




## Article

# Influence of Mass Media on Career Choices of Final-Year High School Students in Braşov County, Romania

Claudiu Coman <sup>1,\*</sup>, Costel Marian Dalban <sup>2</sup>, Ionela Pitea <sup>3</sup>, Marcel Iordache <sup>4</sup> and Anna Bucs <sup>5</sup><sup>1</sup> Faculty of Sociology and Communication, Transilvania University Brasov, 500036 Brasov, Romania<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences, "Al. I. Cuza" University of Iaşi, 700506 Iasi, Romania; marian.dalban@gmail.com<sup>3</sup> Department of Sociology, Faculty of Sociology and Social Sciences, University of Craiova, 200585 Craiova, Romania; piteaionela2020@gmail.com<sup>4</sup> Faculty of Sociology, West University of Timişoara, 300223 Timisoara, Romania; marcel.iordache@e-uvv.ro<sup>5</sup> Faculty of Sociology and Communication, University of Craiova, 200585 Craiova, Romania; anna.bucs@gmail.com

\* Correspondence: claudiu.coman@unitv.ro

## Abstract

This study examines the influence of mass media on the career choices of high school students from Braşov County, Romania, with a focus on their underlying motivational factors. Employing a quantitative design, it draws on data from a standardized questionnaire completed by 1314 students from local high schools. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used in the analysis. While some students identify mass media as a key source of career guidance, documentaries and career fairs are more frequently cited as trusted sources. Students' perceptions of mass media are ambivalent: 55.1% see it as manipulative, while 41.7% and 24.7% acknowledge its informative and educational roles. Personal motivation emerges as the most significant influence, with 64.8% guided by individual talents and abilities, compared to a lower influence from family or media role models. Correlational analysis highlights the importance of personal development, creativity, and collaboration in career motivation. This study suggests that mass media indirectly shapes students' aspirations by reinforcing values like social recognition, mobility, and identity. Finally, it reveals a strong link between career interest and expectations for respectful, stable, and growth-oriented work environments, pointing to a pragmatic orientation toward professional sustainability.

**Keywords:** career choice; high school students; mass media; professional motivation

Academic Editors: Daniel-Rares Obadă, Mihaela-Alexandra Tudor and Murat Mengü

Received: 3 July 2025

Revised: 29 July 2025

Accepted: 30 July 2025

Published: 6 August 2025

**Citation:** Coman, C., Dalban, C. M., Pitea, I., Iordache, M., & Bucs, A. (2025). Influence of Mass Media on Career Choices of Final-Year High School Students in Braşov County, Romania. *Journalism and Media*, 6(3), 126. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia6030126>

**Copyright:** © 2025 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Theoretical Bases of Career Decision-Making

The aim of the present study is to construct a nuanced framework for understanding adolescent career decision-making. To this end, the study synthesizes motivational psychology, sociocultural theory, and media influence. The investigation is based on the hypothesis that career choice is the result of a dynamic interaction between internal vectors (values, interests, and aspirations) and external vectors (cultural pressures, media influences, promoted success models, and the educational system) (Dumulescu et al., 2020). Some authors subscribe to this, reinforcing the notion that career success is down to a mix of intrinsic (e.g., self-confidence, motivation, introspection) and extrinsic factors (e.g., familial support, organizational culture). But it is important to remember that career development is a

continuous, lifelong process influenced by an individual's self-concept in their job (Sclifos, 2023). Social stereotypes and cultural biases can distort perceptions of certain professions, narrowing the range of professional options (McMahon & Arthur, 2018). This is supported by theories such as the expectancy–value model (Eccles, 2009) and social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 2002), which state that self-efficacy perception and the value attributed to a profession determine the level of commitment young people have towards certain educational and professional paths.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) explains how meeting three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) fosters intrinsic motivation and personal development. SDT helps clarify why, in the context of career decision-making, young people are more likely to commit to career paths that align with their internal values and sense of self, rather than those imposed externally (Dunn, 2022). Cultivation theory also highlights the long-term impact of media exposure on individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and expectations. Applied to career choice, this theory suggests that social media and influencers can shape how adolescents view success, professional norms and gender roles (Mosharafa, 2015).

### 1.2. The Influence of Mass Media and Digital Culture on Career Choices

Young people's decision-making can be understood through the lens of three models (Dunn, 2022): normative, descriptive and prescriptive. Despite the usefulness of these models, young people often face uncertainty, compromises and a lack of relevant information.

Mass media influences social norms, behaviours and perceptions, impacting youth development. Rohlinger (Mosharafa, 2015) explores how new media changes relationships, work and more. Authors warn of the risk of forming a 'new man' lacking discernment and focus due to excessive exposure to visual culture. Studies show that constant exposure to digital content affects young people's everyday behaviours and vocational identity development. Granic et al. (2020) and Singer (2020) agree that digital spaces become narrative environments where adolescents project and negotiate their identity. But these environments can lead to fragmentation, overexposure and presentism. Studies by Swart (2021) and Appel and Weber (2021) show how algorithms and stereotypes influence perceptions of career options as "acceptable" or "realistic". In this evolving media landscape, the influence of influencers is becoming a key aspect (Vrontis et al., 2021; Alves De Castro & Carthy, 2021). The image of oneself and the perception of professional success are now heavily influenced by social networks, where validation and reproduction occur. A study by Handayani and Giovanny (2024) shows that young people's decisions are influenced by the content they consume and by pressures and representations in the media.

Singer (2020) warns about the digital environment's impact on personal identity and career choice. However, Granic et al. (2020) argue that we are experiencing a shift in the study of media's effects on youth, highlighting digital environments as spaces for identity construction. Career and media are also discussed by Wang (2024), who emphasizes the influence of films and TV on career perceptions. Exaggerated representations of certain professions can create false expectations, leading to disappointment and reduced academic satisfaction. Some authors (Mann et al., 2020) highlight a dangerous structural gap: many teenagers dream of careers that are either declining or inaccessible, influenced by outdated models, social media or the lack of updated counselling. de Silva et al. (2024) show that media stereotypes about teachers, especially among young people, are a key factor in the falling popularity of the teaching profession. Gass and Seiter (2022) propose a complex social influence and persuasion framework, highlighting the subtle ways in which norms and conformity pressures operate.

### 1.3. Media, Motivation and Modernity: Shaping Teen Career Aspirations in the Digital Age

The media has a significant impact on gender perceptions in career choice (McNeill, 2025). The lack of female role models in STEM fields contributes to the idea that these professions are not “suitable” for girls. As a result, many adolescent girls self-exclude from fields such as science, technology, and engineering, reinforcing existing gender inequalities (Murcia et al., 2020). However, a significant study (Pérez González et al., 2020) shows that exposing girls to female role models in STEM can positively impact motivation, self-confidence and the intention to pursue a scientific career. It has been argued that contemporary career counselling must evolve to address the growing influence of mass media, especially as digital platforms reshape the way young people perceive and pursue careers (Aderonmu, 2025). The rapid advancements in technology and the emergence of artificial intelligence necessitate a reconfiguration of vocational education. Zhang et al. (2023) propose a tripartite approach to AI literacy, comprising technical understanding, ethical reflection and orientation toward future careers. The study shows that middle school students can understand complex ideas and think about how AI affects their lives, which supports teaching ethics and careers in technology.

