

UNIVERSITY OF SARAJEVO
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

MASTER THESIS

**IMPACT OF GENERATION Z VALUES AND ATTITUDES ON
THEIR CONSUMER BEHAVIOR**

Sarajevo, January 2024

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U skladu sa članom 54. Pravila studiranja za I, II ciklus studija, integrisani, stručni i specijalistički studij na Univerzitetu u Sarajevu, daje se

IZJAVA O AUTENTIČNOSTI RADA

Ja, AJLA HODŽIĆ, studentica drugog (II) ciklusa studija, broj index-a 5349-74997 na programu FM & MM, smjer MARKETING MANAGEMENT, izjavljujem da sam završni rad na temu:

IMPACT OF GENERATION Z VALUES AND ATTITUDES ON THEIR CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

pod mentorstvom Maja Arslanagić-Kalajdžić PhD, izradila samostalno i da se zasniva na rezultatima mog vlastitog istraživanja. Rad ne sadrži prethodno objavljene ili neobjavljene materijale drugih autora, osim onih koji su priznati navođenjem literature i drugih izvora informacija uključujući i alate umjetne inteligencije.

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to comprehensively investigate Generation Z's consumer behavior, focusing on the influence of their values, attitudes, digital proficiency, and exposure to extensive product data. By conducting qualitative research through carefully selected focus groups of 16 participants aged 18 to 26, representative of Generation Z, this study delves into their unique characteristics and behaviors. The findings reveal that Generation Z's consumer choices are significantly shaped by their values, including a strong emphasis on personality expression, independence, and social connection. Furthermore, their comfort with technology and reliance on digital sources for information play a pivotal role in shaping their purchasing decisions. The exposure to vast amounts of product information online presents both opportunities and challenges, with the fear of missing out (FOMO) and choice overload influencing their purchase decisions. Businesses and organizations targeting Generation Z should align marketing strategies with their values, prioritize technological convenience, and leverage social media to enhance brand perception. This research contributes valuable insights into understanding the ever-evolving consumer behavior of Generation Z, highlighting the need for adaptability in marketing strategies and consumer engagement. As this demographic continues to wield its purchasing power and influence, those who align with their values and preferences are poised for success in the evolving marketplace. Therefore, comprehending Generation Z's consumer behavior is not only an academic pursuit but a practical necessity for future success.

SAŽETAK

Ovo istraživanje ima za cilj ispitati potrošačko ponašanje Generacije Z, fokusirajući se na uticaj njihovih vrijednosti, stavova, digitalne vještine i izloženosti velikoj količini informacija o proizvodima. Sprovedenjem kvalitativnog istraživanja kroz pažljivo odabrane fokus grupe od 16 učesnika u dobi od 18 do 26 godina, koji su reprezentativni za Generaciju Z, ovo istraživanje dublje analizira njihove jedinstvene karakteristike i ponašanje. Rezultati otkrivaju da su potrošački izbori Generacije Z značajno oblikovani njihovim vrijednostima, uz naglasak na izražavanje njihove ličnosti, nezavisnost i društvenu povezanost. Nadalje, njihovo poznavanje tehnologije i oslanjanje na digitalne izvore informacija igraju ključnu ulogu u oblikovanju njihovih odluka o kupovini. Izloženost velikim količinama informacija o proizvodima kroz pristup Interetu predstavlja i prilike i izazove, pri čemu strah od propuštanja (FOMO) i prevelika mogućnost izbor utiču na njihovo potrošačko ponašanje. Kompanije i organizacije usmjerene na Generaciju Z trebaju uskladiti marketinške strategije s vrijednostima ove generacije, dati prednost tehnološkoj praktičnosti i iskoristiti društvene mreže kako bi poboljšali percepciju brenda. Ovo istraživanje pruža značajne uvide u razumijevanje stalno evoluirajućeg ponašanja potrošača Generacije Z, ističući potrebu za prilagodbom marketinških strategija i učešće potrošača u cjelokupnom procesu. Kako ova demografska grupa nastavlja koristiti svoju kupovnu moć i uticaj, očekuje se da će kompanije koje se usklade s njihovim vrijednostima

i preferencijama bilježiti uspjeh na dinamičnom tržištu. Stoga, razumijevanje potrošačkog ponašanja Generacije Z nije važno samo kroz samo akademski pristup, već i kao praktična nužnost za budući uspjeh.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the topic of Generation Z consumer behavior, more precisely the values and attitudes shaping their buying preferences and habits. The justification for this research problem lies in the unique characteristics and behaviors exhibited by Generation Z, individuals born after 1995, which have significant implications for various sectors, including business and marketing. Generation Z values freedom, independence, technology, financial responsibility, education, and social connection, which are all shaping their preferences and attitudes (Yazıcı, 2006; Kahawandala *et al.*, 2020; Akduman, 2020). Their strong focus on technology and online research, coupled with their purchasing power, positions them as a transformative force in the consumer landscape (Wijaya *et al.*, 2020). Distinct values of Generation Z members, such as the emphasis on experiences, purpose-driven consumption, and social and environmental responsibility, challenge traditional marketing strategies (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). However, despite their influence, limited research has been conducted on Generation Z due to their youthfulness, presenting an opportunity to contribute valuable insights (Dolot, 2018). Understanding how Generation Z values, digital proficiency, and exposure to vast amounts of online product data influence their consumer behavior and decision-making is essential for businesses and organizations aiming to connect with this demographic effectively.

The purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of Generation Z's consumer behavior by examining the influence of their values, attitudes, influence from their environment as well as digital proficiency, and exposure to extensive product data. This study aims to contribute valuable insights to uncovering the core values that drive Generation Z's consumer choices. With Generation Z being digital natives, the research investigates how their comfort with technology and reliance on digital sources for information influence their consumer behavior and shape their purchasing decisions. The study also examines how the exposure to vast amounts of product information, often found online, impacts Generation Z's buying behavior. It investigates whether the fear of missing out (FOMO) and choice overload affect their purchase decisions. The research aims to offer insights for businesses and organizations targeting Generation Z and meeting the preferences of this influential demographic while contributing to the existing body of knowledge.

When it comes to the research questions of this paper, this research aims to give insight into:

- What are the underlying values and attitudes of Generation Z and in which ways do they affect their consumer behavior?
- Do technological improvements affect Generation Z's shopping habits?
- How do Generation Z consumers approach risk, in the context of the large amount of

data available?

The research adopted a qualitative approach, using focus groups to gain profound insights into the personal opinions, feelings, and attitudes of a carefully selected group of 16 participants aged 18 to 26, representative of Generation Z. This method allows for flexible discussions and the emergence of new ideas. Participants came from diverse backgrounds, including various genders, age ranges within Generation Z, and living arrangements, with an intentional avoidance of biases related to financial or marital status, or occupation.

The thesis is structured into three chapters, each focusing on different aspects of Generation Z's behavior, values, attitudes, and consumer behavior. Chapter Generation Z Behavioral Characteristics introduces Generation Z and examines their core values and behaviors, including their emphasis on freedom, independence, technology, and social connections. It highlights the factors that shape their unique perspectives and presents challenges and opportunities for businesses. The chapter delves into Generation Z's role as consumers, emphasizing their significant purchasing power and influence on future commerce. It explores their preferences, motivators, and their impact on retail marketing. Chapter Generation Z Values and Attitudes explores the values and attitudes that drive Generation Z's consumer behavior. It looks at how their personal values influence their decision-making, the impact of the digital environment on their attitudes, and how large amounts of product data affect their purchase decisions. This section also discusses strategies for targeting Generation Z, considering their values and preferences. It covers aspects like the influence of technology, the importance of convenience, and the role of social media in shaping their perceptions of brands. Chapter Generation Z Consumer Behavior Motives: Empirical Research presents the empirical research conducted using focus groups. It aims to gain a deeper understanding of how Generation Z's underlying values and attitudes impact their consumer behavior, how technological advancements affect their shopping habits, and how they approach risk in an era of abundant data. The research methodology and participant selection process are explained. The structure of the thesis allows for a comprehensive exploration of Generation Z's behavior, values, and consumer habits, offering insights and recommendations for businesses and organizations looking to engage with this unique and influential demographic.

2. GENERATION Z BEHAVIORAL CHARACTERISTICS

2.1. Generation Z and Their Values

The term Generation Z refers to all individuals born after year 1995 (Cilliers, 2017). As with all previous generations, research has found that members of Generation Z also show a high level of similarity when it comes to their judgments and values. According to Erden-Ayhün (2013), lifestyles, behaviors and value judgments of individuals who are born in a certain period result from the fact that they were born in the certain global context.

Dolot (2018) accentuates the importance of generation grouping in generalizing the behavior of individuals by stating that despite the fact that every person is unique, there have already been several attempts to identify certain groupings of individuals and establish generalizations about them. The word “generations” was coined as one of the effects of generalization. An identifiable group that shares birth years, age locations, and key life experiences at pivotal developmental periods is referred to as a generation (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Mannheim (1952) made significant contributions to the definition of the term “generation,” emphasizing that the phenomena of generations is one of the fundamental causes underlying the dynamics of historical development.

There are different events and social phenomena that can affect the values and behavior of a certain generation, including wars, socioeconomic changes, crises, high development rates, etc. When it comes to Generation Z, one of the most important phenomena that affected their lifestyle and accordingly their values and consumer behavior is the rapid development of technology, increased ease of communication, and exchange of all forms – from information to monetary exchange. Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka (2017) state that it is believed that this generation will experience its adolescence and adulthood during a time of economic and social resurrection. These changes, according to Ayça (2022), affect people and their lifestyles at an unpredictable speed. The results of this situation are evident in many sectors, from medicine to education up to social behavior and in the end buying behavior. Due to all these changes, generations’ abilities differ which results in altered expectations and values.

Dolot (2018) also states that people may think, act, and behave similarly if they spend their lives in comparable circumstances (e.g., economically, historically), are exposed to the same experiences (e.g., culturally, environmentally), and are affected by similar technology.

Values are, as stated by Nadel (1993), the motives and driving forces for action, and as such, they ultimately determine the particular effects of recognized reinforcers. When talking about the population in general, values are changed on a global level by putting emphasis on achievements and materialism, as stated by Basanez *et al.* (1998):

Advanced industrial societies are now changing their basic value system in a number of related ways. Increasing emphasis on individual economic achievement was one of the crucial changes that made modernization possible (...) social status became something that an individual could achieve, rather than something into which one was born (Basanez et al., 1998, p. 10).

They proceed, stating that an increase in valuing economic achievement by our modern society creates a path for highly valuing the quality of living which, as a result, implies valuing a self-disciplined, self-denying society that is achievement-oriented (Basanez *et al.*, 1998).

Based on the previous research on Generation Z, it has been found that these individuals value freedom in the first place, but at the same time, they highly value their family safety and afterlife security (Yazıcı, 2006). The importance of safety for Generation Z is also discussed by Kahawandala *et al.* (2020), stating that:

As a group raised in constant war, contemporary youth may view the world with the belief that the world is “unsafe,” yet at the same time, they may have greater global awareness as a result (Kahawandala et al., 2020:159).

Besides having freedom as an important value, Generation Z also does not like authority and wants to make their own decisions (Akduman, 2020). This generation is highly independent, in terms of wanting to make decisions independently and learn in that way with self-made conditions. According to Pekel *et al.* (2020), Gen Z members are not inclined to take orders. Generation Z members usually consider their parents as conservative, and they want to live alone (Altunbay & Bıçak, 2018).

Some of the Generation Z general values discovered from previous research are also security, self-direction, achievement, power, and hedonism but also religiosity and conformity (Doğan, 2018), as well as freedom, personalization, scrutiny, speed and innovation (Tapscott, 2009). When it comes to the religious values of Generation Z, Gökçe and Tekin (2021) state that Generation Z members put emphasis on the individual dimension of religion, in terms of religion as a way to make them feel good.

This is the Generation that values knowledge and research and always wants to learn more, so it is not a surprise that Generation Z individuals tend to research religion online. Speaking of online research, we are mentioning an important element affecting Generation Z values which is a technological advance that makes a large amount of data easily accessible. Generation Z is the most equipped generation in terms of technology, global relations, and education (Kaplan & Çarıkçı, 2018), which in the end can leave Generation Z individuals feeling pressured in many areas of life (Ceylan-Dadakoğlu *et al.*, 2023).

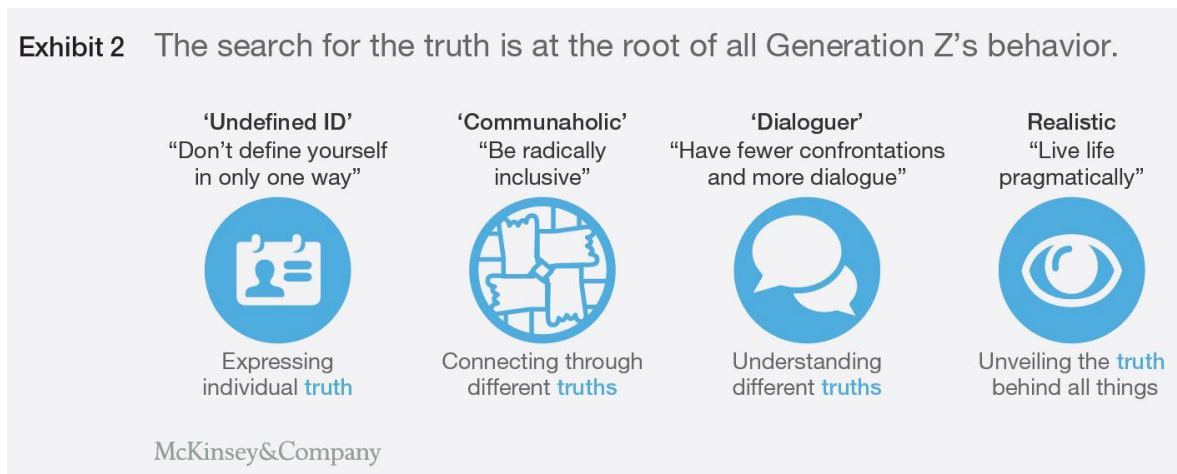
When it comes to pressure for success, Yadav and Rai (2017) state that from an early age, Gen Z was exposed to the rapidly changing nature of technology, an approachable educational system, disposable income, and incredibly supportive families, all of which influenced them to be highly successful, adaptable to change, technical naturals, diverse, and more task-oriented.

The literature on Generation Z also identifies traits that would indicate members of this group would wish to instantly and effortlessly launch a successful professional career. They find it challenging to imagine developing their professional careers over the long term by taking small steps (Dolot, 2018).

According to Francis & Hoefel (2018), their research gave results that identify four key Gen Z behaviors, all of which are rooted in this generation's pursuit of the truth (Fig. 1). Gen Z individuals respect personal expression and they have a strong belief in the power of

communication to resolve disputes and make the world a better place. Hysa (2016) states that Generation Z is the most educated and sophisticated ever.

Figure 1. Gen Z and the search for the truth



Source: Francis & Hoefel, 'True Gen': Generation Z and its implications for companies, McKinsey & Company,

http://www.drthomaswu.com/uicmpaccsmac/Gen%20Z.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2T_UDHUHDadk tHZlxQDTlctmin- URLjhuxhNM5v3WUEGgyFjSnP2Jt6yE (3.5.2023)

Generation Z is the one that highly values financial responsibility and education but at the same time tolerance and occupational flexibility. Systems and quicker reactions are preferred by Gen Z (Kahawandala *et al.*, 2020).

When it comes to occupational flexibility, Dolot (2018) also states that Generation Z is willing to switch jobs frequently in search of variety and a break from the mundane, and they do not value job security. The author proceeds by stating that they are job seekers who travel the world in search of employment due to the fact that adaptability and fluency in other languages are their significant values. For Generation Z, what posed a danger to previous generations is now a source of intrigue and exploration.

Research done by Tari-Kasnakoğlu *et al.* (2020), the majority of Generation Z representatives spend a lot of time in a day with their friends and family, chatting and sharing their day. However, many members of Generation Z like to spend their time after school using social media, rather than being outdoors with their friends, in shopping malls, or at their friends' places. This implies a high level of virtualization of social life. They are less about face-to-face communication, but they highly value being socially connected with everyone, and getting regular feedback (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021).

Dolot (2018) also accentuates the importance of feedback for Generation Z, by stating that it is evident that young people who use the Internet, particularly social media, have become accustomed to "liking" various things, commenting on reality, assessing the products and services they use, where they spend their time, etc. They are accustomed to communicating

their ideas, and they provide feedback, but they also anticipate it, and they see communication as taking place in both directions. According to the author, all of this leads to the conclusion that this generation appears to place a high value on expecting feedback. This importance of social connection for Generation Z individuals is also confirmed by the findings of Kahawandala *et al.* (2020) that the majority of Generation Z individuals emphasize how important networking skills are.

An attitude is thought of as a declaration of support for or opposition to a thing, a concept, or a person. According to the experiences and motivations of the individual, attitude may also be defined as their internal assessment of their propensity or orientation towards a person, character, or thing. Additionally, attitudes vary according to the motivations elicited toward a given stimulus in the form of a concept, a person, or a product, making the formulation of an attitude highly dependent on the location of the elicited phenomena (Raza, Bakar, & Mohamad, 2017). Generation Z puts a lot of importance on a positive attitude, highly valuing opportunity and space to grow and develop themselves (Universum, 2017).

Finally, they are extremely analytical and they value being pragmatic in their decision-making. In contrast with the previous generation of the Millennials, who started out in an age of economic prosperity and are more self-centered, Gen Zers are more open to hearing opposing viewpoints and are less idealistic, combative, and aggressive (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). The widespread opinion is that Generation Z is the most technologically adept and fashion-conscious of all previous generations (Fazith & Nithya, 2023).

As stated by Kahawandala *et al.* (2020), many Generation Z kids may have experienced financial difficulties in their homes, which has made them acutely aware of the value of money. As a result, saving may be very important to them.

When it comes to analyzing the values of a certain generation, it can be connected with the lifestyle patterns measurement, introduced by William Lazer in 1963. According to lifestyle segmentation research, a person's activities are measured in terms of how they spend their time, their interests, or what they value in their immediate environment, how they see themselves and the world, and some fundamental characteristics, like their stage in life, income, level of education, and place of residence (Plummer, 1974).

All of these elements highly affect the values and attitudes of an individual. One of the key predictors of behavioral intention is one's attitude toward behavior, and action is thought to be predicted specifically by behavioral intention (Raza, Bakar, & Mohamad, 2017). For example, a member of Generation Z belongs to the first generation to be born into an internet-connected world and as a result, "lives and breathes" technology. When we connect with the context of higher education, where Generation Z students prefer to record lectures on their computers rather than take notes, they end up being more likely to ask questions, seek entertainment and incentive, and dislike waiting for a response in favor of instantaneous information and communication (Daukseviciute, 2016; Rothman, 2016).

Researchers note that it has become more difficult for Generation Z to be exact or able to concentrate on long- term memory tasks because of applications that facilitate multitasking (Csobanka, 2016).

When it comes to beliefs, it is important to state that according to Schroth (2019), a decent percentage of Generation Z believe that they will fail when taking a leadership role. That fear of failing is accompanied by growing up in an overprotective parenting culture, where young people nowadays are often taken the opportunity to learn some important life skills (Haidt & Lukianoff, 2019).

According to Kahawandala *et al.* (2020), Generation Z is more varied than those before because they grew up during a time when the bi-racial and minority population increased quickly, making many questions not considered a topic for discussion. