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FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS – BETWEEN VALUES, INTERESTS
AND CAREER DECISIONS

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Abstract

One of the most important decisions in a man's life is to set up a career path. In a dynamic, flexible and "liquid society", the generation of emerging adults aged 18-25 faces new interpretations of the values of life / work and career interest. The confrontation between the values of "freedom" and "comfortable life", specific to this generation, and the demands of an ascending career can often be shaded by the moment or prospective career interests. Identification of values (autonomy, challenge, social relationships) and interests (Investigative, Artistic, Social – cf. Holland) in the career decision of first-year students in Journalism (belonging to Generation Z, the generation of snowflakes) is the research question. The present study (First-Year Students – Between Values, Interests And Career Decisions) offers a perspective on the correlation between the three elements defining the professional fulfillment of an individual in the first stage of the study: values, interests and career decisions.

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1. Introduction

Each society requires graduates of a generation to meet certain requirements in the professional space. If until now we have been talking about generations who were between 30-50 years old, today, in the world of internet and speed of reaction, generations have significantly reduced their periodization. We have come to distinguish generations at intervals of 10-20 years. This demographic, social, economic, and cultural phenomenon is very carefully pursued both in the economic environments and in the academic/ educational environments. Since the Millennials (Generation Y) are no longer a current issue, a new generation has entered the labour market, drawing particular attention: Generation Z. Today's students, who were born after 1995, are part of this generation. Whether they are in their final year of studies or only at the beginning of their studies, current job demands are the same as long as these students want to get involved into a paid activity.

1.1. Generation Features of First-Year Students

Who are the young people of Generation Z?

Studies conducted in universities/ research institutes or comments brought to everyone's attention by the media converge to the same conclusions on the defining characteristics of Generation Z.

They are also called iGeneration, Post-Millennium, Tech Generation, Net Generation or Digital Natives. It is the largest generation that has ever existed, with estimates reaching 2.52 billion representatives globally.

Generation Z has grown up at the same time with the fulminant development of smart technology, which is characterized by uninterrupted connectivity. That's why these youngsters have been called digital natives. They are determined to build a life in correlation with technology, far from their predecessors' codes and aspirations. Scientists have called them "mutants", because they fuse almost completely with the digital universe. They navigate on multiple screens, sometimes simultaneously. As a consequence, they are accustomed to "everything, immediately and everywhere".

1.2. Consumer Behaviours of Generation Z

They pay huge amounts of money for the latest model of smart phone, but it seems natural for them to get a movie or a song for free, with a single click. They consider the adult codes, especially the ones related to gender, to be outdated. They appreciate the "rebel" brands and get informed on social networks.

With entrepreneurial and aspirational spirit, Generation Z brings drastic changes in consumer behaviour and at the level of expectations compared to their predecessors. Modelled by the social media and the on-demand technology, they value social responsibility and the positive impact on the world. They are also interested in the values of a business they work for or whose products they purchase. On the other hand, they care less about pricing than the Millennials do. The most significant aspect for the retail industry is that Z, although a mobile-first generation, has high Omni-channel expectations. Although they have been living with digital devices in their hands since childhood, much of Generation Z prefers to shop in physical stores without any binders between the different channels of the same retailer.

Unlike the Millennials, who are defined as the online-shopping generation, 67% of the young Z prefer to buy from physical stores most of the time, while 31% prefer the same occasional channel.

Although they were born with mobile devices in their hands, the young Z use these devices much less than the Millennials. A quarter of the respondents to an IBM study spend more than five hours a day on smartphones, but online shopping is not their primary activity. 73% of the Generation Z members have cited social activities.

E-commerce giants like Amazon or Alibaba are challenged to offer Omni-channel experiences. Click and collect, a relatively simple but largely overlooked model, remains one of the most effective means for a retailer to combine the offline with the online experience. Physical presence gives the trader the opportunity to build a face-to-face service, it offers consumers the extra experience of collection, it is convenient and it makes the 360-brand strategy easier. Money is not a priority. These young Z follow their passions and opportunities to grow and advance in their career.

1.3. Socializing in Social Media

Their friends on social networks matter as much as real-life friends and often end up meeting each other. From the age of 16 – sometimes even earlier – these young people go on online dating sites. More than half of the young Z think that true social life takes place on the online networks, where 84% of them are registered, according to a study by JWT, an American advertising agency. For them, online chatting is easier than engaging in real conversations.

