BUSINESS & DIPLOMACY REVIEW

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MEDIA AWARENESS AMONG STUDENTS OF THE BUDAPEST BUSINESS UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This paper looks into patterns of media awareness among bachelor students at the Budapest Business University. Focusing on Generation Z and based on Rubin (1984), it distinguishes between the routine (ritualised) and the purposeful (instrumental) uses of media. Presenting data of a pilot study conducted in 2023, it assesses students' levels of media awareness and media literacy, and suggests that we should reconsider our knowledge (and stereotypes) about members of GenZ many of whom occur to be lacking the digital literacy skills necessary for safe online navigation.

Keywords: Generation Z, media awareness, survey, uses of media

Introduction

According to the latest data issued by the Hungarian Educational Authority, all three faculties of the Budapest Business University (BBU) are among the ten most popular faculties in Hungary [1]. BBU's state-funded full-time Bachelor Programme in Communication and Media Studies set the third highest admission points in the country in 2023 [2]. Even though communication and media studies are part of the social sciences, there is an unquestionable market demand for efficient business communicators, trained negotiators and studied crisis managers. PR and marketing experts are also needed in the new, digital, media environment. Recognising the importance of this academic field, BBU pays particular attention to its media and communication programme.

At the same time, one should not ignore that both the media landscape and students have changed. A new generation (known as "Generation Z" or "GenZ") has grown up and begun to attend hig-

her education. While members of Generation Z are widely considered "digital natives," this paper argues that we should reconsider our knowledge (and stereotypes) about them as many of them occur to be lacking the digital literacy skills necessary for safe online navigation.

This paper presents a case study based on a pilot survey conducted in the spring of 2023 among bachelor students at the Budapest Business University. Using a quantitative method, it attempts to assess the levels of media awareness of members of Generation Z attending university. I tried to get a first insight from our students, to set a question: are they different from the older generations, and do teachers have to change anything in their teaching methods? These students have spent their entire life in the Digital Era and have been socialised accordingly. Digital communication, including the internet, smart phones, and social media platforms, are a natural environment for them, and most of them navigate easily on the web and manage much of their everyday lives online. While many are considered *digital natives,* Prensky argues that some of them are *digital immigrants* who still need to understand the main mechanisms of the digital world, earn media awareness, and develop their personal skills to be successful in the Digital Era [3]. We, the faculty of the Department of Communication, teach these BA students communication and media studies and have earned some first-hand experience about their media literacy skills—and our opinions are at best divided. We might therefore ask the question of whether members of GenZ really have special media awareness skills and unique competencies in comparison with digital immigrants. Should university teachers revise the content of their courses and their teaching methods accordingly?

The contemporary digital environment

Media technology is permanently evolving. Digital communication is inevitable nowadays, people rely on it globally, and few would deny the fact that they need new competencies to run their everyday lives. According to the Gartner Emerging Technologies and Trends Impact Radar, the following new technologies will disrupt the next three to eight years: neuromorphic computing, self-supervised learning, metaverse, and human-centred artificial intelligence (AI) [4].

These technologies are not necessarily related to users' daily needs, but affect the higher levels of digital communication such as the decision-making structures of self-driving car systems, surgical technologies, and a human-centred partnership model of people and AI working together. As Castells put it, innovation boosts innovation [5]. The end of the ongoing information revolution is difficult to foresee. Life-long learning has become a must for most of us, including the permanent development of our digital skills.

Most of us profit from the advantages of digital technologies. E-commerce is fast and efficient, e-banking services, online businesses and cryptocurrency are easier to handle than ever. Delivery services are affordable and comfortable, and the everyday management of our lives online, including medical consultation, legal assistance and education, is a time saver. Official administration is quick and, more often than not, efficient. Entertainment, including streaming services and gaming, is available on demand and satisfies the needs of many.

