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YOUTH AND SOCIAL MEDIA – A GRADUAL SHIFT DRIVEN BY DIGITAL COMPETENCIES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *The primary aim of this study was to determine the impact of digital competencies on young people's activity in social media.*

Need for the study: *Digital competencies play a vital role in effectively utilizing social media as they enable content creation, interaction with others, influence communication, and support their use for professional, educational, or social purposes.*

Methodology: *The article presents survey results conducted among Polish students. The research was carried out in two phases using both paper and electronic questionnaires: the first phase in 2018 and the second in 2024. Participants assessed their digital competencies using a Likert scale and answered questions about their use of social media. The data were organized and analyzed using multivariate statistical analysis tools, including statistical tests and correlation analysis. The analyses employed the Spearman correlation coefficient, the two-proportion Z-test, and the Mann-Whitney U test. Most calculations were performed using the* ***Statistica 13*** *software suite.*

Findings: *A key finding of the research is that while YouTube and Facebook maintain leading roles among young people, there is a noticeable rise in the popularity of Instagram and TikTok. The division between groups of media is distinct; however, by 2024, there was a stronger connection observed between users, regardless of the platform, than between merely owning and managing an account.*

Practical Implications: *Understanding how students use social media is crucial for universities and could contribute to developing effective strategies to facilitate social media engagement. Taking action to increase digital knowledge and skills in order to improve quality of life, achieve better results at work and increase competitiveness in the labor market. This is also crucial from the perspective of intelligent management of an organization, which uses modern technologies to improve the functioning of an organization in many areas.*

Keywords: Digital competencies, IT skills, information skills, social media, students, digital competence measurement

Jel codes: I23, I25, O33

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1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization processes and the ongoing fourth industrial revolution shape the environment and potential of modern organizations. The fourth industrial revolution is characterized by, among others, digitization, the development of digital competences and advanced automation and robotization.

In today's world, where information reaches us through numerous channels and the industrial revolution has become a reality, relatively modern means of communication, such as social media platforms, play a significant role. Their potential – viewed from commercial, political, and social perspectives – has already been recognized and is continuously exploited. Innovations primarily reach young people, who exhibit high receptivity, adaptability to change, and openness to new technologies.

Modern technologies play an important role in the communication process, access to information, intellectual and professional development of members of many social groups, including young people who are just entering the labor market. They are present in both the public and private sphere of functioning of every person. The 2006 European Parliament recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning lists digital competences as one of the 8 key competences for every citizen that enable personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability in our modern society (Recommendation..., 2006).

Technology is developing very quickly and is deeply penetrating life, the discussion on digital competences has become a burning topic (Mora-Cantallops et al. 2022; Pérez-López & Tosina, 2023; Załoga &Bryczek-Wróbel, 2023, pp. 716).

Integration of information technology, analytical technology and automation for more effective management of resources and processes in the enterprise is the basis of intelligent management of the organization. Intelligent management uses modern information technology, and social media are based on information technology. The combination of management ideas and methods with artificial intelligence technology and intelligent management is an important part of management practice (Xiaojing & Minghai, 2021, pp. 1).

Therefore, this study investigates the level of digital competencies among students and their engagement in social media. The primary aim was to determine how digital competencies influence young people's activity on social media platforms. Surveys were conducted among Polish university students (technical and economic fields) in two stages – 2018 and 2024.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Digital competences in the modern world

Over the past decades, the concept of digital competences has been discussed more and more often, especially in the aspect of "what skills and knowledge people in a knowledge society should have, what to teach young people and how to do it" (Ferrari, 2013; Ilomäki, Paavola and Lakkala, 2016, p. 655). Literature reviews on this topic have also been conducted to explain this concept (Spante, 2018, pp. 1-21; Zhao et al. 2021; López-Nuñez er al, 2024).

Employees' digital competences are the capital of a company, but above all of every person. Using digital technologies allows people to participate in social life, fulfill professional duties, advance or raise their social status (Rogacka, 2022). According to data from the European Commission, over 90% of jobs in the European Union require at least basic digital skills (ECA, 2021), and by 2030 they will be required in 9 out of 10 jobs (European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2021). A report by the World Economic Forum (2023) states that six out of ten workers will need skills training by 2027, but only half of workers have access to appropriate training opportunities.

