

PERCEPTIONS OF CYRIL AND METHODIUS AMONG FOREIGN SLOVAKS¹

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Abstract: MATURKANIČ, Patrik – MEDZIHORSKÝ, Štefan – LEPEŠKA, Jan – AKIMJAK, Amantius – HEISER, František – ŠURÁB, Marian. *Perceptions of Cyril and Methodius among Foreign Slovaks*. The primary objective of this study is to present, interpret, and apply the findings of a quantitative study focused on the perception of Cyril and Methodius' significance among Slovaks living abroad. This topic holds considerable potential for examining cultural identity and national consciousness within diasporic communities. The research was conducted between November 2023 and January 2024 and included 630 respondents: 59.5% women (N = 375) and 40.5% men (N = 255). The study provides valuable insights into how historical figures such as Saints Cyril and Methodius are perceived and how their legacy resonates among Slovaks living outside their homeland. The findings revealed notable gender differences in the perception of Cyril and Methodius. Moreover, the results indicated significant generational disparities among foreign Slovaks, with older generations demonstrating a stronger connection to religious traditions. The study also highlighted regional differences, as respondents from rural areas with fewer than 1,000 residents exhibited distinct perspectives compared to those residing in large cities. The discussion section contextualizes these findings within broader interdisciplinary frameworks, emphasizing the practical implications of the acquired knowledge. The study seeks to offer concrete recommendations for strengthening connections to national heritage, particularly among foreign Slovaks. It also highlights the potential divergence in perceptions of Cyril and Methodius between Slovaks abroad and those residing in Slovakia.

Keywords: *Cyril and Methodius, Slavic missionaries, tradition, foreign Slovaks, quantitative research*

Introduction

The awareness of Cyril and Methodius plays a significant role in shaping cultural identity and heritage among Slovaks living abroad, particularly outside Slovakia. Saints Cyril and Methodius, recognized as Church Fathers, played a crucial role in the Christianization of the Slavs in the 9th century. Their contribution to the development of a written script and the translation of liturgical texts into Slavic languages, including Old Slavonic, is deeply rooted in European history and

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culture (Ivanič et al. 2023, 15-30). The influence of this heritage varies across Slovak communities abroad. Some communities maintain a strong awareness of their legacy, continuing to honor these saints through various celebrations and traditions. Others may have a less direct connection to these historical figures, yet still acknowledge their historical significance for the Slavic world and Christianity.

For many Slovaks abroad, the awareness of Cyril and Methodius serves as a means of preserving and presenting their cultural roots, as well as strengthening their social and communal bonds. One example is the celebration of the feast days of Saints Cyril and Methodius, which reinforces a sense of belonging and connection among individuals who share the same philosophical and religious values (Plašienková 2013, 665-678; Kondrla et al. 2023, 78-92).

Today, the influence of Cyril and Methodius' legacy among Slovaks abroad remains relevant, though it is shaped by various factors such as migration, globalization, and secularization (Petrikovičová et al. 2023, 468-483). Nevertheless, their cultural and religious heritage continues to be a significant aspect of Slovak identity beyond Slovakia's borders (Lenovský – Slobodová Nováková 2023, 150-167).

Objective of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to present, interpret, and apply the findings of quantitative research on the perception of Cyril and Methodius among Slovaks living abroad. This research holds significant potential for exploring cultural identity and national awareness within diasporic communities.

Sub-objectives (Hypotheses)

The study examines the following hypotheses using the Pearson chi-square test:

- Do responses significantly differ between men and women?
- Are there significant differences in responses across age groups?
- Does the place of residence (village, town, or city) significantly influence the respondents' answers?

Methods

Research Design

The research design of this study was selected based on the research objectives and the available measurement methods. A non-experimental comparative research design was employed, with data analyzed using basic descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The research sample was obtained through purposive sampling, targeting Slovaks living abroad. Data collection was conducted over a three-month period, from November 2023 to January 2024, using an online questionnaire, distributed via links.