The hypothesis that Immersive Virtual Reality (IVR) simulations effectively increase interest in science is supported by empirical evidence provided by others (Makransky et al., 2020). For girls, IVR had a positive impact on career aspirations, showing that a good educational design can combat disinterest in STEM (Chen et al., 2022).

In today’s fast-changing workplace, career choices and self-management are vital for success. Mass media, high connectivity, problematic use of social media, and online role models indirectly influence young people’s career choices by shaping their professional values, self-efficacy and self-image.

### 1.4. Statistical Insights into Media, Motivation and Youth Vocational Choice

Pew Research Center (Faverio & Sidoti, 2024) reports that 95% of teenagers have access to a smartphone, and nearly half are online “almost constantly”. Around 45% of young people say they spend too much time on social media, up from 36% in 2022. Most teenagers (74%) view social media as a positive space for friendships and creative expression, but 25% of girls and 14% of boys report that these platforms negatively affect their mental health. The WHO (2025) reports that problematic use of social media has risen from 7% in 2018 to 11% in 2022, affecting mental health and academic performance. Girls are more affected than boys. In addition, 12% of teenagers are at risk of problematic gaming. According to the HBSC study conducted by the WHO (Winter et al., 2024), 44% of 15-year-old girls maintain constant online communication with friends, indicative of an emotional dependency on digital environments. Furthermore, 22% of teens spend over 4 h a day on video games. Boys are twice as likely as girls to develop problematic gaming behaviours. These habits can reduce time for personal reflection, career exploration and extracurricular activities, which are essential for vocational development.

Media influences career aspirations by affecting self-perception, motivation and professional expectations, with effects influenced by psychological and social factors. Research shows that 32% of teenagers see social media positively, 45% see it as neutral and 9% see it as negatively impacting career choices and well-being (Faverio & Sidoti, 2024). The influence of media, particularly social media and brief video content, on the career aspirations of young people is indirect. A 2020 OECD study found that 53% of girls and 47% of boys select their career aspirations from a limited set of the ten most popular occupations. This is influenced by repetitive media exposure and a lack of diversity in promoted career models (OECD, 2021).

The APA report on Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Children and Youth Report (OECD, 2024) states that 48% of young people are influenced by social media when choosing a career, and 41% have changed their educational plans after seeing people with a successful career online. However, only 19% receive consistent educational support to interpret these influences. A lack of clear career prospects impacts career choices. The OECD shows that social media influences career decisions through professional values and self-efficacy. PISA 2022 data indicates that 40% of 15-year-old students in OECD countries lack clear career plans, representing a 50% increase since 2018 (OECD, 2024). This uncertainty especially affects low-performing students and is associated with poorer labour market outcomes (OECD, 2024). Most longitudinal studies show that teenagers who clearly express career plans are more likely to achieve better labour market outcomes, even after controlling for academic performance, social background and ethnicity. This highlights the importance of career clarity in adolescence as a predictor of later professional success (OECD, 2024).

Parental influence is still key to career decisions by adolescents. But the rise in digital communication among adolescents, with 70% now engaging in frequent online interactions, has led to a fall in face-to-face interactions with parents. Consequently, a significant proportion of parents do not undertake regular monitoring of their teenagers' online activity (Using media, 2025). This can hinder parents' ability to guide their children in making important life decisions, like choosing a career.

Many parents are not fully aware of their children's digital habits. Over 60% do not regularly monitor their teens' online activity, reducing their ability to prevent negative influences on career choice and personal identity. Some authors (Marcionetti & Zammitti, 2023) highlight the essential role of mothers as the main source of perceived support in adolescents' career decision-making, followed by fathers and, to a lesser extent, school counsellors or peers.

Mass media has been identified as a contributing factor to gender stereotypes (Ward & Grower, 2020), influencing career aspirations. According to the OECD, 53% of girls and 47% of boys select from a restricted group of 10 professions, a trend that is exacerbated by repetitive media exposure and a lack of diversity.

A study of 15,000 U.S. first-year college students (44.7% male, 54.6% female) investigated how STEM media consumption in high school influences students' interest in STEM careers at college entry (Chen et al., 2022). The study found that the effect of STEM-related TV/games on STEM career interest occurred through indirect effects. Watching STEM TV shows, online videos and video games in high school was positively associated with STEM career interest at college entry, but the effect was indirect and mediated through the development of a STEM identity and personal career values.

The EU Youth Strategy (WHO, 2025) aims to encourage informed and sustainable career choices. In 2023, the youth unemployment rate in the EU was 14.5%, far above the overall average of 6%. This highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions. The strategy promotes access to quality career guidance, internships and mobility programmes. Since 1987, Erasmus+ has supported over 10 million young people, and the European Solidarity Corps engages about 100,000 volunteers annually. The Youth Guarantee initiative invests over EUR 9 billion in supporting NEET youth (not in education, employment or training) and aims to offer them a job, training or internship within 4 months of registration. These efforts show a commitment to a robust and inclusive professional future for young people, adapted to the digital and green economy.

Young Romanians have significant access to digital technology. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics (Studiul Insights PulseZ, 2022), 98% of high school

students have constant access to the internet, and 93% use smartphones as their primary means of connectivity.

Furthermore, it has been determined that over 71% of individuals allocate more than three hours daily to online activities, with a significant proportion, constituting 42%, engaging for more than five hours. The predominant activities of these individuals consist of socializing and entertainment on various platforms, with Instagram (87%), TikTok (76%) and YouTube (73%) being the most prevalent. Furthermore, 64% of respondents reported using the internet for educational content. Just 38% of students were aware of how to verify information, and 61% frequently encountered contradictory content, which can have a negative impact on career choices.

As indicated by INS data in the Social Trends study ([Andrei et al., 2021](#)), Romanian youth primarily seek information online, with 76% of adolescents turning to the internet and social media for decisions related to their professional future. Only 27% have used career counselling, showing how digital sources have replaced educational ones. Public figures and influencers are increasingly influential, with 20% of youth citing them as career inspiration. This is evident in fields like entertainment, technology, fashion and social media, where online lifestyles become aspirational.

Romania had the highest prevalence of problematic use of social media and screen-based gaming (22%), followed by Malta (18%) and Bulgaria (17%). Data show that one in five Romanian children and adolescents exhibit signs of poor mental health and meet the criteria for a mental illness. Children aged 8–10 spend six hours daily on screens, those aged 11–14 spend nine hours, and those aged 15–25 spend seven and a half hours daily, including television use.

The [Studiul Insights PulseZ \(2022\)](#) study demonstrates that 64% of young people encounter challenges related to motivation, 50% face fatigue, and 46% experience emotional fluctuations. Additionally, 68% express a desire for enhanced self-confidence and 60% seek improved time management skills. One in five teens aged 16–18 want to become famous, influenced by influencers on social media. YouTube is used by 99% of young people every day, with an average of 2.3 h per day. Instagram and TikTok are also popular. Students study for an average of 3 h a day, with urban students spending more time than those in rural areas.

Online media is often seen as unreliable, despite being used by 66% of people. It has a moderate impact on decisions (23%) but is increasingly shaping young people's professional aspirations, particularly in modern fields. The lack of effective school counselling intensifies this dependence on informal sources ([Cedefop, 2019](#)).