In the recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning that is proposed by the European Commission (2006, pp. 10–18), digital competence has been identified as one of the eight key life skills along with communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship.

Digital competence definitions emphasize the importance of the ability to use digital technologies in various areas of private and professional life. The basic element of digital competence is technical skills (Rachmadtullah, 2020, pp. 3272 – 3277). Computers, smartphones and tablets are an integral part

of personal and professional life, which requires technical skills that will enable effective interaction with these devices (Zheng, 2018, pp. 311–319). This requires understanding operating systems, managing files and folders, installing and updating software, e.g. office software (word processors, spreadsheets) or solving technical problems (Martin et al., 2022; Kozioł-Nadolna, 2024, pp. 3864).

Other aspects of digital competences also appear, such as problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking and the ability to work in a team. Typology of categories developed and presented in the publication by van Laar et al. (2020) is one of the most popular typologies mentioned in the literature devoted to the analysis of digital competences of society, both from the perspective of young people and students, as well as the sought-after competences of employees and digital skills assessed from the perspective of seniors.

Digital competences encompass much more than just using computers or the Internet (Chomiak-Orsa, Smolag, 2024). They mean the ability to analyze both the potential benefits and limitations of modern technologies, as well as the ability to assess the credibility and relevance of digital content (Song, Ling, 2011). In digital communication, the ability to acquire and communicate with a wide audience is particularly important (Yo, 2010, pp.). Today's network user should have competences in co-creating the network environment, i.e. take the initiative to create Internet channels (Siadak, 2016, pp. 371).

The term ‘digital competencies’ refers to a set of skills that everyone needs to live, learn and work in a society where people need to communicate and access relevant information through digital technologies such as internet platforms, social media and mobile devices (Falloon, 2020, pp. 2449–2472; Ng et al., 2023, pp. 137–161). Table 1 contains selected definitions of digital competences from the subject literature.

The change in the scope of the concept and approach to digital competences can be related to four types of access to new media in van Dijk's model (2014, pp. 250):

- motivational access – motivation to use ICT,
- material/physical access – material/physical access to a computer and the Internet,
- skills access – possession of skills related to ICT,
- usage access – access related to the use of ICT.

In the first period of this phenomenon, motivational access played an important role in its escalation, related to the decision to purchase equipment, install the Internet (mobile or stationary), and take the first steps towards acquiring and improving competences enabling the use of specific applications and computer programs. Material access, referring to the IT infrastructure, i.e. access to equipment, programs, and Internet resources, was also extremely important. Later, with technological progress, functioning within these types of access became insufficient. Being a creative producer of electronic products is associated with functioning at the competence level distinguished by van Dijk (skills access – a catalog approach to digital competences) and usage access. Both of these types of access are characterized by having competences in the area of software use, searching for information resources on the Internet, assessing their credibility, the ability to process and use them for one's own purposes, and the ability to use various ways of using computers and the Internet to improve the quality of one's functioning and create individual development paths related to education and professional work (relational approach to digital competences).

There are two approaches to digital competences: catalog (normative) and relational (Buchholtz et al., 2015). The first approach treats them as one of many skills, from which an individual chooses at a given moment the one thanks to which they will achieve a specific goal. Digital competences are perceived in isolation from other human activities. On the other hand, the relational approach to digital competences allows them to be considered in the broader context of tasks undertaken in everyday life, with digital technologies not constituting a separate area, but an integral part of an individual's activity and helping to improve their actions.