Methods of Statistical Processing

The results were examined through descriptive statistics, contingency tables and a contingency table variability test. The variable independence test assumes that the random variables X and Y are independent, so the values of one variable do not affect the values of the other variable. The dependence between variables can be either one-sided (asymmetric) or mutual (symmetric), in which case both variables interact with each other. Pearson's chi-square test was used to test the independence of two categorical variables in the PivotTable, regardless of the direction of their dependence. The null hypothesis of this test assumes that both variables are independent of each other. This hypothesis was tested at the determined level of significance (α), with independence as the null hypothesis and dependence as the alternative. The hypotheses are written as follows:

$$H_0: n_{ij} = \frac{n_{i.} * n_{.j}}{n}$$

$$H_1: n_{ij} \neq \frac{n_{i.} * n_{.j}}{n},$$

when indicates the frequencies in the PivotTable where $i = 1, 2, \dots, r$ denotes the categories of the variable X and $j = 1, 2, \dots, s$ denotes the categories of the variable Y.

The test criterion χ^2 is defined as:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^r \sum_{j=1}^s \frac{(n_{ij} - n'_{ij})^2}{n'_{ij}}$$

where $\chi^2 \approx \chi^2 [(r-1) (s-1)]$. The larger the differences between the categories of the examined variables, the larger the test criterion χ^2 .

The prerequisite for using this test is that theoretical frequencies where there are less than 5 observations make up less than 20 % of the PivotTable fields. Individual categories of variables can be combined to meet this assumption. The data were processed using the statistical program SPSS (version 23) and MS Office Excel.

Research file

Data were collected from November 2023 to January 2024. A total of 630 respondents were interviewed, of which 40.5% were men (N = 255) and 59.5% were women (N = 375).

Filling language

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
SVK	585	92,8
ENG	15	2,4
ESP	30	4,8
Total	630	100

Gender

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Man	255	40,5
Women	375	59,5
Total	630	100,0

Representation of age groups

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
15-25 years	116	18,4
26-40 years	125	19,8
41-60 years	273	43,3
61-74 years	79	12,6
75-90 years	37	5,9
Total	630	100,0

Religious confession

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Without religion	92	14,6
Christian	480	76,2
Jewish	11	1,7
Eastern religions and similar ones	10	1,6
Your own faith	32	5,1
Other	5	0,8
Total	630	100,0

Highest education level

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Basic education	55	8,7
Secondary education without high school diploma	49	7,8
Secondary education with high school diploma	154	24,4
Higher professional education	33	5,2
University education	270	42,9
Postgraduate education (MBA, BBA, DBA, MSc, LL.M...)	26	4,1
Postgraduate scientific education (PhD., Prof...)	43	6,9
Total	630	100,0

Place of residence (continent)

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Europe	527	83,7
Asia	10	1,6
North America	33	5,2
South America	31	4,9
Africa	11	1,7
Australia	18	2,9
Total	630	100,0

Place of residence (population)

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Up to 1,000 inhabitants	80	12,7
1,001 to 5,000 inhabitants	125	19,8
5,001 to 20,000 inhabitants	103	16,4
20,001 to 100,000 inhabitants	121	19,2
More than 100,000 inhabitants	201	31,9
Total	630	100,0

The results

Measuring instruments

We did not use standardized questionnaires in our research. Instead, we designed a sociometric questionnaire that also included items on basic demographic data. Participants answered four questions. In the following section, we present the data in frequency tables. In the final question, respondents had the option to select multiple answers. Therefore, the results are presented in terms of both absolute frequency (N) and relative frequency (%) based on the total number of respondents.

A) Have you ever had the opportunity to get acquainted with the personalities of the Slavic missionaries, Saints Cyril and Methodius?

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Yes	588	93,3
No	42	6,7
I don't want to comment	0	0,0
Total	630	100,0

B) Do you know the date on which Saints Cyril and Methodius Day (a national and religious holiday), also known as the Day of Slovaks Abroad, is celebrated annually in Slovakia and within the Slovak community?

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
July 5	455	72,2
August 15	21	3,3
August 29	17	2,7
September 15	18	2,9
November 1	8	1,3
I do not know	111	17,6
Total	630	100,0

C) How would you describe your perception of the Slavic missionaries Saints Cyril and Methodius?

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Very positively	330	52,4
Rather positively	135	21,4
Neutrally	109	17,3
Rather negatively	5	0,8
Very negatively	0	0
I don't know/don't wish to answer	51	8,1
Total	630	100,0

D) In your view, which category best characterises St Cyril and St Methodius?

Answer choices	(N)	(%)	Relative frequency given the number of resp. (%)
Historical	362	28,3	57,5
Philosophical	102	8,0	16,2
Political	74	5,8	11,7
Cultural	250	19,6	39,7
Religious	457	35,8	72,5
I don't know/don't wish to answer	32	2,5	5,1
Total	1277	100,0	

Dependency Results

This section presents statistically significant differences calculated using Pearson's chi-square test for variable independence in a contingency table.

A) Comparison by Gender

The research findings indicate that women were significantly more likely than men to have heard of the work of Saints Cyril and Methodius (97.9% of women compared with 86.7% of men). This difference is statistically significant, as demonstrated by a p-value of 0.000 from Pearson's chi-square test.

This discrepancy can be explained by the tendency of women to engage more frequently in religious and cultural activities, which may include education about historical figures such as Cyril and Methodius. In certain communities, women are more likely to attend religious and cultural events or maintain stronger connections to spiritual traditions, which may contribute to greater awareness of key historical figures associated with the spread of Christianity (Ďatelinka – Judák, 2023, 34-46; Hamarová et al. 2024, 138-147).

B) Comparison by Age

The results reveal significant differences in awareness of Saints Cyril and Methodius among different age groups. The highest awareness levels were recorded among respondents aged 41–60 years (97.4%) and 61–74 years (100%), while the lowest awareness was found in the 15–25 age group (83.6%). This difference is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.000 from Pearson's chi-square test.

These generational differences may be attributed to educational and cultural influences. Older generations (41–60 years and 61–74 years) likely grew up during periods when history and traditions, including the role of Cyril and Methodius, were more strongly emphasized in religious and school education. During these times, national and historical figures were often highlighted as part of cultural identity formation.

Conversely, younger individuals (15–25 years) have access to a broad spectrum of information through digital media (Boulianne – Theocharis 2018, 111-127), which may lead them to focus on global cultural and contemporary topics rather than national history. This shift could result in reduced attention to traditional historical figures, such as Cyril and Methodius, who may be perceived as belonging to a more distant historical context (Hetényi – Ivanič 2017, 77-91).

C) Comparison by Size of the Residence Location

The findings indicate a notable difference in awareness of Cyril and Methodius between residents of small villages (with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants) and those living in towns and cities (with 1,000 or more inhabitants). Awareness was significantly lower among village residents (78.8%) compared to those in larger municipalities (95–96%). This difference is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.000 from Pearson's chi-square test.

A possible explanation for this disparity is that people living in larger cities have greater access to cultural and educational institutions, such as museums, cultural centers, schools, and libraries, which often provide programs focused on national heritage and history (Petrikovičová et al. 2022, 15589). Additionally, urban areas serve as hubs for cultural and historical education (Judák et al. 2023b, 514-525; Petrikovičová et al. 2024, 148-154), where awareness of historical figures such as Cyril and Methodius is more frequently emphasized.

Discussion

1. The results of the study related to the first question, “*Have you heard of the Slavic missionaries Sts. Cyril and Methodius and their work?*”, indicate a high level of awareness, with 93% of respondents answering positively. This finding suggests that Slovaks living abroad possess a strong