They are registered on several social networks: Facebook, Instagram for photos, Snapchat for ephemeral messages, Twitter and Tumblr.

A crushing majority goes online while watching television and believes technology makes everything possible. But their attention span is short, they “scan” instead of reading, which sometimes causes superficial answers to teachers’ questions during school hours.

1.4. Attitudes towards Education/ Training

Accustomed to video guides (“tutorials”) on YouTube, self-taught in all of the high-tech areas – since their parents are completely outdated –, the young people of Generation Z have integrated “permanent self-teaching”, all the more so since they have already witnessed the disappearance of several technologies: the old cassette recorders and tape recorders, radio sets, CDs and DVDs. Today everything is done online. On the Internet, they have already seen absolutely everything, from violence to pornography. These young people spend more than three hours a day in front of the screens, according to the US Sparks and Honey cabinet, which advises companies in relation to the developments taking place in society. “Young Z” suffer from “FOMO” (“Fear of Missing Out”) and hate the idea of not being connected to the internet.

They are not happy only with viewing online movies and videos, therefore they also want to participate in, to create their own YouTube channel or their own vlog (video blog), following the model of many famous teenagers, such as the young American comedian Fred (Lucas Cruikshank), who has become known online since the age of 13. Their idols are internet stars, like the Swedish video-game commentator PewDiePie, who is considered to be the biggest star in this field on YouTube.

They consider themselves “unprejudiced” and “inventive”, but at the same time they admit they are “impatient” and “stubborn.” They adopt trends which are globally spread via Internet, from American super productions such as “Hunger Games” and “Divergent” to Korean K-pop music, by learning “twerk” – a

lascivious dance which is all the vogue on the Internet. Their vocabulary is full of acronyms and words borrowed from English, such as “swag”, which is the new term for “cool”.

1.5. Attitudes towards Professional Environment

Children of the economic crisis, the “young Z” have well-defined criteria for their professional choices. In France, at equal pay, 25% would choose the company that offers the highest level of fun, 22% – the company that is the most innovative, and 21% – the company with the highest level of ethics. Wishing to have an impact in the world, the “young Z” like the idea of volunteering, which is already practiced by a quarter of those aged 16-19 in the United States, according to an analysis made by the Sparks and Honey cabinet . They combine professional and personal life: Netflix or Virgin – the idea of “unlimited free time” at work. They are marked by the desire for transparency and authenticity due to over-information. They work individually, not in teams, and they appreciate constant and quick feedback.

1.6. Generation Z = „The Snowflake Generation”

Beyond the presented functional image, both the media and some scientific research have presented certain characteristic elements of this generation, such as vulnerability when faced to the immediate reality. In 2016, a British writer (Claire Fox) described in the book *I find that offensive!* a pretty detailed portrait of Generation Z, calling it for the first time the “Snowflake Generation”. The name “Snowflake,” explains the author, is given by: the extreme fragility of the British youth (especially those in universities), the immature behaviour (they get offended very quickly and permanently), over-sensitivity (they consider themselves “unique”), the intolerance of any disagreement, the abandonment of idea disputes. Three quarters of the young people complain their mental health could be affected (the study interviewed 2,000 British 16-24-year-olds).

In line with the position of the British writer, there are articles from *The Spectator* and *The Telegraph* which claim that: Snowflakes are in permanent depression and are “treated” with psychotropic drugs. One third of the British youngsters between 15 and 25 years of age suffer from anxiety or depression. They are cut off from the reality of family life, preferring to live in the culture of Social Media. This current period of time has been called by the same journalists “The Age of Desperation”.

It has also been noticed that these young people demand a life which does not impose any sacrifices on them. They resist freedom of speech in order not to be offended. They ask society, especially university campuses, to set up “safety zones” in which they cannot be disturbed in their thinking, their habits, and their behaviour. The reverse is labelled as incitement to hatred. “Snowflakes” criticize intensely the people who don’t agree with their behaviour, thus organizing protests in universities and streets, boycotting and demanding dismissal of the teachers who do not like their position. (The case of some French students, left-wing extremists, who love communism.)

It is known that the psychologist and psychotherapist Jordan Peterson of Toronto refused to use transgender pronouns when talking to the students and consequently he was forced by the university administration to review his attitude.

