



Business  
goes viral

# Social media skills of young adults born between 1991–2003

RESEARCH REPORT

#logv

# Acknowledgements

## #businessgoesviral

Empowering MSEs to achieve digital transformation through upskilling young employees

## Project coordination

Room466 by WKO Steiermark

## Project partner organisations

SirPauls Digital Agency, Austria  
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eWyse eLearning Agency, Croatia

PREPARED BY  
**Room466**

PREPARED FOR  
**#bgv**



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# Executive Summary

300 young adults were surveyed to find out about their social media use and skills.

This research report investigates the social media use and related skills of young adults. Therefore, people born between 1991 and 2003 were surveyed to gain insights into their digital skills and their skills gap to be able to perform social media marketing on business level. An online questionnaire was sent out and responded to by a total of 300 people living in Austria, Croatia, and Italy.

The research underpins previous findings of young adults being heavy users of social media and in general interested in using it also on a professional level. Especially, results on content creation skills are in line with previous investigations (such as the DESI Index), where they were found to be weak.

As Social Media Assistant and Social Media Coordinator belong to the emerging roles in the field of content production (World Economic Forum, 2020), the investigation proves not only the high usage, but also the young adults' interest in social media and the need for proper learning materials concerning social media marketing.

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# Introduction

The 16–25 age group spends 3 hours per day on social media.

Younger generations, known as digital natives, are used to social media. They consume social media, create content and, so to speak, live on TikTok, Instagram & co. In 2019, the 16–25 age group spent an average of 2 hours per day on social media, in 2021 it was already 3 hours (European Commission, 2023).

The project #businessgoesviral aims to help younger employees gain confidence, develop their social media marketing skills and strengthen their entrepreneurial abilities, resulting in more motivated, fulfilled and interested young employees. According to the Future of Jobs Report 2020, digital marketing and strategy specialists rank 4th in the top10 jobs needed in 2021 (World Economic Forum, 2020). While micro and small enterprises (MSEs) can utilise available resources and forge strong bonds between employer and employees, this new job profile offers responsibility and appreciation.

This research report investigates the social media use and related skills of young adults. Therefore, people born between 1991–2003 were surveyed to gain insights into their current digital skills and the skills necessary to be able to perform social media marketing. An online questionnaire was sent out and responded to by a total of 300 people living in Austria, Croatia and Italy.

# Background

Digital innovations have transformed private and business lives and are one of the most fundamental social and economic occurrences of our times. In order to keep pace with the technological progress and unrolling social changes triggered by the generations X, Y, Z and further generations, businesses must meet the challenge to conduct modern marketing, if they want to survive (Ziółkowska, 2021).

There is substantial evidence which shows that businesses using social media channels gain significant benefits, compared to competitors without online visibility (Copenhagen Economics, 2020). In rural areas, many micro and small sized enterprises (MSEs) do not use the potential of social media for their success, despite it being an indispensable tool in remaining successful in the age of digitalisation, rural exodus and globalisation (Kumar et al., 2022). The common justifications for not focusing on digital marketing such as a lack of funds and know-how are understandable. However, the project aims to show that the solution often exists within a firm's talent pool itself.

## ICT Skills

According to Eurostat research, four out of five young people (80%) aged 16 to 24 in the European Union had basic or above basic digital skills in 2019. In the EU, Croatia had the largest share of people aged 16 to 24 with basic or higher basic overall digital skills (97%), followed by Estonia, Lithuania and the Netherlands. While Austria is in seventh place, Italy is among the countries with the lowest shares of individuals with basic or above basic overall digital skills (European Commission, 2020). Such a high level of digital literacy among young people as exists in Croatia shows that a large number of digitally literate young people can add value to the economy, especially when high-quality jobs are created as they are in the IT sector.

As stated by DESI Index 2022, advanced technologies are steadily gaining popularity among Croatian enterprises. 35% of them use cloud solutions, 43% use e-invoices and 9% use AI technologies. For all these three indicators, Croatia performs above the EU average. However, only 24% of Croatian companies use electronic information sharing and the same percentage use social media for business purposes, meaning that both are not yet widely used (European Commission, 2023). Therefore, a larger and more widespread use of social media for business purposes is expected, especially with larger numbers of Gen Z members entering the labour market.

# Background

The ISTAT report “citizens and ICT” (Information and Communication Technology) 2019 investigated competence areas in Italy. It found that the digital skills of Internet users, mainly young people, are more advanced in the domains of communication (72.3%) and information (61.8%) in contrast to their ability to solve problems (49.8%) and to use software to process/convey digital content (42.6%) (see Figure 1). The results show high digital skills in the area of communication. However, the findings indicate low skills related to digital content procession, which is in line with the DESI Index 2022, detecting that Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and Italy had the lowest share of individuals with activities accounting for at least basic content creation skills in 2021 (European Commission, 2023).

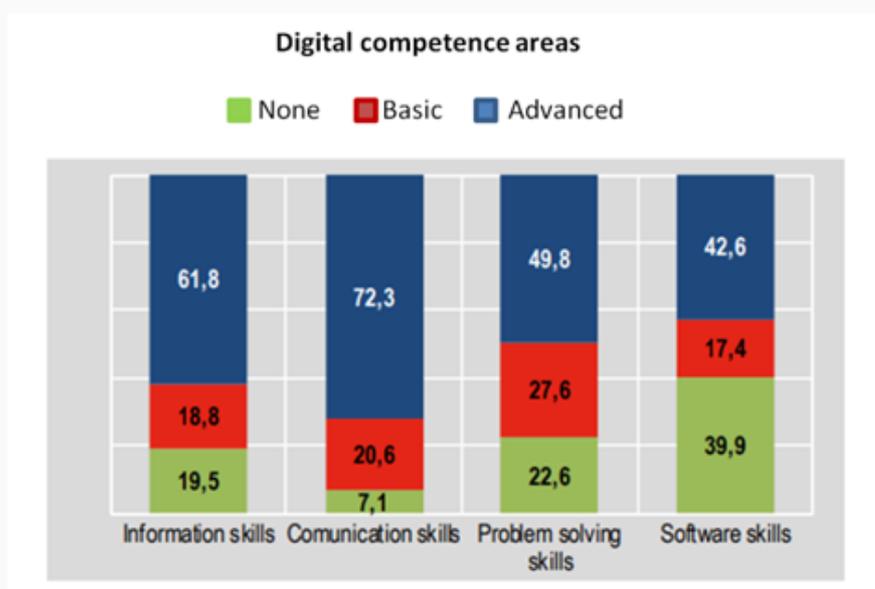


Figure 1. Skills level for digital competence areas (ISTAT Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2019, p.7)

The Digital Skills Index is a tool to measure the perceived readiness to acquire and retain the digital skills that are needed to succeed in the workplace. Conducted among 23.000 employed and future employees across 19 countries, it revealed that only 25% of people belonging to Gen Z in Italy feel like they have the digital skills required by the workplace (Salesforce Research, 2022).

# Background

In particular, Italian Gen Z state that they have advanced digital skills levels especially related to everyday usage of social media and web navigation. Also, skills regarding digital communication, productivity programs and smart technology are perceived to be at a good level. In contrast, young people are less confident in the area of data analytics. However, most of the people belonging to Gen Z claim that they do not have the skills required by the labour market, with the digital marketing area being among the lowest positions (Salesforce Research, 2022).

The Unioncamere study on digital competences (Sistema Informativo Excelsior, 2020) stresses the importance of digital skills for the Italian enterprises, which are looking for an adequate ICT-skills mix in their staff to deal with the digital advancements. This confirms that digital marketing is one of the main strategic business areas. Digital media specialists were found to be the third most sought after professionals with almost 7.000 vacancies published.