awareness of historical figures who played a significant role in the development of Slovak culture and religious identity. However, it is also important to acknowledge that 42 respondents (6.7%), primarily from the 15–25-year-old age group, reported having no prior knowledge of Cyril and Methodius. It is likely that this younger Generation Z cohort is less engaged with historical and cultural narratives, which may contribute to their lack of familiarity with these Slavic missionaries. Additionally, modern information consumption habits and an emphasis on contemporary issues such as technology, politics, and economics (Fiľa et al. 2024, 231-241; Viglaský – Tóthová 2024, 242-254) may lead younger individuals to prioritize present-day challenges over historical events, which they may perceive as distant or less relevant. This question also highlighted differences in religious traditions. Among respondents from large cities with over 100,000 inhabitants, 31.9% belonged to the youngest age group, who also demonstrated a greater diversity of religious affiliations or a lack of religious identification altogether. This may correlate with a lower interest in figures associated primarily with the spread of Christianity (Králik 2015, 183-189). Addressing this issue in public discourse requires an approach that acknowledges religious pluralism with respect and openness (Judák et al. 2023c, 85-99; Akimjak et al. 2022, 47-54). For those who do not identify with Christianity or who adhere to different religious beliefs, it is essential to emphasize the broader cultural and linguistic impact of historical figures like Cyril and Methodius. Their contributions extend beyond religious contexts, influencing literacy, language development, and cultural heritage, which remain relevant to all individuals, regardless of their religious affiliation (Krupa 2024, 1-15; Stranovská et al. 2023, 20-33).

2. The second research question examined awareness of a key national and religious holiday among Slovak expatriate communities: *“Do you know the date on which Sts. Cyril and Methodius Day (a national and religious holiday), also known as the Day of Foreign Slovaks, is celebrated annually in Slovakia and among the Slovak community?”*

A significant 75% of respondents (N = 455) correctly identified July 5 as the date of this celebration. This high level of awareness likely stems from the cultural and religious importance of the holiday, as 76.2% of respondents identified as Christian. Cyril and Methodius were not only Christian missionaries but also creators of the Glagolitic script, which facilitated the development of Slavic literacy and religious texts in the vernacular language. As a result, this holiday serves as a commemoration of both Christian traditions and the cultural legacy left by Cyril and Methodius in Slovakia (Krogmann et al. 2023, 78-91).

The holiday also carries political and national significance. It serves as a reminder of the Slovak diaspora and its heritage, offering Slovaks living abroad an opportunity to celebrate their cultural identity and national affiliation. More broadly, Sts. Cyril and Methodius Day holds international relevance, as it connects Slovaks worldwide, regardless of their country of residence.

However, 17.6% of respondents (N = 111) were unable to provide an answer, indicating a certain level of disinterest or lack of awareness, similar to the patterns observed in the first question. This finding highlights the need for more effective strategies to enhance public awareness of these historical figures and their relevance to cultural and national identity.

Potential solutions include the implementation of innovative educational approaches, such as school curricula, religious and historical workshops, and public awareness initiatives. Additionally, integrating Cyril and Methodius' contributions into cultural and historical discussions and making their legacy more accessible to younger generations through modern communication channels could help bridge the awareness gap (Tkáčová 2025, 25; Hladush 2023, 18-34; Tkáčová 2024, 1218).

3. The third research question asked: *“How would you describe your perception of the figures of the Slavic missionaries Sts. Cyril and Methodius?”* 465 respondents (73.8%) provided a positive assessment, a result that aligns with the findings of previous questions. A neutral stance was

reported by nearly one-fifth of the respondents (N = 109; 17.3%), while a notable proportion of participants either did not know or chose not to respond at all (N = 51; 8.1%).

The presence of this “one-fifth disengagement”, particularly among younger generations, may be linked to a tendency toward individual self-sufficiency and pragmatism, rather than a focus on traditional religious values or historical-national symbols (Judák et al. 2023a, 218-234).

The study recorded only a marginal number of negative perceptions of Saints Cyril and Methodius (N = 5; 0.8%). Such responses may stem from religious or political considerations. From a religious perspective, some respondents may view the spread of Christianity among the Slavic nations as a form of religious colonization. Cyril and Methodius, as missionaries, introduced Christianity to regions where other religious traditions had already existed, leading to possible perceptions of forced conversion (Krupa 2022, 160-169).

