TV programmes, the emergence of binge-watching and so on. "One of the most important influences of streaming services concerned the habits of young adults watching TV. With the enlargement of contents easily available at hand, young adults have acquired greater autonomy and control over what, when and how they watch." (Sahoo, 2024, p.704) Researches have revealed the trend noted with the respondents in Serbia is in proportion with spending time on live programme. While in Serbia 43,7% follow live programme, in Great Britain, for instance, according to Ofcom reports, from 76% in 2018 the time spent on linear programme watching fell to 48% in 2023. (Perspective, 2025). In the USA as many as 41% of young adult population do not follow live programme on weekly basis. (Advanced television, 2025). The growing trend of following videos on demand on video streaming platforms was recorded even in the USA, where 28% of the population do not watch TV at all, and 72% of video consumers aged 18 to 30 first and foremost follow Netflix, and then Amazon Prime Video (67%). (Park, McClain, 2025) The examination of viewer habits of the same population in Serbia exhibits the preference of watching foreign TV series regardless of the language. However, the results of visitations of foreign streaming platforms are not drastic: on Netflix they are 24,9%, on Amazon Prime Video platform only 0,6% respondents.

Due to the growing trend of following TV programme live, one of the most serious challenges is how to attract young adult population, so it is important to get to know them better, to recognise their wishes and expectations and to be prepared to respond to them. Owing to the characteristics of digital natives to change quickly and to accept new trends, their pulse and viewing affinities ought to be regularly gauged, which was also declared in some previous studies. Since more and more devices are coming to the hands of the young audience, the consumed contents and quantity are to bring major changes, not only in terms of the manner the content is delivered, but the kind produced for the viewers. "No matter whether they watch short clips on YouTube or they listen to podcasts, they are constantly consuming content on their devices. When somebody begins to employ certain kinds of technology or even methods at their early age, it becomes a norm." (Salandria, 2020, p. 20-21) With consumers looking for more practical ways to view contents, media companies have redirected their focus from linear television to the platforms for direct access to live programme and contents on demand. The same is being done by cable and IPTV operators developing their video streaming platforms that present a combination of TV channel streams and programme content catalogues in VoD (Video on Demand) or SVoD (Subscribe Video on Demand) service.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The first thing we may derive as a conclusion from the conducted research is that the trends of following videos are in line with worldwide trends, from traditional watching to following videos on demand. Moreover, global data indicating that the greatest traffic on the Internet has been made by video contents, found their confirmation in the affinities of the surveyed target group in Serbia. Following series and movies on video streaming platforms and short videos, mostly on Instagram, then on TikTok, fitted into the wider picture of this audience's viewing habits, which did not only follow professional, standard formats, but also generated contents on YouTube and social networks. From the point of content type, as well as of the themes interesting to the target group, this research has provided significant results that could serve as guidelines for content creators and, especially, for the editorial board of the digital platform RTS Planeta. The conclusion is that the presence should be reinforced on social networks and YouTube, where young adult population dwells on a daily basis, to attract and motivate them to explore domestic platforms, on which the available contents can be of interest for them.

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