At the same time, however, digital technologies have a number of adverse outcomes, too, many of which are connected with the accumulated long-time effects of the above-mentioned benefits. Easy-to-access and affordable e-commerce enhances consumption on a global scale and inter-continental transportation has a major impact upon clime change as it increases people's ecological footprints. Digital capitalism speeds up the global transfer of products and services, which is without doubt harmful to the Earth. Mass production exploits both labour and the environment. The digital environment also undermines the democratic system. Researchers of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, the Hertie School, and the University of Bristol studied whether and how digital media affect citizens' political behaviour and detected six key factors [6]. Two are positive: digital media encourage political participation and enrich political knowledge. But the negative effects are more numerous and important, including growing distrust in legacy media and democratic institutions, political polarisation and the decline of democratic cohesion, the rise of populist politics, and the rise of echo chambers, closely associated with the spread of online disinformation and fake news.

There is a marked discrepancy between the benefits and the costs of digitalisation, and yet many would welcome these changes. In fact, the positive reception of the spread of digital communication tech-

nologies seems to be a major factor behind efforts investing in and furthering digitalisation. Why think that digital media improve our lives? The likely answer is that *on the micro level* individuals mainly see the blessings of digitalisation. At the same time, many fail to contextualise these developments and to note *the macro-level* consequences thereof. This is where digital literacy education may play a part. Few can see the big picture and even fewer seem to think about the indirect and pernicious effects that digitalisation exerts upon society. It seems therefore imperative to encourage students to reconsider their positions on digitalisation and its effects upon the environment and the democratic political system.

Media awareness and media literacy

In order to use digital media efficiently, people need to obtain a certain level of media awareness and media literacy. According to the National Association for Media Literacy Education, *media literacy* is "the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication." [7] These concepts refer to special skills that help to identify different types of media, to understand how they work, and to learn to use them efficiently. The concept of *media awareness* refers to the ability to understand the basic logic and mechanisms of the media. It improves the ability to reflect upon and think critically about media content. It also is a special type of knowledge, including a competency to use media consciously.

Joshua Meyrowitz argues that there are at least three types of media literacy: media content literacy, media grammar literacy, and medium literacy [8]. The first refers mostly to the creation and the construction of media messages, and it contains basic knowledge about the intentions of the sender, the different interpretations of the media messages, and the political, economic, and instrumental constraints. The second type is about the own languages of the different mediums, and it includes understanding how visual grammar variables can be used. The third conception of media literacy focuses on the communication shaping aspects of the different mediums.

Even though GenZ was born around the Millenium and into the current media environment, its members have not earned media

awareness automatically. One cannot intuitively use digital media but must first learn it. Researchers of the Stanford History Education Group analysed the levels of media awareness of US students. According to their findings, "whether [the Internet] will make us smarter and better informed or more ignorant and narrow-minded will depend on our awareness of this problem and our educational response to it." [9]

The first step toward media awareness is arguably a better understanding of the digital media that helps students to adequately perceive the actual media environment, to interpret the intended meaning of media messages, and to navigate safely on digital platforms. According to Jenkins and colleagues [10], in order to obtain this knowledge, one needs some kind of special education (whether official education, informal training, or family socialisation) whereby these skills can be transferred and developed. In the course of early socialisation, universities are the latest institutions that may help to develop the level of media awareness of members of GenZ.

Media consumption or media use?

Contrary to early media research suggesting that people are a passive and unconscious mass exposed to media manipulation, the "uses paradigm", emerging in the 1970s, focused on the audience instead of the media. Researchers of this school argued that people do not "consume," but "use" media, and sought to answer the question of what people use media for, i.e., they considered audiences active and critical-minded agents. The Uses-and-Gratifications Theory established by Blumler, Katz and Gurevitch states that people use media to satisfy their psychological, social, and cultural needs, i.e., to find information, entertainment, diversion, social integration, and identity [11].

In a similar vein, in his study of the popular television show "60 Minutes" Rubin identifies two main types of television viewers, including the time-consuming (or habitual) information seeker, a "more frequent, generalised user" of television, and the non-time-consuming (or non-habitual) entertainment and information seeker who exhibits an affinity with the programme [12]. In an investigation into elder people's motives for watching television, he identifies a number

of motivations associated with these two types. During routine, or ritualised, media use, people watch television in order to just spend time and in search of companionship, relaxation, arousal, and escape. By contrast, during the purposeful, or instrumental, use, selective viewers seek information and watch news, talk, and magazine, programmes accordingly. These two types correspond to the general media orientations identified by uses and gratifications research. Instrumental media use thus refers to the goal-oriented use of media content aimed at satisfying information needs, and ritualised media use to a more or less habitual use of media meant to gratify diversionary needs. These definitions suggest that the "activeness" of the audiences may vary in kind and degree.

Tomka looks into television viewing habits in Hungary and observes that television has a dual function. It is used to spend leisure time when no alternative activities are in sight, while it also becomes a lifestyle-organising factor, influencing the frequency of other leisure and cultural activities [13]. For Angelusz and Tardos, the term "media consumption" suggests passive reception. They suggest that the "consumption" of commercial media should be considered a direct self-rewarding mechanism. By contrast, the term "media use" should be used to refer to a more active and conscious attitude [14].

How does Generation Z use media?

Generation Z is a cluster of people born between the first half of the 1990s and the first few years of the 2000s. These now youngsters have direct experiences with the incredibly fast changes in digital communication. They went to kindergarten when 9/11 happened, and many saw the terror attack broadcast on television. They have witnessed a number of global crises, including major financial setbacks and waves of mounting unemployment. Computerisation and digitalisation were obvious parts of their daily communication practices. First mobile phones, then smart phones, laptops and tablets became common devices for interpersonal communication when these people were teenagers. Interactive television, streaming services, podcasts and social media platforms were key actors in their socialisation. Guld argues that members of Generation Z spend most of their time using

media and get to discover themselves and the world via media communication [15]. A study conducted in the United States in 2014 finds that GenZ students describe themselves as loyal, thoughtful, compassionate, open-minded, and responsible people [16].

The latest Hungarian report on the uses of digital media shows that internet usage is high in this group, as members of Generation Z daily spend 5–6 hours daily surfing the internet, and the most common device they rely on when so doing is the smartphone [17]. Multi-tasking (i.e., engaging in different online and offline tasks at the same time) and multi-screening (i.e., using different media channels and platforms simultaneously) are everyday practices for them. The term "multi-tasking" here refers mainly to "media consumption" rather than a conscious, attended, goal-oriented "media use." Guld observes that, as a consequence, time pressure is an essential problem for many of them as there emerges a tension between the time they may and the time they would like to spend with media, given the endless stream of exciting content available [18].

Many believe that digital competencies are easily obtained by members of GenZ and should therefore not be taught at school. This view, however, seems to be unfunded. As Wineburg and colleagues observe, "if young people are fluent in social media, that does not mean that they are equally savvy about what they find there." [19] These young adults are extremely and unlimitedly exposed to the dark side of the internet, including cyberbullying, data security problems, unethical online communication, trolling, body-shaming, tech-addiction marked by endless scrolling, and a number of digital anxieties such as the fear-of-missing-out (FOMO), the fear-of-being-offline (FOBO), and the mystery-of-missing-out (MOMO). They could not imagine their lives without the internet, which explains why it is difficult to offer them offline alternatives that could meet their informational and other needs.

Media education in Hungary

In order to understand better how this generation can be efficiently taught, first an overview of media education in secondary institutions is in order. Media literacy classes are, at least on the rhetorical

level, an important part of the Hungarian education system. On a practical level, however, problems are manyfold. Hungarian educational institutions have been facing financial, infrastructural and human resources problems for ages [20], and their shortcomings define teachers' everyday work. According to researchers, the information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure of Hungarian schools is lagging behind international standards [21]. In line with global trends [22], ICT training should also be improved during teachers' education.

Secondary education

A "Motion Picture Culture and Media Literacy" course was introduced in the National Curriculum in 1997. Digital skills were admitted among the key competences of the Curriculum as late as 2007. In recent years, however, the "Motion Picture Culture and Media Literacy" course has not been listed as a mandatory subject, even though it still can be chosen as an elective subject during last two years of secondary education. It is important to note that, according to the Curriculum, almost all Hungarian students need to learn digital, practical, interactive and media-focused skills, even though there is just one media-oriented subject in it—not to mention that it is a part of the "Arts" section, instead of the "Humans and society" section. In other words, according to the authors and developers of the Hungarian national curriculum, media studies are not a part of social sciences—possibly because originally this subject was called Film Studies. This classification could be a cause for misunderstanding among teachers. Despite the difficulties of interpretation, secondary educational institutions must, according to the 2020 National Curriculum, build media competencies into almost all subjects.

The National Curriculum: Principles and objectives

Secondary education is centrally regulated by the National Curriculum, which has been issued by the Hungarian Government and has been regularly amended and revised. It lays down the ideological/theoretical/philosophical bases for the main areas of knowledge to be conveyed [23]. The newest version of the Curriculum was issued in 2020. According to the Curriculum, the aim of the "Motion Picture Culture and Media Literacy" subject is to help students earn

basic-level media literacy, with particular regard to the development of motion picture text comprehension and the exploration of the social roles and functions of the media. It offers a skills and personality development toolkit that is necessary for students so they can confidently navigate online and make choices in the world of media in and thus become equal, understanding, and reflective participants in the interactions that take place in new social arenas [24].

The National Curriculum, the only education policy document on this issue, is ideologically biased as the principles and objectives of the media class reflect upon the Hungarian Government's recurring narratives [25]. According to the Curriculum, students of this subject may "strengthen their sense of national identity and feeling of patriotism" so that they can "become responsible citizens who want to do something for their families and nation," for which "acquiring media literacy is essential." [26]

Considering the subject's peculiarities, one is faced with another problem: the over-representation of film studies. The film section, in line with the central objective of encouraging patriotism, has a very narrow focus as it mainly discusses classic American, European, and Hungarian films. One might argue that the emphasis on old mainstream movies fails to help students to develop media awareness skills and competencies in the contemporary media environment where openness and cultural sensitivity are a must. The officially prescribed mandatory material is, however, multifarious, including topics such as network communication, social media, news reporting, the ethics of digital communication, media regulation, media economics, star studies, influencers, extended reality, privacy issues in the new media environment, public service media, content production, and arts and aesthetics. The projected learning achievements also occur to be diverse—perhaps too diverse, as it may be challenging to teach and to learn all the recommended topics within just one year. The practical uses of the subject may easily be lost in the process, which observation has also been confirmed by teachers [27].

The secondary-level media subject encourages students to take a defensive position vis-à-vis media. It repeatedly states that media have a strong and direct impact on the audiences and are hence a source of potential manipulation and a threat to people's lives. Media are seen as a suspicious, unsafe, and harmful realm. This is an old and largely

outdated approach to media, dating back to decades ago when media scholars focused on the effects of war propaganda. Early studies such as the Hypodermic Needle Theory and the Cultivation Theory interpreted media as a one-way communication process in which audiences play a passive part, being an homogeneous mass unable to escape or to resist media messages. By contrast, contemporary media theories highlight the role of the audiences in the interpretation process and focus on their motives for accessing media, stressing the interactive nature of media/audience relations [28].

Higher education: Communication and media studies at the BBU

During the three-year Communication and Media Studies Bachelor's Programme, the BBU provides a profound introduction into the main communication theories and the different approaches to the media, including communication and media history, media economics, and digital and network communication. It also offers courses on communication skills development and news editing. The BA curriculum is based on the assumption that first-year students have earned at least a medium level of media literacy. Also, as this is their chosen field of interest, it is held that they are more communication and media savvy than others.

Methodology

A pilot study was conducted in the spring of 2023 in an attempt to assess the levels of media literacy among BBU's GenZ students. An anonymous online questionnaire, of 25 questions, produced 162 responses in a two-week period, covering students from the BA programmes of communication and media studies, including students of international relations, commerce and marketing, and international business economics who also attend some of the courses offered by the Department of Communication. The sample was divided in two parts, including students who do and those who do not attend the communication and media BA programme. However, the differences between these two clusters will be highlighted only in the event they

are statistically significant. The survey was to uncover how students relate to the media, focusing on their levels of media awareness, uses of media, news-seeking practices, as well as critical attitudes toward and trust in the media.

Findings

Secondary level media education
Interestingly, one out of three students majoring in communication and media studies (32%) considered secondary level media classes useless and unfit to provide them with *any* useful knowledge or competency. This ratio is one out of four (26.22%) among the other students surveyed. At the same time, 44 per cent of communication and media students and 63.93 per cent of the others said that, in their experiences, these classes were not useless, even though they did not encourage them to obtain much new knowledge.

Uses of media
The answers about students' daily uses of the web are in line with the national findings [29]: almost three-quarters of the students surveyed (71.7%) spend 2–5 hours a day surfing the internet. Four students out of ten spend more than five hours daily using the web. When answering the questions, 68.5 per cent reported about an above-the-average internet use. Even so, one in three communication and media studies students (35.93%) said that they would feel frustration, tension, impatience or anger, were the internet shut down for a day. By contrast, this ratio was lower among all other students, one in four feeling anxiety, should they be unable to access the internet (24.48%).

Objectives when surfing the net
Somewhat surprisingly, our findings suggest that a high ratio of respondents (64.8%) use the internet to satisfy their entertainment needs and/or to scroll the social media. Other objectives—such as studying (6.2%), keeping contact with others (4.9%) and news gathering (3.1%)—were almost insignificant.

Only 3 per cent of students said that they used the net to read news. But when asked another question about their objectives when

accessing written, auditive and audiovisual content, their answers were quite different. The accessing of national and international news was on the top of the cluster of written content with 24.1 per cent, the second most popular written digital content including posts related to health, beauty, lifestyle, and fashion. The remaining answers were divided between specific hobbies and tabloid news content.

The data about the uses of auditive content are also noteworthy. It was assumed that members of GenZ would listen to podcasts regularly as it facilitates multi-tasking activities. According to the data collected, 22.8 per cent do not listen to podcast at all. The main objective of podcast-listeners is to find entertainment (18.5%) rather than scientific content (11.7%).

Considering audiovisual content, entertainment-related objectives are extremely frequent (42.6%). As with written content, health and beauty videos were listed as the most popular choices.

Seeking information

When answering the question "On an average day, how do you get information about the world's events?" most respondents pointed at some online news site (40.7%). Compared to this, when the students of the communication and media studies BA programme were asked the same question in the classroom two weeks earlier, they identified TikTok as the main source of information. The difference in their answers may be owing to their understanding that the upcoming survey was to be conducted for the purposes of academic research.

Impressively, almost all respondents (92.6%) said that whenever unexpected or unprecedented events occur, including natural disasters, pandemics, and terror attacks, they would consult at least one further news source for information.

Trust in different news sources

Remarkably, when asked to evaluate different types of news sources, many considered social media, people met on the internet, online blogs and fora, and videos unreliable. We used a three-level scale including the categories "absolutely reliable," "mostly reliable," and "not reliable." Data from the first category included social media (1.8%), people met on the internet (3.7%), online blogs and fora (5.5%), and video-sharing portals (4.3%). Likewise, the reliability of perso-

nal relationships, including relatives, friends, acquaintances, was also underrated as only 10 per cent of our respondents considered them "absolutely reliable".

In contrast to this, legacy media, including the print press (24%), radio (16%), and television (15.4%), were considered the three most reliable sources.

Discussion

This pilot study is not representative of the whole student community of the Budapest Business University, but it does highlight a few interesting points. Many researchers suggest that members of Generation Z are media-savvy and always online, i.e., experts in digital communication who can use digital technologies better than any other generation. Compared to this, the data here presented suggests that these youngsters are not as well-prepared to use the web as previously believed. They primarily use media to meet their leisure needs, as opposed to using media for individual purposes such as self-development or information.

Secondary-level media education is facing various challenges in Hungary. The National Curriculum is over-inclusive as it is it is nearly impossible to both teach the whole content of the subject and to give real-life practical lessons within the limited time-span available. Also, most of the state-run schools encounter human resources and infrastructural problems. The training possibilities available for Hungarian teachers to improve their digital competencies are scarce.

Arguably, these difficulties and deficits may affect the levels of students' media awareness. The intimidating narrative of the Curriculum targeting social media, audiovisual content and blogs feeds general scepticism vis-à-vis the online world's news sources. This pilot study has revealed a major contradiction: while students do not trust online news sites, they fail to use legacy media such as newspapers, radio or television. Also, they have self-reflexively confessed that their uses of the net exceed what they would consider convenient, even though they would not want to change their online habits.

An exceptionally low level of trust may be seen as an indicator of how this generation thinks about the contemporary media environ-

ment and of how they perceive news media in general. Members of GenZ are believed to be media-savvy as they have grown up in the Digital Era, but they have not obtained all the necessary media competencies.

Concluding remarks

To sum up our findings, it seems that many of our students differ from what the mainstream academic literature holds. They seem to be unaware users of new media as their majority consumes digital content passively. That is an important finding that suggests that universities should rethink their teaching methods. What should we do? The first important thing is to engage in self-reflection. A generation change has taken place. We need to reconsider what we know about our students' digital competencies. In addition to teaching, we should also be able to help them to improve their communication and digital skills and competencies.

The findings of this research suggest that the level of media uses is high, while that of media awareness is low among them. Further, more representative, research is of course required to verify this finding which, however, does highlight some of the main issues. Applying Meyrowitz's findings, it could be useful to provide grounded media lessons to the students, focusing on the different levels (the content, the grammar and the media) of media literacies. And presenting contemporary examples to show the complexity of the certain issue, and at the same time, to develop the different media literacy levels. Our job is to provide high quality education focused on media uses, and we need to be more practice-oriented and open-minded in teacher/student interactions. While maintaining the quality of university-level education, we should also try to adapt our teaching methods to the abilities and needs of our students.

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Publikálás a Business & Diplomacy Review folyóiratban