The study Youth in Romania ([Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2019](#)), conducted by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Foundation (FES), reveals that the absence of specialized counselling constitutes a fundamental issue. Young people are not being given the vocational advice they need to make informed choices.

Young Romanians need more structured career support, but access to career counselling is limited. In the 2023–2024 academic year, there were 3354 school counsellors, equating to 1 counsellor for every 800 students.

[Eurostat \(2025\)](#) shows that Romania has the highest rate of early leavers from education and training in the EU. Specifically, 16.8% of 18–24 year olds leave school with only lower secondary education and do not go on to further training. Gender disparities are also notable, with slightly more young women affected than men, unlike most other EU countries, where young men typically dominate.

Career choice is still heavily influenced by family. A study ([Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2019](#)) found that family influences the career decisions of young Romanians by 60%, followed by income prospects (45%) and passion (27%). Only 25% of young people benefit

from effective school counselling. OECD (2025) highlights that 72% of youth choose their careers based on personal interests, and 64% consider financial earning potential. Only 21% have constant access to formal vocational counselling, highlighting the importance of informal sources, including digital media.

A 2025 study by the Center for Independent Journalism (2025) on 1852 students provides a clear picture of how youth use the internet and social networks, showing clear variations between the digital behaviours of girls and boys, as well as significant differences between urban and rural students. The most popular digital sources are podcasts (25.9%) and influencers commenting on current events (19.6%).

According to data from the European Institute of Romania (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2019), SPOS 2021 Strategic and Policy Studies, Romanian youth primarily choose careers based on personal interest (72%) and financial potential (64%), while also seeking job stability (60%) and development opportunities (55%). Family has a major influence on these choices (57%), followed by teachers (39%). Most young people obtain career information from the internet and social media, and many are influenced by media content or influencers. However, only 21% benefit from formal vocational counselling, suggesting that digital media may serve as a compensatory mechanism for the absence of structured educational support in career decision-making processes.

The influence of mass media on young people's career choices is significant and multifaceted. Firmansyah notes that digital platforms often replace traditional values with individualistic ones centred on consumption and self-fulfilment, shaped by peer dynamics and digital trends (Firmansyah, 2024). Visible generational differences amplify this. Adolescents rely on personal sources of information that promote individual development. In this evolving landscape, media education is a critical tool for career development and social value preservation. A coherent educational approach, incorporating critical thinking competencies, is necessary for young people to filter information and understand the broader social implications of their choices (Bereźnicka, 2022). The long-term impact of extensive media exposure on the internalization of core values further emphasizes the importance of incorporating media literacy into educational strategies (Gerbner & Gross, 2017). At the same time, mass media has a positive impact on civic engagement and educational opportunity.

To achieve the stated purpose of the research project, the study assumes a series of specific objectives:

- O.1. Identifying the sources of information perceived by students as relevant for career choice.
- O.2. Determining the perception of the role of mass media in the professional decision-making process.
- O.3. Investigating the relationships between students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and media influences.
- O.4. Analyzing the socio-demographic profile of students who use media sources as the main support in their career orientation.
- O.5. Exploring the factors that contribute to sustainable career development among high school students.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The present study aims to investigate the influence of mass media on the career choices of high school seniors, as well as the motivational factors that guide their decisions. The research is quantitative in nature, with a descriptive and correlational character, and is based on the application of a standardized questionnaire composed of closed-ended, semi-open, and Likert-scale questions.

The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 1314 twelfth-grade students from all educational tracks—theoretical, vocational, technological, and professional—from colleges, high schools, and vocational schools in Braşov County, Romania. The instrument was distributed online, in accordance with legislation regarding the protection of personal data. The Commission approved the data collection during the 2020–2021 academic year (document no. 36 dated 15 September 2020). The data were automatically centralized in a secure environment to ensure the confidentiality of the responses.

The quantitative method was selected due to its capacity to analyze a substantial volume of data and identify statistical relationships between the variables of interest. Thus, relevant patterns and correlations can be identified between factors such as perceptions of mass media and personal motivations in career choice.

The sample is non-probabilistic, based on convenience, due to the accessibility of students from partner educational institutions. This enables the extraction of significant conclusions for the local context, whilst acknowledging the limitations that prevent the results from being generalized at the national level.

In addition to addressing the core research objectives, the study’s methodological framework also contributes to the broader aim of fostering sustainable educational practices. The research method employed a systematic analysis of students’ digital behaviours, media literacy levels and motivational orientations in the context of career decision-making. The analysis generated practical insights to inform the development of equitable, student-centred, and forward-looking career counselling strategies. These strategies not only respond to the diverse needs of today’s youth but also align with the principles of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4—Quality Education—by promoting inclusive, informed and adaptable pathways that prepare students for a dynamic labour market.

The IBM SPSS Statistics programme (Version 22) was utilized for the purpose of data processing. The analysis of the data was conducted through the utilization of both descriptive and inferential methodologies. The former comprised the calculation of frequencies and percentages, whilst the latter involved the implementation of Pearson’s correlation coefficient to measure the strength of the relationship between the variables. The correlations identified not only reveal current behavioural patterns but also offer a robust empirical basis for the development of evidence-based policies aimed at fostering sustainable career trajectories. It is evident that policies that address the misalignment between educational pathways and labour market demands have the potential to contribute to more effective, future-ready career preparation and workforce integration.

Regarding the variables, they were grouped into two main themes of analysis. The first theme refers to the role of mass media as a vector of professional influence, while the secondary theme investigates the personal motivations and values involved in career choice. Table 1 presents the themes of analysis and the associated variables.

**Table 1.** Themes of analysis, variables and indicators.

Theme of Analysis	Variables Used
1. Sociodemographic profile of respondents	Gender, age, area of residence, type of high school
2. Mass media as a career information source	Sources consulted regarding career, types of information sources
3. Perception of mass media	Perception of mass media: manipulation, education, information, entertainment
4. Career choice motivations	Main motivation, importance of social variables in relation to career
5. Activities providing personal satisfaction	Activities that lead to increased motivation (music, TV, walking, reading, internet browsing)

Source: personal processing.

The study’s methodological emphasis on media exposure, motivational autonomy and sociodemographic disparities facilitates the identification of critical sustainability indicators

within youth education—namely digital resilience, self-efficacy and informed agency. These indicators form the basis for designing adaptive educational interventions that respond to the evolving demands of the labour market. By empowering students to make informed and autonomous career choices, such interventions can mitigate the long-term social and economic risks associated with uninformed career choices.

This study proposes a set of analytical variables:

**H1:** *High school students perceive mass media as having an ambivalent role in career choice, being both a valuable source of information and a potential means of manipulation.*

**H2:** *Students who value personal development tend to associate career choice with opportunities for creativity, collaboration and intercultural interaction.*

**H3:** *Students' career choices are significantly influenced by their perception of workplace benefits and conditions.*

### 3. Results

The study analyzes a sample of 1314 respondents, representing high school seniors surveyed in order to identify the factors influencing their career choices. The analysis of sociodemographic characteristics reveals a relatively balanced distribution across the considered categories, providing a solid basis for relevant and differentiated interpretations based on characteristics such as gender, age, background and type of high school.

Among the 1314 respondents, 1304 provided valid information regarding gender, of whom 733 (56.2%) identified as female and 571 (43.8%) as male. Ten participants (0.8%) did not respond to this question.