## Social media in business

Social media became more than a possibility for entertainment. Looking at the jobs of tomorrow, Social Media Assistant and Social Media Coordinator belong to the emerging roles in the field of content production. Emerging job clusters are content, marketing and sales (World Economic Forum, 2020). This reflects the rising importance of social media in the private as well as professional environment.

At the same time, the emerging job fields match the younger generations' preferences regarding social media use. While digital immigrants rather passively participate in social media, digital natives prefer creating content and using social media actively (Rudolph, 2023). Generation Z uses the internet to entertain themselves and to get in touch with family and friends or other people with the same interests. They like to be active online, which means they like to share pictures or videos publicly. Companies should pay attention to the fact that it is very important for this generation to present themselves authentically. This means that they should show the brands' personality, use their own pictures instead of stock photos, be truthful which can be verified through good reviews, and provide support to their employees (Selig, 2022).

It seems reasonable to assume that such extensive use of social media goes hand in hand with distinctive competencies. The Global Digital Skills Index revealed that more than 64% of the Generation Z representatives say that they have advanced social media skills, but only 31% believe that they have the advanced workplace skills needed by businesses now (OC&C Strategy consultants, 2019). This means that Generation Z representatives are not able to take on responsibility for their businesses' social media presence without further training.

# Results

## Sample description

The online survey was filled in by a total of 300 respondents consisting of young adults who are born between 1991 and 2003 and live in Austria, Croatia and Italy.

Among the survey respondents, about two out of three are currently employed and one out of three are in education. As you can see in the chart, a total of 95,6% of young adults are either employed or in education. The other 4% are unemployed/homemaker. Out of those employed, 15% are currently working in the field of marketing, which influences the results. It may be assumed that they already have extensive knowledge in marketing and social media marketing compared with respondents who are not working in this field.

Despite so many respondents not working in this field, 42% use social media in a professional context, which is either for a company or as an influencer. This result shows how important social media is not only in the private, but also in the professional sphere.

Further, the respondents would be willing to take on social media marketing for their business alongside their current tasks. If asked by their manager, most of them would be willing to take on the responsibility of setting up and managing their company's online presence alongside their day-to-day duties. Apart from those who are already working in the field, most of the interviewees responded with "yes" or "maybe" to the question whether they would like to engage in social media marketing (77%). In other words, only 12% are not willing to take on social media marketing for business due to a lack of competences, time or interest.



Figure 2: Employment status

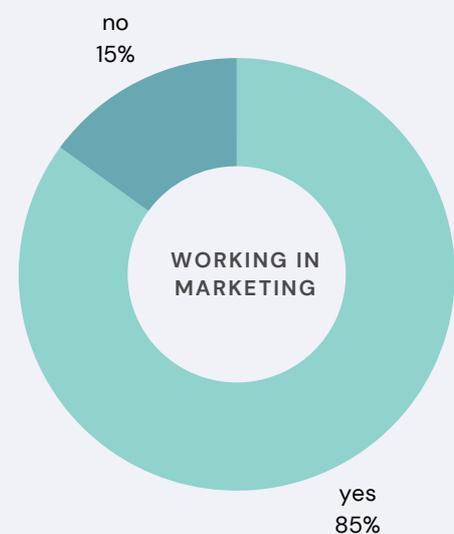


Figure 3: Are you currently working in the field of marketing?

# Results

## Social media use

The investigated generations are heavy social media users. Half of the respondents use social media more than one hour per day. There is only one respondent using social media once a week and no respondent using it less often. This is in line with other results, picturing a high use of social media (e.g., Dialog Komunikacije, 2019; Eurostat, 2021).