1.5.1. How did “snowflakes” appear?

Nowadays young people are growing up learning to perceive the world as a frightening place by insistently sending alarm messages about the most diverse aspects of everyday life, Fox says. Consequently, they develop an obsessive need for protection. And parents have become so protective that they take from children even the freedom to play and run outdoors, to climb trees, as it was perfectly normal some years ago. Everything is done in the name of safety and the desire to smooth children’s way into life.

Moreover, parents are constantly told they have to eliminate criticism from the discussions with their children, in order not to harm their self-esteem, but this way they actually cancel their children’s critical thinking. We raise and we educate these children so that they end up finding extremely offensive the opinions they don’t like and, consequently, they become too affected by what other people say and think about them, Fox explains.

Psychotherapists claim that these children develop fears and anxieties when facing challenges and miss opportunities due to “the insecure family environment, the unstable relationship between parents, divorce, lack of emotional support, leading them to an area of emotional inadequacy. The lack of role models, the lack of human respect, the emphasis on material goods do not prepare a brave and socially active young man, but an unhappy one, who always awaits favours.

They are fearful, they exaggerate the difficulties they go through because they are not accustomed to effort, they are not focused on finding solutions and ways of solving any issues they encounter, and they remain stuck in revolt. The passive role, the choice of non-involvement, only creates inappropriate individuals for whom life has no charm, this being just a series of challenges for which they are not prepared. Parents who give up criticizing their children, who give up educational criticism, form people with weak self-criticism, individuals who do not wish for their own evolution, for their own success.”

Thus, “snowflakes” seem to primarily be the product of misunderstood modern methods of parenting, and then the effect of a given cultural, social context.

2. Problem Statement

Career Values Imposed by the Liquid Society

Values have been studied both in psychology and in philosophy, without reaching a unanimous agreement with regard to their definition and description. Van Deth and Scarborough (1995) cite a study from the mid-1970s in which about 4,000 academic publications were analysed, this way being able to register 180 meanings for the term “values.”

They have identified five characteristics of the values on which there is a consensus among the authors. These are the following: they have a latent character; they are conceptions about the desirable and relate to the hierarchical scale of preferences; they have a relative stability; they influence (get manifested through) behaviours, attitudes, opinions; individual values have a social determination.

But none of these features attract an absolute consensus, thus social sciences continue to circulate various ways of using the term “value”. According to the definition provided by the Dictionary of Psychosociology (Iluț & Chelcea, 2003), values are general principles of desirability, which guide and organize the actions and mentalities of individuals, groups and communities.

Values are emotionally charged thoughts about objects, ideas, behaviours, etc., which guide behaviour, without necessarily imposing it (Rokeach, 1979; Huitt, 2007). Rokeach (1979) considers that values, correlated with attitudes, constitute the main guiding axis of personality. He describes values as such: they have a complex structure, being made of three components: cognitive, affective and behavioural; they are relatively stable over time, being the manifestation of faiths and beliefs; they get organized at the level of personality in a hierarchical structure, in a system whose role is to guide the person along the existential route. Rokeach (1979) understands by “value” a specific, final state of existence (a purpose) or a specific type of behaviour that is preferred to an opposite final state, respectively to an opposite type of behaviour.

Iluț (2004) classifies values according to the field of human activity as follows: vital values necessary for the protection of life and environment, such as (physical and mental) health, tonus and physical strength, the beauty and harmony of the body, the balance state of the environment, material goods and economic prosperity, etc.; moral, political, legal and historical values necessary for the existence of a state and of nations, such as democracy, sovereignty, good, justice, courage, wisdom, independence, legality, dignity, love of the nation, etc.; the theoretical values necessary for human knowledge and creation, such as truth, evidence, objectivity, scientific imagination, creativity; aesthetic and religious values which concern the contemplation of the world and of human creation.

As a result of research carried out in 20 countries, Karp and Guterman (2000, as cited in Bobek & Gore, 2004) have highlighted eight categories of values which have been considered in numerous cultures as “guiding principles in life” and which are “crucial to having career satisfaction”. These are: goodwill, universality, tradition, security, power, accomplishment, excitement and self-commandment.

2.1. Work-Related Values

Work-related values are part of the set of “lifestyle” values (Patton, 2000, as cited in Bobek & Gore, 2004). There isn't a unanimously accepted definition for work-related values either. Some authors (Lofquist & Dawis, 1978) consider them to be preferences for types of work or work environments. Others consider them a set of motivations based on ideas about truth and falsity (Dose, 1997).