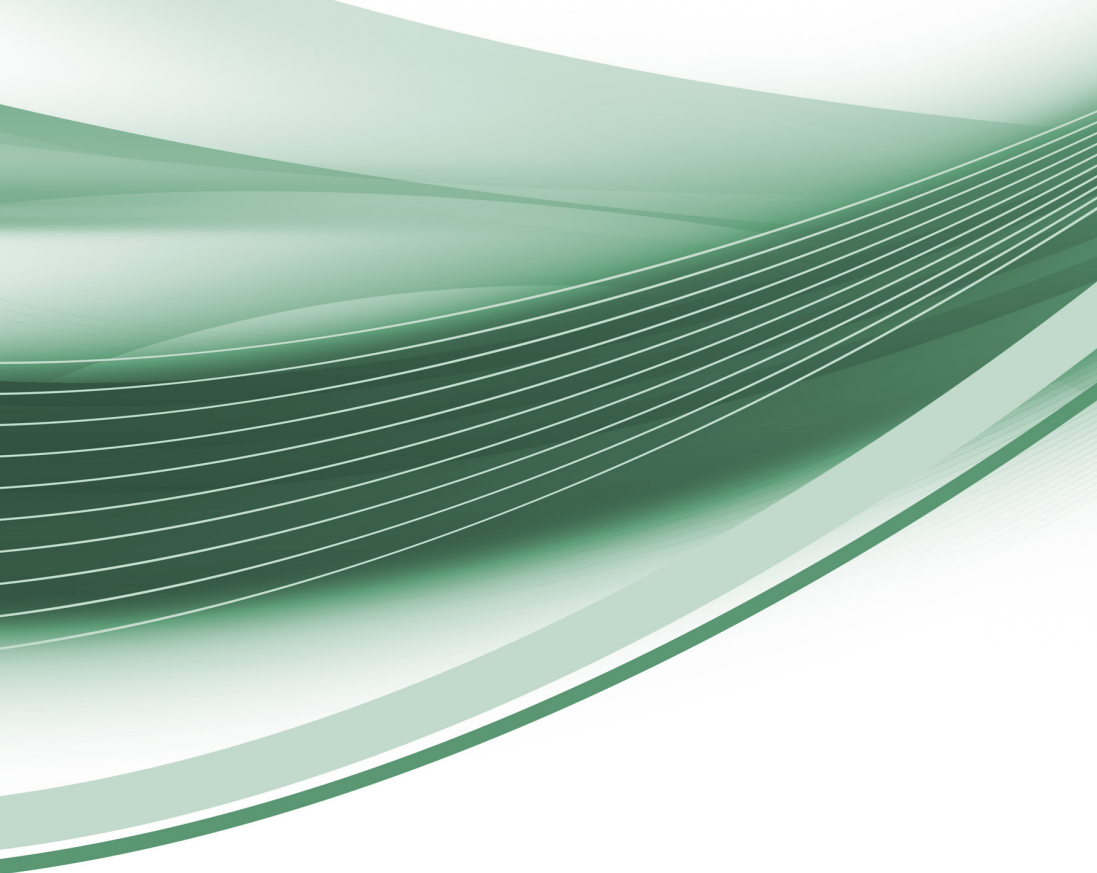A Folyóirat az alábbi témákhoz kapcsolódó kéziratokat fogad be lektorálásra:

- gazdaság,
- kereskedelem,
- pénzügyek,
- nemzetközi kapcsolatok,
- diplomácia,
- nemzetközi kommunikáció
- társadalomtudományok;
- közgazdasági tudományok.

A tanulmány absztraktja minden esetben angol nyelvű. A tanulmány magyar vagy angol nyelvű, amelynek terjedelme 30 000–40 000 leütés (az absztrakttal együtt).

A kéziratok előzetes befogadásának feltételei:

- a kézirat és annak szerzői megfelelnek a Folyóirat etikai szabályainak;
- a kézirat, illetve ahhoz tartalmában nagyon hasonló tanulmányt még nem publikálták;
- a benyújtott kézirat megfelel a formai követelményeknek.

A Folyóirat a szerzőknek tiszteletdíjat nem fizet. A Folyóirat minden egyes befogadott kézirat esetében kettős vaklektorálást alkalmaz, ami azt jelenti, hogy az anonimalizált anyagot a szerzők által nem ismert lektorok értékelik. A Folyóirat csak abban az esetben fogad be kéziratot publikálásra, ha azt mind a két vaklektor publikálásra ajánlja, és vaklektor(ok) által kért javításokat/kiegészítéseket a szerző(k) végrehajtotta/ák. Amennyiben az egyik lektor javításokkal publikálásra ajánlja a kéziratot, míg a másik nem, akkor a javítások után a témában jártas újabb vaklektornak kell értékelnie az anyagot. Akkor minősül egy tanulmány tartalmában nagyon hasonlónak egy korábbi tanulmányhoz képest, ha azok egyezősége 60% felett van. A szerzők minden egyes esetben kötelesek a vaklektorok által írt kifogásokra/javaslatokra tételesen írásban reagálni.