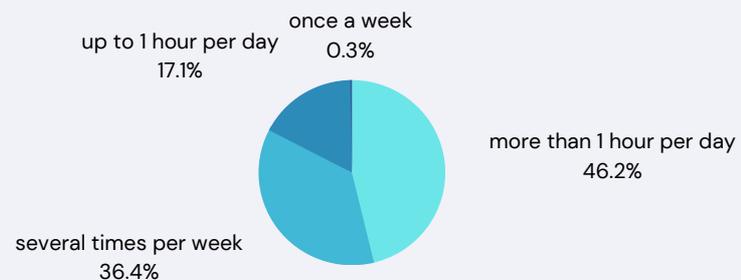


Figure 4: How often do you consume social media?

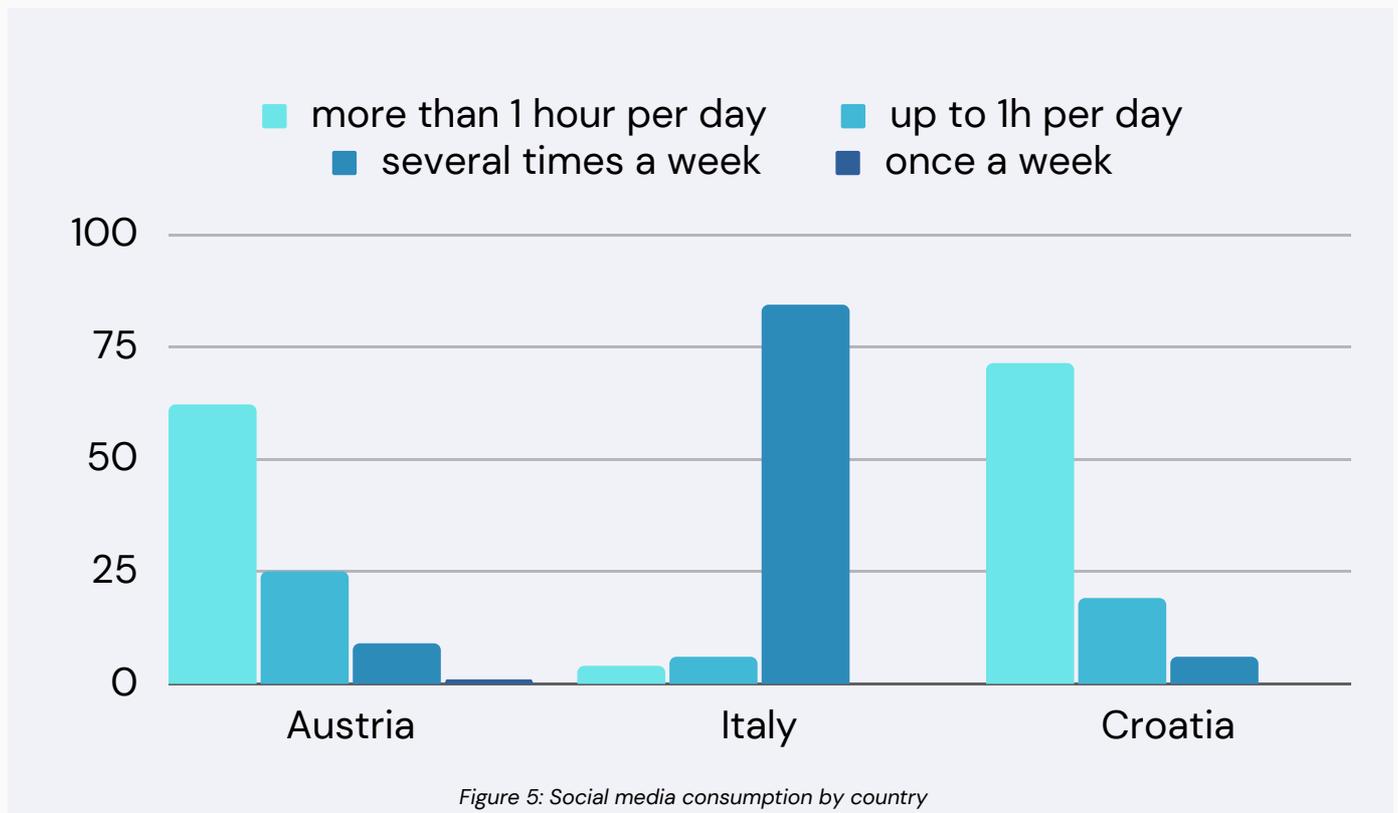


Figure 5: Social media consumption by country

The Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was a significant difference between the countries. A Dunn-Bonferroni test revealed that the pairwise group comparisons of Austria - Italy and Italy - Croatia have an adjusted p-value less than 0.05 and thus, based on the available data, it can be assumed that these groups are significantly different. The table below shows that young adults from Italy use social media significantly less frequently than Austrian and Croatian respondents do.

# Results

The most frequently used social media platforms are WhatsApp (90%), Instagram (86%), Youtube (73%) and Facebook (69%). There are country-specific differences: LinkedIn is particularly widespread in Italy (51%), while Snapchat is used most frequently in Austria (45%). Compared to Croatia and Italy, Twitter and TikTok are less common in Austria (6% and 20%).

A differentiated picture emerges when it comes to content creation. Although 27% create and share content on social media at least once a week, 60% do this only once a month or less frequently. This means that there is a broad range in this age group when it comes to forms of engagement with social media. Some actively use social media and share content on a daily basis or even more frequently and others use it only passively, i.e., without creating content at all. This could be related to low content creation skills as shown by the DESI index (European Commission, 2023).

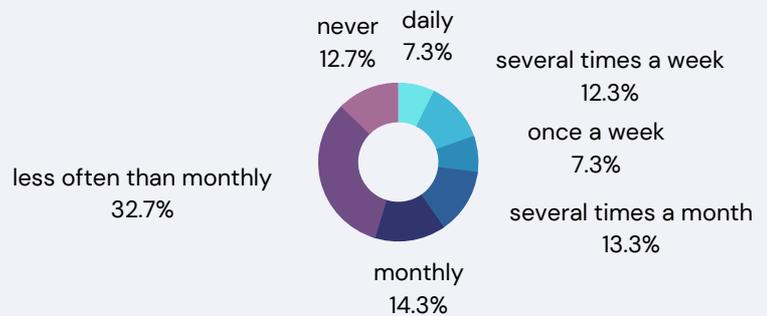


Figure 6: How often do you create and share content on social media?

At the same time, it reflects the differential use of social media by different populations (as distinguished by generation or region. While the study of Marcello (2022) found that Gen Z in Italy is mainly characterised through a passive use of social media, our figures show that they create and share content on social media more frequently than those in Austria and Croatia. This is revealed through a Kruskal-Wallis and a Dunn-Bonferroni test. The distribution is shown on the boxplot below (1=daily, 7=never). To sum up, figures show that Italians use social media less frequently, but create and share content more often than Austrians and Croatians.

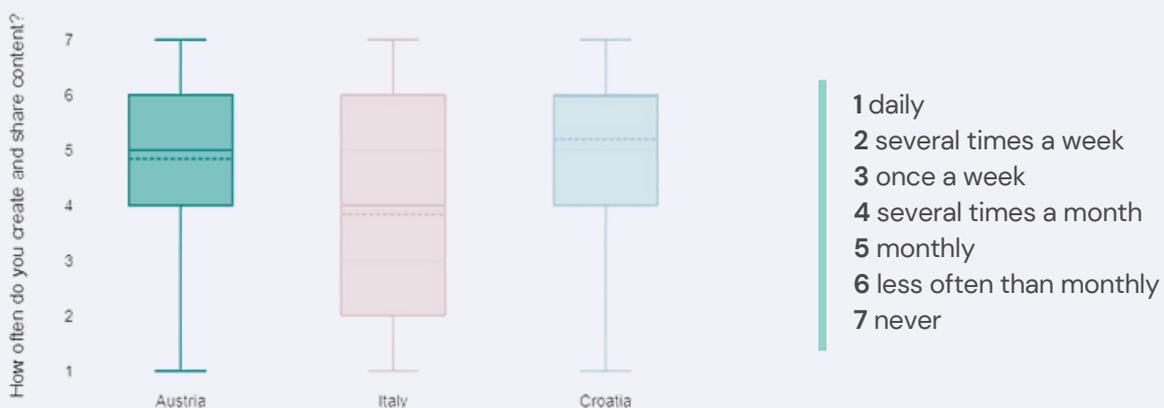


Figure 7: Boxplot. How often do you create and share content by country

# Results

## Competences

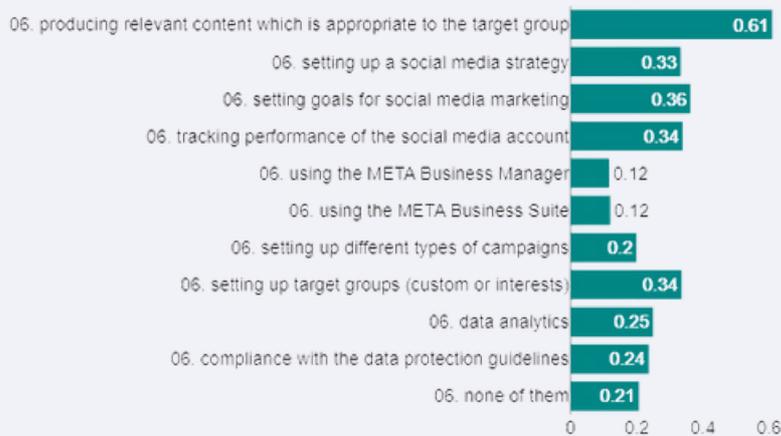


Figure 8: Tasks able to do, self-assessment



Figure 9: Tasks not yet able to do, self-assessment

The survey participants were asked which tasks related to social media marketing they think they could already do in sufficient quality, which ones they could not and which of the suggested topics they would like to learn before, hypothetically, taking on social media marketing for professional use. These questions were completed as self-assessments. The answers may not reflect the actual competences of the participants, but they give an insight into their beliefs about what they are able or unable to do.

The responses show that participants think that they would already be able to set goals for social media marketing (36%), set up target groups (34%), track performance of the social media account (34%) and set up a social media strategy (33%). In contrast, 21% say that they would not be able to do any of these tasks in sufficient quality.

When asked what they are not yet able to do in sufficient quality, the number of every item is much higher. This was to be expected because most respondents do not have expertise in this field. The respondents are particularly sceptical about their abilities concerning the META Business Suite and Business Manager, data analytics, and compliance with data protection regulations (GDPR). In contrast, the respondents are relatively confident about their competencies in setting up the right target groups for social media marketing (given that only 13% feel that they are unable to do so).

# Results

Before hypothetically taking on social media marketing professionally, the respondents would like to learn especially social media strategy techniques (56%), copywriting techniques (50%), producing relevant content for corresponding target groups (47%), and unconventional social media marketing techniques (46%). It is noteworthy that the answer categories in this question had high approval rates. This means that the respondents are aware of the skills gap between the social media marketing skills needed for such a position and their current skill set.

The answer category “none of them” is used by 7%, which is very low. Apart from this, only setting goals is below 30%. This shows that the respondents wish for a broad mix of relevant content and almost all of them would like to learn basic/most important information on how to perform social media marketing for businesses. The desire to improve content creation skills is especially in line with the DESI 2022, which proves low content creation skills (European Commission, 2023). Proper materials would support the skills development process in order to overcome this skills gap.