Table 1. *Selected definitions of digital competences*

Author, year	Source	Criteria for assessing digital competences
Horton, 1983	Information literacy vs. computer literacy; Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science Vol. 9, No. 4, April	Ability to use a computer to collect and process data
Basil, 2008	Theorems of Information Literacy. A mathematical-like approach to the discourse of Information Literacy	Two levels of assessment: technical use of in-formation technology and information skills consisting in understanding processed re-sources
van Dijk & van Deursen, 2014	Defining Internet skills. in Digital skills. Unlocking the information society (pp. 21-41). Palgrave Macmillan	Four levels of access to technology: motivational access, material/physical access, skills access, usage access
World Economic Forum, 2018	The 2018 Future of Jobs Report	The ability to use digital technologies to achieve goals, solve problems and communicate with others
van Laar et al., 2020	Determinants of 21st-Century Skills and 21st-Century Digital Skills for Workers: A Systematic Literature Review; SAGE Open	Categories: Information digital skills, communications digital skills, collaboration digital skills, critical thinking digital skills, creative digital skills, problem-solving digital skills
KPRM, 2023	Digital Competence Development Program	Digital competences are a harmonious composition of knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable living, learning and working in a digital society, i.e. a society that uses digital technologies in everyday life and work

Source: own elaboration.

Digital competences include (KPRM, 2023, pp. 8):

- IT competences covering the use of computers and other electronic devices, safe use of the Internet, applications and software, new intelligent digital technologies and the ability to use methods derived from computer science when programming and creating IT solutions for problems in various fields (computational thinking),
- information and communication competences, consisting of the ability to search for information, understand it, as well as select and critically evaluate it, as well as communicate remotely using digital technologies,
- functional competences, i.e. the real use of the above competences in various areas of everyday life, such as finance, work and professional development, maintaining relationships, health, hobbies, civic engagement, spiritual life, etc., in accordance with the principles of safe use of digital technologies.

Another typology of digital competences is the DigComp 2.2 model (Vuorikari et al., 2022, pp. 6). This is the next edition of the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp). The framework allows for systematizing areas and levels of competences, as well as creating systems for their measurement and certification.

The areas of digital competences can be presented as follows:

- information and data, including data browsing and storage, data evaluation and data management,
- communication and collaboration, including communication in digital environments, sharing resources using online tools, collaboration via digital tools, digital identity management,
- creating digital content, including creating and editing new content, respecting intellectual property rights and licenses, programming,
- security, including personal data protection and privacy, digital identity protection, security measures,
- problem-solving including solving technical problems, identifying digital needs and resources, creative use of digital technologies.

A less complex model of digital competence is the UK-developed Essential Digital Skills model, which identifies the core competences of individual users, such as (Department for Education, 2019):

- communicating,
- handling information and content,
- transacting,
- problem solving,
- being safe and legal online.

The digital competence model used by the Central Statistical Office in Poland assumes the division of users into 4 categories (GUS, 2020, pp. 155 –156). The first category is people who do not have any general digital skills. They could use the Internet in the last 3 months and did not have any digital information, communication, problem-solving or software skills. People with low digital skills are people who used the Internet in the last 3 months and did not have 1 to 3 of the digital information, communication, problem-solving or software skills.

The third category includes people with basic digital skills, characterized by having any type of digital information, communication, problem-solving or software skills (but at least one type at a basic level). The fourth category includes people with above-basic digital skills from any type of digital information, communication, problem-solving or software skills. According to data from the Central Statistical Office, in 2024 in Poland, 73.5% of people aged 16–24 had basic or above-basic digital skills (GUS, 2024, pp. 3). This age group had the highest percentage of people with basic or above-basic digital skills.

The level of creating digital competences is influenced by the following determinants, which include (Drabik, Tuszyński 2013, pp. 16):

- home, family, friends – this group inspires, teaches, enables and provides access to devices, applications, computer networks, enables spending time together, having fun and learning, solving problems together, making purchases,
- school, university or workplace – requires, shows possibilities, motivates to use them, teaches critical thinking, indicates potential directions of development of computer applications and devices, forces people who teach and work to think and use the potential of ICT creatively, in the case of professionally active people, the need to use the potential of ICT is also conditioned by cooperation with the customer, suppliers and business partners,
- own interests and needs – drive activity in the use of ICT solutions and devices, help maintain the consistency of their use.