Beyond the religious mission, a political dimension is also apparent. The Byzantine Empire actively sought to expand its influence in Great Moravia and other Slavic territories. Some respondents may interpret their mission as part of a broader geopolitical strategy, potentially perceiving it as a form of manipulation or political dominance.

4. The final question explored the respondents’ classification of Cyril and Methodius through the inquiry: “*In your view, which category best characterizes Sts. Cyril and Methodius?*” Among the six available choices, the religious and historical dimensions were the most frequently selected (35.8% and 28.3%, respectively), aligning with their relative frequency within the respondent pool (72.5% and 57.5%).

This finding confirms that Cyril and Methodius are primarily recognized as missionaries (Adam – Trstenský 2024, 53-67; Botek 2023, 201-217) who spread Christianity among the Slavic nations, particularly in Great Moravia. Their work in translating biblical texts and liturgical ceremonies into Old Church Slavonic was instrumental in disseminating the Christian faith. From a historical perspective, their activities had a crucial and irreplaceable impact on the development of Central and Eastern European nations.

The third most frequently chosen category was the cultural dimension, supported by both absolute numbers (19.6%) and relative frequency (39.7%). A significant proportion of Slovaks living abroad perceive Cyril and Methodius primarily as cultural innovators, given their role in the creation of the Glagolitic script. This development enabled Slavs to access written texts in their native language, laying the foundation for the emergence of Slavic literature and intellectual traditions. Their contributions thus had a lasting impact not only on religion but also on language and literary development (Krupa 2023, 23-39; Stranovská – Szabó 2024, 419-434).

While the study’s positive findings are encouraging, they must not lead to complacency, as deeper trends deserving further attention may be present. When considering the perception of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in religious, historical, and cultural contexts, it is essential to focus on applicative strategies to enhance awareness and engagement.

One promising avenue is the integration of modern psychology within pedagogical frameworks (Kondrla et al. 2024, 73-84) to strengthen positive perceptions while addressing potential apathy or negative reactions across generations (Petrovič et al. 2024, 54-74).

Moreover, the use of social media for the promotion of cultural heritage presents an opportunity to engage younger audiences in innovative ways (Pysarchuk et al. 2024, 75-86). Creative campaigns and interactive content that connect historical figures with contemporary themes, such as values, modern technology, tolerance, and global diversity, offer an effective means of fostering interest and accelerating knowledge dissemination (Tkáčová – Pavlíková 2024, 96-109; Tkáčová – Slivka 2024, 1).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the primary objective of this study – to present, interpret, and apply the findings of a quantitative research study focusing on the perception of Sts. Cyril and Methodius among Slovaks living abroad—has been largely fulfilled. Based on a substantial sample of 630 respondents, the study found that Slovaks residing across five continents predominantly identify with the Christian faith. The vast majority of these individuals regard Sts. Cyril and Methodius as historical figures who have had a positive influence not only on the history of the Slovak nation but also on those who, even abroad, continue to identify with their legacy (Maturkanič et al., 2022, 161-176; Javor 2023, 62-77).

One of the primary limitations of the research lies in the scope of outreach and electronic dissemination, particularly in engaging Slovak expatriate communities outside of Europe. Expanding the reach of the study to a broader range of communities worldwide would provide a more comprehensive picture.

Another limitation pertains to the age distribution balance within the sample, particularly in the 61–74 and 75–90 age categories. These age groups may require additional motivational strategies for participation, potentially through targeted outreach within senior communities (Paľa et al. 2024, 563-580; Budayová et al. 2024, 156-169).

The legacy of Sts. Cyril and Methodius remains a relevant and continuously evolving subject of international religious studies. The study highlights the importance of raising awareness of this heritage, particularly among younger generations, who tend to be less familiar with its historical and cultural significance.

As discussed in the application aspects outlined in the discussion section, further exploration of pastoral and educational dimensions of this “heritage of our forefathers” is warranted. This area offers a broad research space for various interdisciplinary topics, including social-missionary studies and anthropological-religious themes, which focus on spiritual celebration and human well-being (Plašienková 2016, 246-248; Máhrik et al. 2024, 34-43; Králik 2024, 1-10).

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