The last two concepts are valid for values in general, not just for the work-related ones. Zytowski (1970, as cited in Dose, 1997) understands through work-related values a “set of concepts mediating between the person's affective orientation and classes of external objects that offer similar satisfactions” (p. 176). On the O*NET OnLine site, work-related values are defined as “global aspects of work that are important to a person's satisfaction”.

2.2. Classification of Work-Related Values

McKay (2007) defines work-related values as beliefs and ideas that are important to an individual, guiding their actions. In the Student Counselling Guide (n.d.) there is a classification of the career-related values (which, however, are not defined) as follows:

- intrinsic values – are values related to intrinsic motivation: variety at work; the opportunity to develop professionally; the possibility to work in a new field of activity; the possibility to offer community support; experiencing adventure, strong emotions; meeting the need for strong sensations,

taking risks; the ability to feel respected for what they are doing; the opportunity to compete with others; the opportunity to be in constant contact with others; the possibility to influence others; the opportunity to express creativity;

- extrinsic values – are values associated with tangible rewards: the perception of control, of authority; the possibility to travel; financial rewards; the opportunity to be an entrepreneur; the opportunity to work in a team; the ability to work in a rapidly growing field; the opportunity to have a personalised working program; the opportunity to engage in a job associated with a healthy lifestyle; the possibility to gain an intellectual status; the ability to work in an aesthetically pleasant working environment;

- life values – are values associated with lifestyle: the opportunity to save money; the opportunity to enjoy luxurious holidays; the opportunity to have access to a rich cultural life; the possibility to be an active member of the community and to build a personalised time schedule that allows people to spend quality time with their families; the opportunity to develop a lifestyle in a populated city; the possibility to live in another country; the opportunity to invest in spiritual growth or in a life in rural areas; the perception of a professional and entertaining life.

2.3. The Role of Values in Professional Orientation

It has been noticed that people who have the same occupations or occupations of the same category tend to have similar values (Realo, 1999). Knowing a person's values is very important in the counselling process, while knowing their work-related values is essential in order to make informed career decisions (Bobek & Gore, 2004).

This assertion is based on the fact that a person's satisfaction at work can be predicted by:

- the degree of matching between their values and the possibilities given by their occupation in order to achieve these values (Bobek & Gore, 2004).
- the degree of correspondence between their needs and values and the rewards offered by the work environment (Dima, Smeureanu, & Petrescu, 2011).
- the degree of correspondence between their needs/values and the conditioning system currently operating in the work environment (Dima et al., 2011).

Assessing values brings benefits both to individuals who can identify inadequately met work-values in their job, as well as to organizations that can recruit prospective employees from people whose values best fit the organization's values, since matching the culture of an organization with the values of those working in the organization can improve the organization's results (Realo, 1999).

2.4. Values in the Professional Field:

Professional recognition: For such people, it is important to be respected and admired by others. In order to achieve this, they believe they must be competent in their field of work.

Autonomy: For such people, it is important to have great freedom and diversity in their actions, to make decisions and plans according to their own standards (as they think is right).

Compliance with rules: For such people, it is important to organize and carry out activities according to clearly defined rules set by others (family, organization, society).

Safety: For such people, it is important to look for and carry out activities in which they know exactly what it is going to happen, what the involved factors are, what they have to do, what the consequences are.

Social Relations: For such people, it is important to focus on building, developing and maintaining pleasant, uncompetitive relationships with the people they come into contact with at school, at work or in any other field.

Challenge: It is important for this type of people to look for risky activities with a high level of complexity in terms of planning, implementation and monitoring strategies.

Authority: It is important for such people to have the opportunity to lead others, to make decisions, and to take responsibility for their own work and for that of others; they like to have influence and dominance over the people they work with.

2.5. Career Interests

The theory of person-to-environment correspondence developed by Holland (1997) is one of the most influential in the field of vocational psychology. The concepts deriving from this theory have been basically assimilated into general vocabulary, methods and practices of career assistance.

The basic assumptions of the theory can be presented as follows: 1. People and work environments can be categorized into 6 types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, entrepreneurial and conventional (RIASEC). 2. People tend to look for work environments that will allow them to implement the characteristics of their vocational personality. 3. Vocational behaviour is the result of the interaction between personality types and the environment.

The characteristics of these types are:

Artistic Interests (A) – They appeal to less structured activities which involve a creative solution and offer self-expression (e.g. poetry, painting, music, design). In general, they prefer to work with new ideas, to change things, to develop products and not necessarily to follow rules.