When analyzing the possession of digital competences, it is necessary to remember about issues related to the lack of appropriate competences or their inappropriate level, resulting in the phenomenon of digital exclusion, and due to the scope and scope of the impact of ICT on the surrounding reality, social exclusion (Czerski, 2020, pp. 63-64; Ragnedda et al., 2022). The problem of digital exclusion is as important as the issue of digital inclusion.

2.2. Use of social media by young people

The use of digital technologies has become fundamental to enabling people to function effortlessly across all areas of life in today's world. Young people, in particular, represent a group that actively and skillfully utilizes the benefits of the digital world.

Specifically, it is important to mention Generation Z, which is conceived as a digital native generation, as this generation includes people born between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s (Kowalczyk, 2022, pp. 170–171). This is the first generation to grow up in the era of universally accessible Internet (Dimock 2019, pp. 1).

These demographic exhibits high levels of internet usage, with the time spent online steadily increasing (Nastolatki 3.0, 2023). Moreover, young people, who engage with digital content more frequently than adults, have significantly greater opportunities to develop their digital competencies (Sitek, 2024). Social media platforms play a pivotal role in the virtual lives of young people, enabling them to build relationships, share interests, and fulfill various social needs (Lozano-Blasco et al., 2023; Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Young people form social connections, social media interactions can promote healthy socialization, especially when they are experiencing stress or social isolation (Craig, 2021).

Participants may use social media to interact with people they already know, as well as a way to meet new people. It is also used as a mechanism for consuming media content and engaging in a range of other activities, which vary depending on the specific site (Buehler, 2017). Youths use social media extensively for various purposes, and it has become an integral part of their daily lives. According to (Sumadevi, 2023, pp. 289–290; Levenson et al. 2016), young people use social media as:

1. Communication and Connectivity – Social media platforms are a primary means of communication to stay connected with others
2. Self-Expression and Creativity – Young people want to express themselves creatively. They share photographs, poetry, prose, and other forms of self-expression on platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest.
3. Entertainment and Content: social media is a source of entertainment for young people.
4. Information and News: social media provides young people with access to news and current events, for example, on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to stay up to date.
5. Social Networking – They build professional networks, connect with potential employers, and seek out career opportunities (LinkedIn).
6. Learning and Education: Young people follow educational channels on YouTube or participate in educational groups on Facebook to enhance their learning.
7. Cultural Exchange and Global Interaction – social media enables young people to interact with peers from different countries and cultures, promoting cross-cultural understanding and the exchange of ideas.
8. Social Activism and Awareness – Young people use social media to advocate for causes they care about, participate in online campaigns, and share information to advocate for change.
9. Shopping and E-Commerce
10. Health and Wellness: social media provides health-related information, fitness tips, and mental health support.

As ICT technologies evolve, so does the way we live, necessitating the development of skills that ensure individuals can function autonomously and confidently in the modern digital landscape (Beyer, 2023, pp. 4776).

Digital competences among students increase their competitiveness on the labour market, support adaptation to the technological revolution and reduce social exclusion. Today's societies are experiencing a digitalization that is transforming organizations and jobs (Peiró & Martínez-Tur, 2022, pp. 189). This changes the way of managing an organization, which becomes intelligent. Intelligent management changes the roles of employees, their commitment and creativity.

The skillful use of digital technologies, including AI tools, is an important area in today's digitalized world. The tools currently in use, such as text, voice and video generators or Learning Experience Platforms (LXP), are significantly improving the efficiency and accessibility of education for young people. At the same time, they introduce elements of gamification and improved online discussion forums, which increases student engagement (PARP, 2023, pp. 18–22).

According to a study by Xia et al. (2022), the main effect of implementing artificial intelligence for learners is to increase their motivation and engagement in the learning process.

In 2022, new tools were developed: the Open AI company introduced ChatGPT, and Microsoft introduced Bing. ChatGPT and Bing are advanced AI language models capable of generating content on a variety of topics. Importantly, these tools have the ability to interact with people, making them capable of playing a key role in human communication, supporting both individuals and businesses

Voice-generating AI tools, often called text-to-speech (TTS), convert written text into spoken words using advanced machine learning techniques (e.g.: ElevenLabs, Murf, Resemble AI tools).