The majority of respondents (70.8%) were 18 years old, thus emphasizing that the sample mainly consisted of high school seniors at a critical time for making important educational and professional decisions. Furthermore, 13.1% of respondents were 17 years old, and 13.2% were 19 years old. Other age groups, including ages 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, and 23, are represented only sporadically, suggesting that some individuals who took part in the survey may have been repeating school years or resuming their studies, or they may have been recent graduates.

With respect to area of residence, the distribution reveals that 68.1% of the student population came from urban areas, while 31.9% were from rural areas. This distribution shows a significant urban presence yet also maintains sufficient representation from rural areas to allow for a relevant comparative analysis of access to information and career-related resources. The influence of background (urban/rural) on both career choice and the likelihood of success has been demonstrated.

With regard to the specialization of high schools, the data show that 65% of the respondents came from theoretical high schools, followed by 15.5% from technological high schools, 10.9% from vocational high schools (such as those with artistic, pedagogical, or military profiles), and 8.6% from professional schools. These figures suggest a predominant orientation towards general and potentially university pathways while also including students with applied educational profiles, allowing for a broader understanding of the diversity of professional aspirations.

#### 3.1. Mass Media—A Key Vector in Career Influence

##### 3.1.1. The Following Profile Is That of Students Who Have Elected to Utilize Mass Media as Their Primary Source of Career Guidance

The analysis of the responses from students who reported relying primarily on mass media (online sources, TV, radio, newspapers, magazines) in their career decision-making

process reveals a set of demographic and educational traits that are relevant for understanding how mediated information shapes young people's professional paths.

In a survey of 1314 respondents, 747 students (56.85%) selected this option ("With whom do you consult regarding your future profession/occupation?—I consult online sources, TV, radio, newspapers, magazines") as their trusted source for career orientation. The gender distribution of the respondents indicates a predominance of girls (61.5%) over boys (38.5%), suggesting a potentially greater receptivity among adolescent girls to media content when forming career decisions. This difference may reflect both a greater need for external role models and a possible lack of direct support from family or school.

Regarding age distribution, most of these students were in their final year of high school—77% of respondents were 18 years old, which aligns with the critical moment when decisions regarding university enrolment, employment or other career paths are made. This age group appears to demonstrate a notable degree of active concern for their future, and the use of mass media as an information tool may reflect both a desire for autonomy and a need for quick guidance in the context of a multifaceted educational environment.

The data also show that the majority of these students came from urban areas (70.3%), while only 29.7% were from rural areas. This disproportion may be explained by unequal access to digital infrastructure and educational events (fairs, conferences, information platforms), which are more frequently available in cities. Additionally, the urban environment offers more visible career models, which may stimulate interest in exploring them through media channels.

With regard to the type of educational pathway pursued, 78.6% of the students who use mass media for career information come from theoretical high schools, followed by students from technological high schools (12.8%), vocational schools (5.1%), and professional schools (3.4%). This distribution suggests a connection between a university-oriented trajectory and the need to access diverse information sources, which are most often available in the media space.

Consequently, the general profile of a student who bases their career choices on mass media is shaped by being female, 18 years old, from an urban background, and enrolled in theoretical education.

### 3.1.2. Perception of Mass Media and Information Sources as Career Influence Vectors

The data show that documentaries were the most frequently indicated source of information, comprising a significant 62.7% of all respondents (824 out of 1314). This option suggests that students seek out content-rich sources, perceived as more objective and educational. Participation in career fairs is the second most prevalent form of engagement, with 58.15% of respondents reporting participation. This suggests a pragmatic tendency, characterized by a direct interaction and experiential exploration of professional opportunities.

On the other hand, films and TV series were mentioned by 30.66% of students—a figure that should not be overlooked. This may signal the subtle influence of narrative mass media on adolescents' professional imagination, particularly regarding certain careers portrayed in an idealized or exaggerated light.

Cultural and political programmes constituted approximately 16.67% of the responses, according to Table 2. This relatively small percentage could indicate a lack of access or interest in rigorously informative content or a perception that such media are less relevant to personal career choices.

Surprisingly, the relatively low percentage for radio and television news (6.01%) may suggest a trust crisis in traditional mass media or a shift among young people towards

alternative information sources. Entertainment shows are also rarely mentioned (5.63%), which may indicate the ability to distinguish between recreational and formative content.

**Table 2.** Sources of information regarding career opportunities.

Associated Category	Frequency	Percentage of Total (1314)
Movies/TV series	403	30.66%
Entertainment shows	74	5.63%
Cultural/political programmes	219	16.67%
Documentaries	824	62.70%
Radio/TV news	79	6.01%
Participation in career fairs	764	58.15%

Source: personal processing.

A smaller percentage (24.73%) associate it with an educational role, while 37.90% primarily consider it a source of relaxation and entertainment, as shown in Table 3. These data suggest an increased awareness among students about the dual impact of mass media, both as an educational and informative resource and as a potential tool for influencing opinions.

**Table 3.** Perception of mass media.

Perception of Mass Media	Total Frequency (Out of All Responses)	Percentage of Total Respondents (N = 1314)
A way to relax and entertain oneself	498	37.90%
A valuable source of information	548	41.70%
An effective means of manipulation	724	55.10%
A tool with a strong educational impact	325	24.73%

Source: personal processing.

### 3.2. Students' Motivations in Career Choice

#### 3.2.1. The Correlation Between the Selection of a Career Path and Student Motivation

The analysis of students' motivations in choosing their professional path reveals a predominant preference for self-determination. This phenomenon is further highlighted by the substantial proportion of respondents—852 students, or 64.8% of the total sample—who reported being guided by their personal talents, qualities and abilities. This percentage validates the emerging trend among young professionals to cultivate their professional identity through self-reflection, prioritizing internal resources over traditional external role models.

The second most common motivation, cited by 19.2% of respondents, is the influence of the profession of their parents or other family members, according to Table 4. This result indicates that the family still plays a significant role in the decision-making process, although it does so to a lesser extent than personal aspirations, suggesting that although students do respect the role models set by their families, their own goals tend to be prioritized.

With regard to the role of external factors associated with visual and media culture, 8.6% of students indicated that they draw inspiration from the careers of their idols (TV celebrities, actors, singers, athletes). Meanwhile 2.7% aspire to new occupations heavily promoted in the digital space, such as blogging, vlogging or becoming an influencer. Together, these two categories represent 11.3% of the respondents, highlighting the influence of media culture on the shaping of professional aspirations. However, they also suggest that this impact is comparatively restricted in comparison to that of personal self-evaluation or family influence.

**Table 4.** Motivations in choosing a career path.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
<b>Admired parents’/family members’ profession</b>	252	19.2
<b>Teachers’ careers</b>	61	4.6
<b>Careers of idols (TV stars, actors, singers, athletes)</b>	113	8.6
<b>New digital careers (blogger, vlogger, influencer)</b>	36	2.7
<b>Personal talents, qualities and abilities</b>	852	64.8
<b>Total</b>	1314	100.0

Source: personal processing.

A smaller percentage—only 4.6%—attributed their motivation to their teachers’ careers, which can be interpreted as reflecting the diminishing role of schools in shaping students’ career decisions. This prompts questions regarding the present effectiveness of school counselling and the extent of students’ exposure to relevant professional role models within the educational environment.

In terms of the importance students assign to different elements in choosing a future career/profession, a number of noteworthy responses have been identified, which may be linked to the influence of mass media. The most significant factor in the selection of a career path by students is the perception of fairness and respect within the workplace. This assertion is corroborated by the results of the survey, with 1209 respondents (91.9%) selecting the highest scores (4 + 5), as illustrated in Table 5. This is followed by personal development (84.8%) and financial security (88.8%), indicating a balanced outlook—young people seek both professional fulfilment and economic stability. The final aspect is that of fame and social recognition, which is often associated with media influence. This aspect is considered to be of least importance by the majority of respondents.

**Table 5.** Ranking of indicators regarding career choice importance.

Indicator	Important (4)	Very Important (5)	Total (4 + 5)
<b>Being treated fairly and with respect</b>	186	1023	1209
<b>Personal and spiritual development</b>	336	778	1114
<b>Increased financial gain</b>	437	729	1166
<b>Freedom and creativity at work</b>	422	586	1008
<b>Opportunities for socializing and collaboration</b>	397	652	1049
<b>Time with family/friends</b>	411	481	892
<b>Social contribution/helping others</b>	345	575	920
<b>Travel and intercultural knowledge</b>	274	583	857
<b>Fame and social recognition</b>	254	181	435

Note: This analysis aims to identify the aspects considered most important by respondents in choosing a career. Only responses marked as ‘important’ (4) and ‘very important’ (5) were considered. Source: own processing.

The results obtained from the questionnaire reveal students’ clear preferences regarding activities that increase their satisfaction. The centralized analysis of frequencies for the listed activities shows that listening to music ranks first, with a total of 827 mentions. This reflects a strong attachment to this activity as a means of relaxation, emotional expression and personal reconnection.

The second most frequent activity is spending time with friends or partners, with 799 responses. This confirms the importance of interpersonal relationships and social interaction during adolescence, a critical period for identity formation and future career choices.

Browsing the internet and using social media was mentioned 682 times, placing it third. This high frequency not only indicates a preference for the online environment as a source of entertainment and communication but also its potential influence on shaping aspirations, interests and career-related decisions.

### 3.2.2. Analysis of Correlations Between Motivational Values in Career Choice

The strongest statistical correlation appears between the desire for personal development and the collaborative and creative dimensions of work. Thus, the variable “To develop my skills/abilities, to grow spiritually through my profession” strongly correlates with the need for “varied opportunities for socializing and collaborating with others” ( $r = 0.490$ ), “freedom and creativity in work” ( $r = 0.362$ ) and “the possibility of traveling and discovering other cultures” ( $r = 0.347$ ), as evidenced by Table 6. The aforementioned correlations indicate that a profession is no longer regarded exclusively as a means of generating revenue or ensuring stability. Instead, it is increasingly perceived as a medium for self-expression, fostering identity development, and facilitating intercultural interaction.

**Table 6.** Pearson correlations on motivational variables.

	Time with Family/Friends	Financial Gain	Fame and Recognition	Helping Others	Freedom and Creativity	Travel and Cultures	Respect at Work	Personal Development	Socialization
Time with family/friends	1								
Financial gain	136 **	1							
Fame and recognition	120 **	311 **	1						
Helping others	187 **	087 **	171 **	1					
Freedom and creativity	199 **	131 **	225 **	312 **	1				
Travel and cultures	130 **	239 **	290 **	183 **	307 **	1			
Respect at work	143 **	224 **	103 **	171 **	230 **	230 **	1		
Personal development	164 **	145 **	189 **	323 **	362 **	347 **	329 **	1	
Socialization	209 **	290 **	235 **	315 **	306 **	362 **	320 **	490 **	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: personal processing.

In the context of a generation influenced by globalization and social networks, this orientation is natural: young people seek more than just a job—they desire a space for self-affirmation and human growth.

Financial reward and social recognition, as complementary aspirations, emerged as another set of findings. The extrinsic value “having a high financial income” shows a significant correlation with “gaining fame and social recognition” ( $r = 0.311$ ), as well as with other variables that indicate professional satisfaction, such as collaboration ( $r = 0.290$ ) or being treated fairly at work ( $r = 0.224$ ), as evidenced by Table 6. This finding suggests that students do not merely seek material success but rather equate it with recognition, respect and, implicitly, social status. In the current socio-economic landscape, where stability is questionable, financial aspirations cannot be ignored. However these aspirations are accompanied by a need for personal and professional validation. It is possible that social role models promoted by the media—such as influencers, successful entrepreneurs or public figures—contribute to this dual valorization of a career as both a source of prestige and well-being.

Another well-defined value cluster is the prosocial dimension. The desire “to help those in need and to be useful to society” is significantly correlated with personal de-

velopment ( $r = 0.323$ ), collaboration ( $r = 0.315$ ) and creativity at work ( $r = 0.312$ ). These correlations highlight the fact that social responsibility is not perceived as a burden but rather as a form of self-realization. It appears that students have adopted the notion that a fulfilling career is characterized by its potential to generate a positive impact. This perspective is aligned with contemporary trends in ethical leadership, social activism and civic engagement, increasingly prominent in today's public discourse.

The balance between personal and professional life is a present and important dimension, though secondary compared to other perspectives. The indicator "having more time with family/friends" shows the lowest correlations in the analyzed set, though they remain statistically significant (between  $r = 0.120$  and  $r = 0.209$ ). This suggests that young people are aware of and acknowledge the importance of personal life but do not place it at the centre of their career decision-making. This aspect may be seen more as an indirect benefit of a fulfilling career rather than an explicit priority during the decision process. In a society that promotes performance, flexibility and mobility, students may perceive personal time as something to be negotiated later, after achieving other professional goals.

The findings indicate that students aspire not only to achieve personal success but also to contribute socially and pursue self-actualisation—values that align closely with the core tenets of sustainable development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). It is imperative to cultivate an educational system that is both socially inclusive and future-oriented. To this end, it is essential to encourage autonomy in career decision-making while concurrently addressing gender disparities and digital dependencies. Furthermore, the relatively marginal role played by school counsellors and teachers highlights the urgent need to reform educational support mechanisms. The integration of career guidance with a focus on sustainability, emphasizing critical thinking and media literacy, will better equip students to navigate increasingly complex and digitally mediated labour markets.

### *3.3. Analyzing the Relationship Between Career Orientation and Key Influencing Factors*

The analysis in this section is grounded in the development of new composite variables, constructed by aggregating participants' responses through the "Transform" function in IBM SPSS Statistics programme (Version 22). These variables were designed to capture essential dimensions of the career decision-making process, including preferred sources of information, anticipated workplace benefits and the composition of informal support networks—namely, the individuals with whom young people discuss their professional aspirations. This methodological approach aimed to yield a more nuanced understanding of how adolescents conceptualize career pathways and identify the key influences that shape sustainable professional development.

This analysis is founded on the premise that ascertaining the factors influencing career orientation is of crucial importance, given that career choice extends beyond a personal decision to encompass significant social and economic ramifications. A professional trajectory that is informed and appropriate will not only foster individual fulfilment and identity coherence but also facilitate smooth integration into the labour market. Furthermore, this alignment supports the efficient and ethical functioning of the socio-economic system by promoting careers that are pursued with competence, passion and a sense of responsibility. In this context, career development emerges as a critical nexus between personal growth and collective well-being, reinforcing the broader goals of sustainable development.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to analyze the data and examine significant relationships between the dependent variable CAREER and three key composite variables. This analytical approach aimed to elucidate how these factors interact in shaping students' career orientations and decisions.

The results (Table 7) reveal a strong positive correlation between career and workplace benefits and conditions ( $r = 0.721, p < 0.001$ ), indicating that young people's career decisions are substantially shaped by their expectations regarding the professional environment. A number of key factors have been identified as playing a pivotal role in how adolescents envision sustainable careers. These factors include job stability, mutual respect, fairness, workplace safety and favourable working conditions. A moderate correlation was also found between media information sources and career ( $r = 0.340, p < 0.001$ ), highlighting the increasing significance of access to accurate, current and contextually relevant information in the career orientation process. Research indicates that young individuals who engage with high-quality informational resources are more likely to formulate clear, realistic and long-term career objectives. In contrast, the correlation between the informal counselling network and career was significant but relatively weaker ( $r = 0.264, p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that while social support from family, friends and teachers does contribute to career decision-making, its influence may be secondary to personal informational access and workplace value alignment. Collectively, these findings emphasize that sustainable career development is driven by a multifaceted interplay of informed decision-making, perceived quality of the work environment and social encouragement. A deliberate, well-informed career choice enhances individual fulfilment, promotes social cohesion and supports the effective operation of the labour market.

**Table 7.** Pearson correlations between career orientation and key influencing factors.

		Career	Media Information Sources	Workplace Benefits and Conditions	Informal Counselling Network
Career	Pearson Correlation	1	340 **	721 **	264 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)		000	000	000
	N	1314	1314	1314	1292
Workplace Benefits and Conditions	Pearson Correlation	340 **	1	−069 *	098 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	000		012	000
	N	1314	1314	1314	1292
Workplace Benefits and Conditions	Pearson Correlation	721 **	−069 *	1	−106 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	000	012		000
	N	1314	1314	1314	1292
Informal Counselling Network	Pearson Correlation	264 **	098 **	−106 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	000	000	000	
	N	1292	1292	1292	1292

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Source: personal processing.

#### 4. Discussion

The influence of mass media on young people has been demonstrated by both theoretical and practical analyses. A salient finding of the research is the use of mass media as a source of information about professional futures. A significant percentage (56.85%) of students rely primarily on media sources for this purpose. The findings from the correlation analysis support the observation that media plays a significant role in shaping career interest, as evidenced by a strong correlation between career and media information sources ( $r = 0.340$ ). However, the most substantial relationship emerged between career orientation and workplace conditions and benefits ( $r = 0.721$ ), underscoring that while young people are influenced by media portrayals, their career decisions are more profoundly guided by expectations of job quality. These factors include stability, fairness and a respectful work environment. These results indicate an emerging trend among young people: a pragmatic and sustainability-oriented approach to career planning, where long-term well-being and workplace values are prioritized alongside informational access and inspiration.

This finding can be interpreted in the context of theories on the direct and indirect influence of mass media on young audiences. One such theory is the cultivation theory proposed by (Gerbner & Gross, 2017), which states that prolonged exposure to media content shapes perceptions of reality, including professional aspirations. The specialized literature (Watts et al., 2015) warns that the lack of effective counselling can lead to such deviations (Coman et al., 2025).

Girls seem more receptive than boys to media's influence, which can be explained by a stronger need for external role models in the absence of concrete guidance from school or family. The distribution exhibits a slight predominance of girls, a factor that may influence career perceptions and choices, particularly in terms of motivational dimensions or access to information regarding professional opportunities (Watts et al., 2015). This statement is also supported by other research (Steele & Brown, 1995), which shows that young people use media to explore possible identities and to understand social norms.

Nevertheless, documentaries and participation in career fairs (Boyd & Boyd, 2020) are the most respected sources, indicating a preference for content perceived as informative and grounded in reality. The reduced interest in traditional news or entertainment programmes suggests a critical thinking approach among teenagers, similar to the conclusions drawn by Buckingham (Buckingham, 2007) regarding media literacy among youth. Increasingly, young people are turning away from traditional news, preferring content that can stimulate social conversations or provide personal inspiration (Costera Meijer, 2007). The emergence of modern social networks has fundamentally changed the way young people access news, often leading to passive engagement and avoidance of classic news sources (Duvekot et al., 2024).

Young people's perceptions of mass media show an ambivalent attitude. A significant part of the group analyzed sees media as a valuable source of information, while others perceive it as a means of manipulation. This dual representation highlights an awareness of the dual potential of media, in line with the critical analysis promoted by (McQuail, 1987), who states that mass media is both a vehicle of knowledge and an instrument of symbolic control. Awareness of this duality can foster a more autonomous attitude in media use, but it also requires well-developed critical skills, raising questions about the effectiveness of media education in the Romanian education system. Integrating critical media literacy and digital health competencies into the educational curriculum could enhance young people's ability to navigate an increasingly diverse media landscape (Begoray et al., 2014). As they interact with various media sources, critical discernment becomes an essential filter for selecting relevant and truthful information.

Perhaps the most important finding of the study is the overwhelming proportion of intrinsic motivation in career choice: students are guided by their own skills and interests (Blustein, 1988). This result is also supported by self-determination theories that emphasize the importance of autonomy in decision-making and long-term professional development. External influences, such as the profession of parents or media idols, are secondary, indicating a gradual shift away from traditional models and a reorientation toward self-exploration. This trend is increasingly noted in the current literature (Savickas, 2013), which highlights a transition from a "prescriptive" to a "constructivist" approach in career counselling—young people build their career path not based on external pressures but as part of a personal development narrative.

Teenagers seem to particularly value aspects such as respect and fairness in the workplace, personal development, and financial security. This value hierarchy suggests a balance between idealistic aspirations and pragmatic needs, a combination that demonstrates adaptability to contemporary social realities. These findings underline a progression from childhood idealism to the realism of maturity, also influenced by the age at which they completed the questionnaire. Furthermore, the association between the desire for personal develop-

ment and the creative, collaborative and intercultural dimensions of work highlights a preference for professions that allow identity expression and social integration—aspects increasingly important in a globalized and digitalized economy (Guichard, 2009).

A concerning aspect is the low proportion (4.6%) of students who declare being inspired by the career of their teachers. This outcome indicates a discrepancy between the educational system and students' real aspirations, possibly due to the lack of relevant career guidance activities or the absence of inspirational role models in schools. Teacher enthusiasm is an essential motivational factor; a recent study highlighted that the participants admitted that teacher enthusiasm directly influences their own motivation (Palmer, 2020). Despite the overall trend aligning with the findings of our study, it is noteworthy that 66% of Yeshiva high school graduates consider teachers as positive role models, illustrating that perceptions of teachers are strongly influenced by educational context (Tannenbaum, 2011).

The pursuit of personal development is closely related to the need for collaboration, creativity and cultural openness, underlining that young people view careers as a space for self-affirmation, rather than merely a means of financial gain. While financial success is valued, it is often associated with social status and recognition, and these ideals are heavily shaped by media representations. At the same time, prosocial values are perceived as forms of self-realization. While work–life balance is recognized as a key concern, it is often seen as a secondary priority when compared to other aspects of career advancement. This combination of personal motivations and professional expectations underscores the necessity for a comprehensive career development strategy that integrates personal values with realistic professional goals. It is vital that this approach is supported through enhanced educational guidance, experiential learning opportunities, and the implementation of critical media literacy programmes. All of these are essential for supporting sustainable and purpose-driven career pathways.

Based on these findings, several educational policy implications can be formulated to support students in making sustainable and informed career decisions. First, the integration of media education and critical thinking into the national curriculum is essential to help students evaluate media messages and distinguish between aspirational content and realistic opportunities. Second, career counselling services must be strengthened and diversified, especially in schools where access remains limited. Personalized guidance—both individual and group-based—should be offered starting from early school years in order to foster self-awareness and long-term planning. Third, teacher training programmes should emphasize the importance of being a role model, as well as professional enthusiasm and active involvement in supporting students' vocational exploration. Finally, cooperation between schools, families and professionals outside the educational system (e.g., mentors, career counsellors, experts from various fields) should be encouraged through structured partnerships, career fairs, and experiential learning programmes.

## 5. Conclusions

This study highlights the complex and differentiated influence of mass media on the decision-making process regarding career orientation among students in their final year of high school. Respondents indicated the use of media resources—particularly documentaries, digital platforms and participation in career fair-type events—as relevant reference points in shaping their professional paths.

Furthermore, intrinsic motivation, characterized by the recognition of personal competencies and the pursuit of personal fulfilment, is a predominant factor in the vocational decisions of young individuals. Values such as workplace respect, personal development, and financial stability occupy a central position within the hierarchy of preferences.

This observation suggests a balanced vision that combines aspirational idealism with pragmatic decision-making.

A notable correlation was identified between a desire for personal growth and an appreciation for collaborative, creative and intercultural values. This suggests the emergence of a new career paradigm, understood as a platform for personal expression and integration into global communities, aligning with current globalization trends.

This study emphasizes that students' career choices are driven by their efforts to align personal aspirations with long-term professional stability, social contribution and informed decision-making. By focusing on workplace conditions, personal growth and reliable information sources, students show an increasing commitment to careers that are both personally fulfilling and socially responsible. This commitment enables them to adapt to future labour market demands. This change reflects a move towards sustainable career paths that integrate individual growth with broader economic and societal well-being.

Although the influence of media culture is notable, media-promoted models play a secondary role compared to self-evaluation mechanisms and family influences. However, the limited involvement of teachers in the career orientation process remains problematic, which may reflect both the absence of inspirational educational models and the existing deficiencies in the vocational counselling system in Romanian schools.

The research also presents several methodological limitations. The exclusively quantitative design, although suitable for identifying patterns and correlations, did not allow for an in-depth investigation of students' subjective motivations. Geographical representativeness is relatively limited, despite an adequate numerical coverage; expanding the study nationwide or to other regions with different sociocultural specifics could offer relevant opportunities for comparative analyses. Additionally, the primary focus on 12th-grade students does not capture the dynamics of attitudes over time, instead offering more of a "snapshot" of preferences and influences regarding career options. Moreover, the use of a non-probabilistic sample limits the generalizability of the findings, as the results may not accurately reflect broader student populations. Another potential limitation is the reliance on self-reported data collected via a questionnaire, which may introduce bias due to social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Methodology, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Software, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Validation, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Formal analysis, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Investigation, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Resources, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Data curation, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Writing—original draft, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Writing—review & editing, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Visualization, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Supervision, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Project administration, C.C., C.M.D., I.P., M.I. and A.B.; Funding acquisition, M.I. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The Commission of the Faculty of Sociology and Communication at the Transilvania University of Braşov approved the data collection during the 2020–2021 academic year (document no. 36 dated 15 September 2020).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** All data is available within this document.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- Aderonmu, O. K. (2025). Articulating career counselling through edupreneurship for the 21st century Nigeria youth. *Ilorin Journal of Education*, 45, 137–145.
- Alves De Castro, C., & Carthy, A. (2021). Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in context: A literature review. *Journal of Marketing Management (JMM)*, 9(2), 59–71.
- Andrei, T., Iağâr, E. M., Pisciă, S., Cambir, A., Bălteanu, L. E., Ioniță, A., Logofătu, G., Rădoi, F., Mondiru, D., Chiorean, S., Militaru, A., Anghel, M., Cofîrță, D.-A., Deacu, G. A., Cîrlig, T., Necșescu, I., Pătru, C., Stan, E. S., Ichim, L., . . . Dante, D. (2021). *National institute of statistics*. Available online: [https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/tendinte\\_sociale\\_2.pdf](https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/tendinte_sociale_2.pdf) (accessed on 29 July 2025).
- Appel, M., & Weber, S. (2021). Do mass mediated stereotypes harm members of negatively stereotyped groups? A meta-analytical review on media-generated stereotype threat and stereotype lift. *Communication Research*, 48, 151–179. [CrossRef]
- Begoray, D. L., Banister, E. M., Wharf Higgins, J., & Wilmot, R. (2014). Online, tuned in, turned on: Multimedia approaches to fostering critical media health literacy for adolescents. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, 5, 267–280. [CrossRef]
- Bereźnicka, M. (2022). Media-szanse, wyzwania i zagrożenia a potrzeba edukacji medialnej. *AUPC Studia ad Bibliothecarum Scientiam Pertinentia*, 20, 641–660. [CrossRef]
- Blustein, D. L. (1988). The relationship between motivational processes and career exploration. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 32, 345–357. [CrossRef]
- Boyd, J., & Boyd, S. (2020). Expectation and interaction: Student and employer approaches to university careers fairs. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, 44, 57–63. [CrossRef]
- Buckingham, D. (2007). Digital media literacies: Rethinking media education in the age of the internet. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 2, 43–55. [CrossRef]
- Cedefop. (2019). *Vocational education and training in Romania: Short description* (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training Ed.). ISBN 978-92-896-2855-6. Publications Office.
- Center for Independent Journalism. (2025). *The relationship with information and media consumption habits of children and young people in Romania*. Center for Independent Journalism.
- Chen, Y., Chiu, S. W. K., Zhu, J., & So, W. W. M. (2022). Maintaining secondary school students' STEM career aspirations: The role of perceived parental expectations, self-efficacy, and cultural capital. *International Journal of Science Education*, 44, 434–462. [CrossRef]
- Coman, C., Bucs, A., Dalban, M., & Gavriluță, C. (2025). Analyzing career counseling and guidance services among Romanian universities: A quantitative approach to students' perception. *Societies*, 15, 92. [CrossRef]
- Costera Meijer, I. (2007). The paradox of popularity. *Journalism Studies*, 8, 96–116. [CrossRef]
- de Silva, D., Kaynak, O., El-Ayoubi, M., Mills, N., Alahakoon, D., & Manic, M. (2024). Opportunities and challenges of generative artificial intelligence: Research, education, industry engagement, and social impact. *IEEE Industrial Electronics Magazine*, 19(1), 30–45. [CrossRef]
- Dumulescu, D., Necula, C. V., & Opre, A. (2020). Profiles of career calling on a Romanian teachers' sample: A cluster analysis. In *European proceedings of social and behavioural sciences*. European Publisher.
- Dunn, R. C. (2022). *Exploring the developmental experiences of youth athletes during the transition to competitive sport*. Available online: <https://utoronto.scholaris.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/3a3b5a2f-3fc3-4e34-8d5b-556190a5f25a/content> (accessed on 29 July 2025).
- Duvekot, S., Valgas, C. M., de Haan, Y., & de Jong, W. (2024). *How youth define, consume, and evaluate news: Reviewing two decades of research*. New Media & Society. [CrossRef]
- Eccles, J. (2009). Who am I and what am I going to do with my life? Personal and collective identities as motivators of action. *Educational Psychologist*, 44, 78–89. [CrossRef]
- Eurostat. (2025). *Early leavers from education and training*. Available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_leavers_from_education_and_training) (accessed on 25 June 2025).
- Faverio, M., & Sidoti, O. (2024). *Teens, social media and technology 2024*. Pew Research Center.
- Firmansyah, R. (2024). *Loss of social values among teenagers due to social media*. Available online: [https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/ts42n\\_v1](https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/ts42n_v1) (accessed on 29 July 2025).
- Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. (2019). *Study on the Romanian youth: What are the opinions, fears, and aspirations of the new generation?* Available online: <https://romania.fes.de/e/study-on-the-romanian-youth-what-are-the-opinions-fears-and-aspirations-of-the-new-generation.html> (accessed on 29 July 2025).
- Gass, R. H., & Seiter, J. S. (2022). *Persuasion: Social influence and compliance gaining*. ISBN 1-003-08138-X. Routledge.
- Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (2017). Living with television: The violence profile. In *The fear of crime* (pp. 169–195). Routledge.
- Granic, I., Morita, H., & Scholten, H. (2020). Beyond screen time: Identity development in the digital age. *Psychological Inquiry*, 31, 195–223. [CrossRef]
- Guichard, J. (2009). Self-constructing. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75, 251–258. [CrossRef]

- Handayani, P., & Giovanny, E. C. (2024). *An overview of career decision-making among high school students at PSAA Putra Utama two and three in Jakarta Province* (pp. 23–29). Atlantis Press.
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., Talleyrand, R., McPartland, E. B., Davis, T., Chopra, S. B., Alexander, M. S., Suthakaran, V., & Chai, C.-M. (2002). Career choice barriers, supports, and coping strategies: College students' experiences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 60, 61–72. [CrossRef]
- Makransky, G., Petersen, G. B., & Klingenberg, S. (2020). Can an immersive virtual reality simulation increase students' interest and career aspirations in science? *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 51, 2079–2097. [CrossRef]
- Mann, A., Denis, V., Schleicher, A., Ekhtiari, H., Forsyth, T., Liu, E., & Chambers, N. (2020). *Teenagers' career aspirations and the future of work*. Available online: <https://www.mmlln.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/dream-jobs-teenagers-report.pdf> (accessed on 29 July 2025).
- Marcionetti, J., & Zammitti, A. (2023). Perceived support and influences in adolescents' career choices: A mixed-methods study. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 1–24. [CrossRef]
- McMahon, M., & Arthur, N. (2018). Career development theory: Origins and history. In *Contemporary theories of career development* (pp. 3–19). Routledge.
- McNeill, A. (2025). *Troubling creativity discourses: A foucauldian feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis of the idea of 'creative subjects' in public texts and in the context of a level decision*. Available online: <https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/items/0f12f234-12e5-49c0-8b3e-208028099086> (accessed on 29 July 2025).
- McQuail, D. (1987). *Mass communication theory: An introduction*. ISBN 0-8039-8069-8. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Mosharafa, E. (2015). *All you need to know about: The cultivation theory*. Global Journals Inc.
- Murcia, K., Pepper, C., & Williams, J. (2020). Youth STEM career choices: What's influencing secondary students' decision making. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30, 593–611.
- OECD. (2021). *OECD skills outlook 2021: Learning for life* (OECD skills outlook). ISBN 978-92-64-11607-8. OECD.
- OECD. (2024). *Digital technologies in career guidance for youth: Opportunities and challenges* (OECD Education Policy Perspectives) (113th ed.). OECD.
- OECD. (2025). *Education and Skills in Romania* (Reviews of National Policies for Education). OECD Publishing.
- Palmer, D. (2020). Teacher enthusiasm and student motivation for learning. *Global Journal of Educational Studies*, 6, 40. [CrossRef]
- Pérez González, S., Mateos de Cabo, R., & Sainz, M. (2020). Girls in STEM: Is it a female role-model thing? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 2204. [CrossRef]
- Savickas, M. L. (2013). Career construction theory and practice. *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work*, 2, 144–180.
- Sclifos, L. (2023). Reflecții despre carieră, etape și factori care pot da culoare succesului. *Revista Didactica Pro. . . , Revistă De Teorie și Practică Educațională*, 141, 7–9.
- Singer, J. A. (2020). Narrative identity in a digital age: What are the human risks? *Psychological Inquiry*, 31, 224–228. [CrossRef]
- Steele, J. R., & Brown, J. D. (1995). Adolescent room culture: Studying media in the context of everyday life. *Journal of youth and Adolescence*, 24, 551–576. [CrossRef]
- Studiul Insights PulseZ. (2022). *Studiul insights pulseZ (Ediția a III-a). Efectul TikTok Asupra Generației Z: 1 Din 5 Tineri Își Dorește Să Devină Celebru (București, 28 Septembrie 2022). Izi data*. Available online: <https://izidata.ro/studii/studiul-insights-pulsez-efectul-social-media-asupra-generatiei-z-1-din-5-tineri-isi-doreste-sa-devina-celebru/> (accessed on 29 July 2025).
- Swart, J. (2021). Experiencing algorithms: How young people understand, feel about, and engage with algorithmic news selection on social media. *Social Media+Society*, 7, 20563051211008828. [CrossRef]
- Tannenbaum, C. (2011). Effective teachers/inspired students: The critical role of teachers in *Yeshiva* high schools. *Religious Education*, 106, 550–566.
- Using media*. (2025). Living Democracy.
- Vrontis, D., Makrides, A., Christofi, M., & Thrassou, A. (2021). Social media influencer marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 45, 617–644. [CrossRef]
- Wang, Y. (2024). Cognitive and sociocultural dynamics of self-regulated use of machine translation and generative AI tools in academic EFL writing. *System*, 126, 103505. [CrossRef]
- Ward, L. M., & Grower, P. (2020). Media and the development of gender role stereotypes. *Annual Review of Developmental Psychology*, 2, 177–199. [CrossRef]
- Watts, L. L., Frame, M. C., Moffett, R. G., Van Hein, J. L., & Hein, M. (2015). The relationship between gender, perceived career barriers, and occupational aspirations. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 45, 10–22. [CrossRef]
- WHO. (2025). *World Health Organization*. Available online: <https://www.who.int/> (accessed on 19 June 2025).

- Winter, K., Moor, I., Markert, J., Bilz, L., Bucksch, J., Dadaczynski, K., Fischer, S. M., Helmchen, R. M., Kaman, A., & Möckel, J. (2024). Concept and methodology of the health behaviour in school-aged children (HBSC) study—insights into the current 2022 survey and trends in Germany. *Journal of Health Monitoring*, 9, 99. [[PubMed](#)]
- Zhang, H., Lee, I., Ali, S., DiPaola, D., Cheng, Y., & Breazeal, C. (2023). Integrating ethics and career futures with technical learning to promote AI literacy for middle school students: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education*, 33, 290–324. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]

**Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.