Social interests (S) – They involve the focus on activities which require interpersonal relationships, being interested in how people understand each other, learn and develop (e.g.: training, teaching, assisting activities to help people solve various problems). They prefer to be in the service of others, to work in a team, rather than to perform technical tasks which involve working only with objects, machines or data.

Realistic Interests (R) – They are manifested by the tendency to move towards activities involving the manipulation of objects, machines and instruments, but also physical activities (e.g. in the automotive, technical, agricultural fields). They would rather prefer to work outdoors with objects, plants, animals, nature elements, and less with other people.

Investigative interests (I) – They suppose an attraction for research, investigation in various forms and in various fields, such as: biology, physics, mathematics, culture, sociology, etc. They usually prefer to work

with ideas, to explore, to understand in depth things/ events, to solve abstract problems, to be involved in scientific research activities.

Entrepreneurial Interests (E) – They are manifested by the preference for activities which allow for initiative and the possibility of coordinating their own activity or the activity of a group (e.g. management, sales activities). They usually prefer activities which involve influencing people, making decisions, taking risks, and less working with ideas or scientific activities.

Conventional interests (C) – They suppose preference for activities which require the systematic and orderly manipulation of data or objects within a well-organized and well-defined framework (e.g.: accounting, secretariat, finance, administration). In general, they prefer activities with clear rules, conducted according to certain procedures.

2.6. Career Decision

Making a decision consists of a sequence of cognitive processing that leads to choosing an alternative from a variety of available options. A number of mental processes form the basis of a decision. Researchers have also discovered the normative theories which explain, to a good extent, the decision-making mechanism. E.g.: the expected-value theory, the expected-utility theory, the game theory based on a rigorous mathematical system. Some research, developed by Kahneman and Tversky (2000), has shown that decision-makers do not choose rationally.

In our case, the career decision was made when our students opted for the *Journalism* specialization at the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences.

3. Research Questions

Identification of values and interests in the career decision of first-year students in Journalism (belonging to Generation Z, the generation of snowflakes).

4. Purpose of the Study

- I1. First-year students in Journalism chose this specialization in relation to the intrinsic, extrinsic and life values involved in the journalistic profession.
- I2. Students' career interests coincide with the career interests of the journalistic profession
- I3. Students persevere in their career decision after the first semester of study at the Journalism specialization.

5. Research Methods

Study Case

5.1. Research Tools:

The Interest Evaluation Questionnaire (CEI, Holland)

Work Values Inventory (after Donald Super)

The Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ; Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996).

5.2. Configuration of journalism profession (cf. Holland):

Career Interests: Investigative - Artistic - Social

Career values: (autonomy, challenge, social relationships)

6. Findings

The study results are presented in Table 01.

Table 01. Correlations between values, interests and professions / occupations

Examples	Interests	Values	Profession/occupation
Student 1	Artistic Social Realist	Professional recognition Authority Compliance with rules	Commentator Advertising
Student 2	Artistic Investigative Social	Authority Safety Challenge:	Critic
Student 3	Entrepreneurial Conventional Realist	Autonomy: Professional recognition Safety	Director/leader
Student 4	Social Investigative Realist	Social Relations Challenge Authority	Counselor
Student 5	Investigative Artistic Social	Autonomy Challenge Social Relations	Columnist Reporter Philosopher
Student 6	Social Artistic Realist	Social Relations Autonomy Safety	Philosopher Educator
Student 7	Entrepreneurial Conventional Investigative	Autonomy Professional recognition Social Relations	Director
Student 8	Social Artistic Realist	Challenge Professional recognition Compliance with rules	Educator
Student 9	Social Investigative Artistic	Social Relations Autonomy Compliance with rules	Counselor
Student 10	Social Investigative Artistic	Autonomy Social Relations Challenge	Counselor

7. Conclusion

Out of 10 first-year students in Journalism, (as a result of tests) 1 has been indicated as suitable for the journalist profession, in terms of career interests and personal and career values. Confirmation / refutation of research assumptions:

11. 9 first-year students out of the 10 evaluated did not choose the specialization in relation to the intrinsic, extrinsic and life values involved in the journalistic profession.

12. 9 students out of the 10 rated do not have career interests specific to the journalistic profession.

13. Students still persevere in their career decision after the first semester of study at the Journalism specialization.

Acknowledgments

The present empirical study offers the prospect of studying the phenomenon of career choice in relation to the values and the career interests at the quantitative level.

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