Video-generating AI tools use advanced machine learning and artificial intelligence techniques to create, edit and enhance video content. They can generate synthetic video content, automate video editing processes, apply effects or enhancements, and even animate static images (e.g., Bongo, Synthesia tools). Tools for generating presentations, infographics and websites use artificial intelligence to automate and streamline the creation of visually appealing and effective digital content (e.g.: Canva, Miro tools).

The spread of artificial intelligence will certainly have an impact on the development of competencies, including digital competencies.

Digital competencies are a critical factor shaping the quality of life for individuals and organizations alike. These competencies equip people to respond effectively to transformations in how products and services are delivered, organizations operate in the market, and how individuals learn, work, and enhance their qualifications (Saienko et al., 2022). These changes are evident not only in the conveniences of daily and professional tasks but also signify a cultural shift in communication methods. Traditional communication channels have been reshaped by modern tools, with face-to-face conversations increasingly supplemented or even replaced, by digital communication tools that enable remote interaction. Remote communication now predominantly occurs via text-based methods, sometimes supplemented by ideograms, rather than voice communication.

Navigating today's reality requires individuals to adopt and utilize available digital tools. Despite resistance in certain circles, nearly all institutions: governmental, cultural, educational, and others—are advancing towards extensive digitalization of their operations, including both internal and external communication. On one hand, this shift leverages the efficiencies and cost savings of modern methods and tools; on the other, it reflects the evolution of administration and industry to meet the demands of an ever-changing clientele. Companies try to function as best as they can in such conditions and to achieve this, they implement appropriate business strategies (Kozioł-Nadolna, 2022, pp. 3194).

The generation entering the workforce today is highly adept at navigating the digital world. Social media has become a dominant communication channel, serving not only personal interactions but increasingly supporting business and administrative functions (Korombel & Ławińska, 2023). Practically all local and central government institutions now communicate with citizens via social media platforms (Tripopsakul, 2018). This presence is an indispensable element of organizational functioning in the current era. Globally, over 62% of the population actively uses social media, offering companies unparalleled opportunities to engage with potential audiences (Digital 2024 Global Overview Report). In Poland, approximately 28 million people are active social media users (Report Social Media 2023). Younger generations expect brands to engage with them on social media, tailoring their marketing to resonate with their language and preferences. In contrast, mature consumers emphasize secure payment transactions and a seamless shopping experience during e-commerce activities (Co (u)gryzie e-commerce?, 2021; Beyer, 2023a, pp. 3094). Consequently, an increasing share of trade, including retail operations, is migrating online (Szajt & Rafałko, 2017).

Companies active on social media closely monitor the fast-evolving trends to reach potential customers quickly and effectively through the internet. For businesses, online sales are critical; however, Generation Z is characterized by impulsivity and a lack of decision-making analysis, making physical retail stores a compelling sales channel for this group (Kluza, 2019). Skillful use of social media in business enhances processes ranging from product development to customer service (Lu & Lee, 2012). A significant advantage of social media is its ability to create, share, and exchange information within communities formed on these platforms (Sivakumar, 2020).

The demographic profile of Polish internet users reveals that the target group of interest comprises over 24% of users, representing a substantial audience for any outreach efforts.

This study aimed to examine the digital competencies of students and their involvement in social media. Digital competencies were defined as the ability to use digital technologies to access and utilize information, learn, work, collaborate, and function in society critically, responsibly, and creatively (Ala-Mutka, 2011). These investigations align with other efforts to measure students' digital competencies (Tzafilkou et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in two phases: the first in 2018 (sample size: 175 participants) and the second in 2024 (sample size: 148 participants). The initial phase of the study was carried out concurrently in Slovakia (Hajduová et al., 2020); however, this report focuses exclusively on the research conducted in Poland. The primary tool used was a survey questionnaire containing questions about social media usage and digital competencies, divided into IT and information competencies. For the competency test, a Likert scale-based measurement was applied.