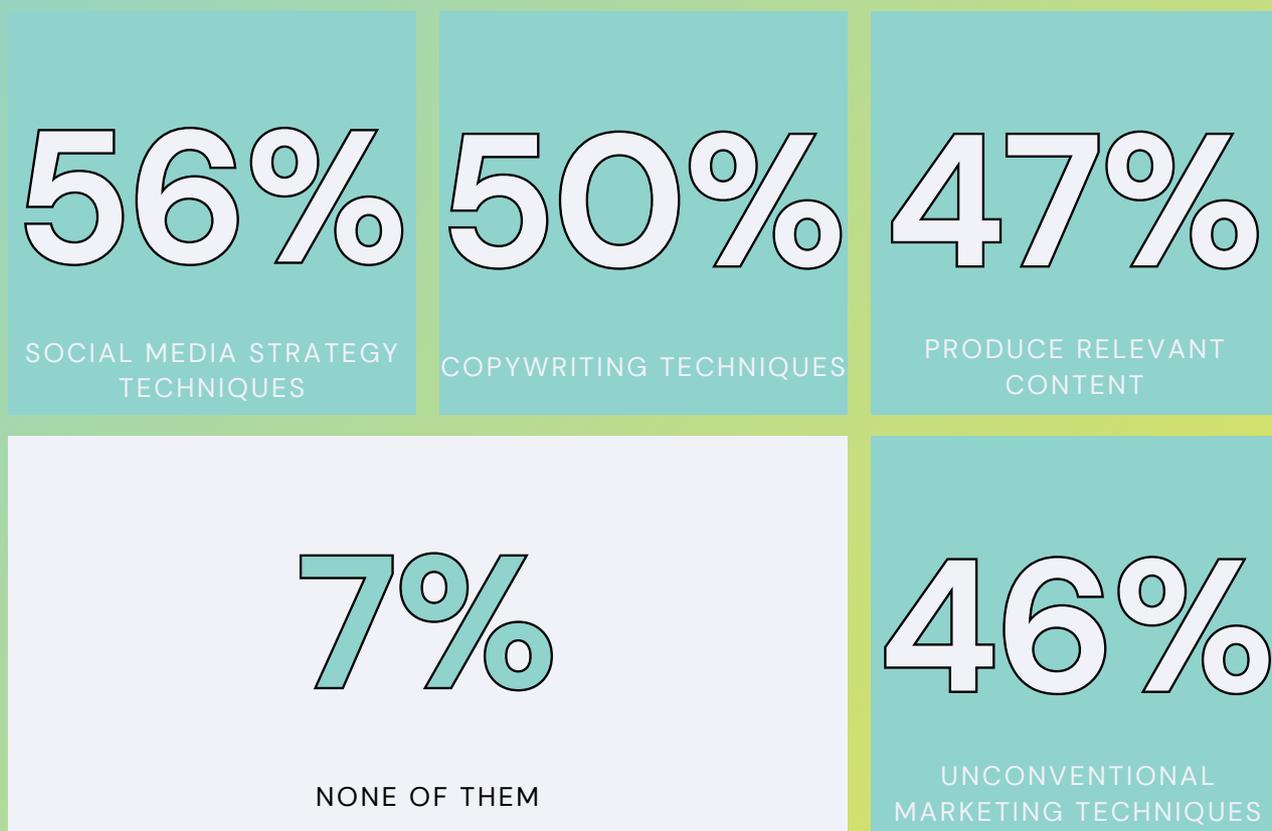


Figure 10: What would you like to learn before taking on social media marketing?

# Conclusion

The research underpins previous findings of young adults being heavy users of social media and in general interested in using it also on a professional level. It was found that there is a lot to learn: Before taking on social media marketing for business, respondents would like to learn more about social media marketing topics, especially about social media strategy techniques, copywriting techniques, producing relevant and target group-specific content and unconventional social media marketing techniques. In particular, results on content creation skills are in line with previous investigations (such as the DESI Index), where they were found to be weak.

As Social Media Assistant and Social Media Coordinator belong to the emerging roles in the field of content production (World Economic Forum, 2020), the investigation proves not only the high usage, but also young adults' interest in social media and the need for proper learning materials on social media marketing. To sum up, the development of social media marketing skills of young adults needs to be supported through relevant learning materials specifically tailored to the needs of the target group.

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