The data collection involved both paper-based questionnaires and their electronic counterparts, which were distributed to potential respondents – university students in Poland. The reliability of the questionnaire was verified using Cronbach's alpha, calculated at $\alpha = 0.973$. The data were organized and analyzed using multivariate statistical analysis tools, including statistical tests and correlation analysis. The analyses employed the Spearman correlation coefficient, the two-proportion Z-test, and the Mann-Whitney U test. Most calculations were performed using the **Statistica 13** software suite.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to examine the impact of possessing IT and information competencies on engagement with and usage of social media. Given the two rounds of the survey conducted in 2018 and 2024, the study assessed the use of five social media platforms.

Table 2. Number of significant changes in competency levels related to possession and usage of social media

Acrivities	**Account ownership**		**Use of**	
change	decline	increase	decline	increase
Facebook	36	0	46	0
Google plus	48	0	49	0
Twitter (X)	0	49	0	16
Instagram	0	48	0	0
Linkedin	0	49	0	42
Youtube	0	7	43	0

Source: own elaboration.

The findings indicate that in 39 out of 49 cases for account ownership and in 46 out of 49 cases for account usage, individuals with high information and IT competencies were less likely to use (or have an account on) Facebook. An even larger decline in account ownership (48) and usage (49) was noted for Google Plus. Conversely, Twitter (now X) gained popularity within the studied group (across all competencies) as a platform, although this growth did not entirely translate into an increase in active users – growth was observed in only 16 identified competencies. This suggests that factors other than IT competencies might influence its popularity.

Creating accounts appears to be almost intuitive in most cases, not only for social media platforms but also for other services. However, active usage of these accounts requires certain skills, which were identified in the study. These include:

- inserting images/symbols in a word processor,
- inserting and editing tables in a word processor,
- moving files/folders on a computer,
- moving files/folders on a smartphone,
- transferring files/folders between devices,
- using snipping tools,
- using basic mathematical functions in a spreadsheet,
- installing software on a computer independently,
- uninstalling software/apps on a smartphone independently,
- using file-sharing programs (P2P),
- buying and selling goods via websites in languages other than Polish.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that social media usage can negatively impact users, potentially leading to addiction (Pellegrino et al., 2022).

The study focused on students and their IT competencies. As other research shows, students' digital competencies are not inherently high simply because they are students (Martzoukou et al., 2020). Nevertheless, these competencies are identified as critical for achieving success today (López-Meneses et al., 2020), whereas their absence can significantly hinder success (Cabero-Almenara et al., 2023).

In our research, we asked participants about both account ownership and actual usage of social media accounts. Notably, in the 2018 survey, the questionnaire included the platform "Nasza Klasa", which was still active at the time. By 2024, it had been replaced by TikTok.

Facebook remains the leading platform in terms of account ownership, but YouTube, previously in second place, has been replaced by Instagram. Among users, Instagram has caught up with Facebook, and the difference between TikTok and YouTube is only five percentage points (Figure 1).

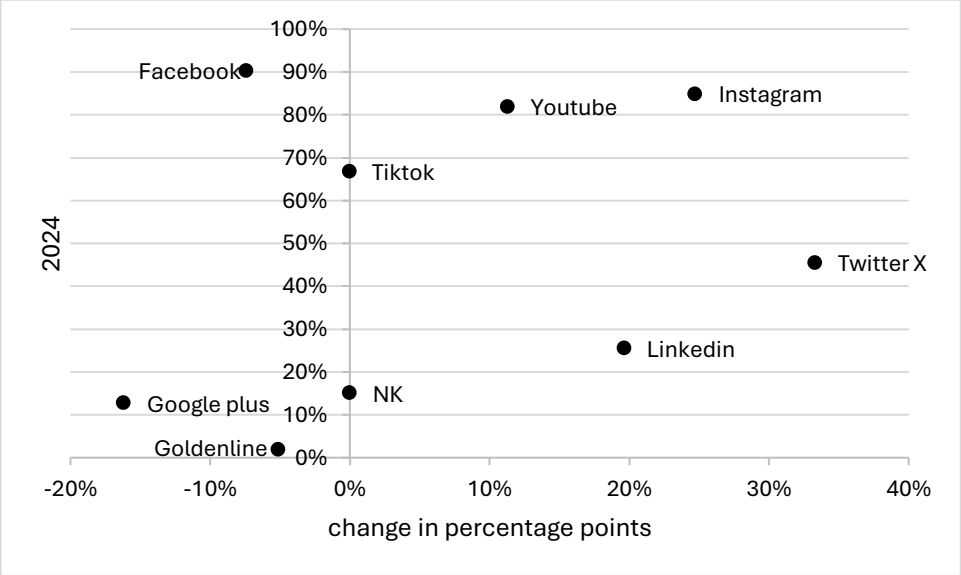

Figure 1. Changes in the Percentage of Social Media Users Between 2018 and 2024
Source: own elaboration.

Global studies continue to confirm the leading roles of YouTube and Facebook among young people, but the rapid rise of Instagram and TikTok is evident, with the gap narrowing each year. Similar conclusions emerge from our findings. The changes in user groups are noticeable even within a relatively short six-year span between surveys. The most significant progress was observed for Instagram and Twitter (X), while Google Plus experienced a decline. Facebook's popularity appears stable for now, but it is important to remember that the social media market is highly dynamic.

Social media enables the creation and sharing of information as well as collaboration (Malik et al., 2020), and it opens up new educational opportunities (Esteve-Mon et al., 2017). The chosen reference group appears appropriate; however, differences in results may directly stem from the academic focus of the participants' studies or from other non-digital skills and competencies (Wild & Schulze Heuling, 2020).

The study also individually examined the frequency of Facebook usage. All significant changes regarding Facebook usage in connection with competencies indicated a declining percentage of users. The proportion of those using Facebook rarely or not at all increased more than fourfold – from 5.8% to 25.0% in the surveyed groups. However, this does not necessarily signify an exodus from social media but rather its evolution. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter (X) are gaining popularity, leading to declines in others. Naturally, alongside competencies, trends and the quality of services also play a role.

The study of students' involvement in the use of social media is also important from the point of view of university management (its recruitment). Recent research has confirmed that thanks to the implementation of AI in marketing – through social media – universities can operate more effectively, better communicate with potential and actual customers such as students (Gołąb-Andrzejak, 2022). All the more so as the use of AI in social media, for technical and economic reasons, is growing in an unprecedented way and is constantly transforming social media (Sadiku et al. 2021). This is a response to the situation in the market, where AI is playing an increasingly important role in every marketing segment due to its versatility and efficiency (Chithra Lekshmi, Jayaseelan and Kadeswaran, 2024).

New tools used by social media platforms are becoming increasingly intuitive. The pandemic served as a significant test of competency levels. In 2018, respondents rated 34 of the 49 competencies higher, with only two rated lower compared to 2024. It can be assumed that respondents' knowledge has grown substantially due to the "virtual reality" imposed by the lockdown. However, a high self-assessment of digital competencies followed by their actual verification is not unusual and has been documented in other studies (Silva-Quiroz & Morales-Morgado, 2022).

The conducted research aligns with findings presented by other researchers and international organizations. A certain degree of user rotation between social media platforms has been observed (O'Day & Heimberg, 2021). Some platforms, through changes or modifications to their usage rules, attempt to appeal to a broader audience—Twitter (X) being an example. Others remain popular within specific circles but are less so among the same age groups in different geographic locations. Currently, over one-third of young people (and nearly as many in other age groups) are constantly online. Young people, on average, engage with more than seven social media platforms.

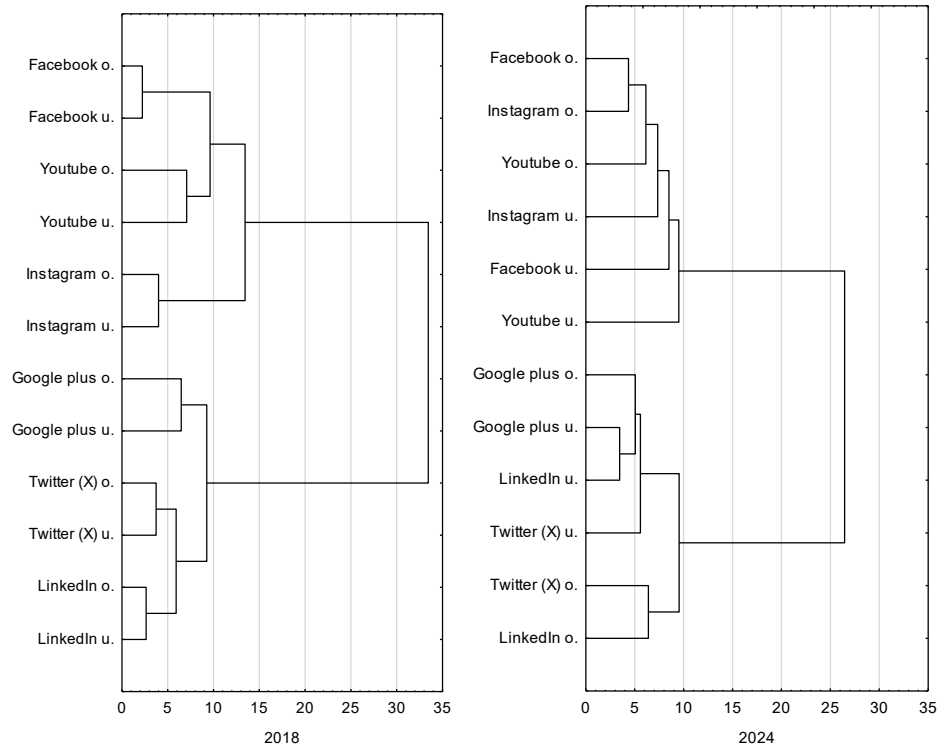

Figure 2. Cluster Analysis Using the Ward Method for Social Media Users (u.) and Owners (o.) in 2018 and 2024 (Euclidean Distance)
Source: own elaboration.

The ownership of multiple accounts and their interconnections are more pronounced in the 2024 study. While the division into two groups of media remains constant, the 2024 results show a stronger connection among users of three specific social media platforms, as well as within the second group—stronger than the link between ownership and usage (Figure 2). This could suggest the influence of competencies on social media usage.

According to our findings, platforms like Facebook and Google Plus show a decline in their association with IT competencies. In contrast, new platforms such as Twitter and TikTok, which were not included in the 2018 study, have gained prominence – TikTok, for instance, was owned by two-thirds and used by 53.3% of respondents in 2024. In today's reality, the presence on social media and the diversity of platforms are key elements determining their role (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), particularly for the studied group of users.

5. CONCLUSION

The study, conducted in two stages in 2018 and 2024 on a total sample of 323 respondents, allowed for an assessment of the impact of digital competencies on the activity of young people on social media. The results highlight changes in the popularity of social media among young users. Facebook remains popular but is losing ground to newer platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

It turns out that merely having accounts on social media – which reflects an effort to keep up with trends—is not dependent on IT competencies. Access to these platforms, particularly for young people, is intuitive. However, their actual usage requires specific competencies, as confirmed by the research and its practical verification conducted in the second stage. It can be assumed that the self-assessment of competencies in 2024 was more accurate than in the first edition.

Movements among social media users are also noticeable, with changes in platform popularity and, consequently, user numbers. Understanding how students use social media is crucial for universities and could contribute to developing effective strategies to facilitate social media engagement (Lu et al., 2016).

This is also crucial from the perspective of intelligent management of an organization, which uses modern technologies to improve the functioning of an organization in many areas. Understanding how young people use social media can help improve the activity of companies in social media to reach potential customers. Knowledge of issues related to the use of social media is essential in intelligent management of an enterprise.

The study has its limitations, stemming from the territorial criteria and sample size, which should be regarded as preliminary. Conducting more in-depth research seems promising, particularly to determine whether changes in the social media platforms used by young people are influenced to some extent by the possession or acquisition of specific IT and informational competencies.

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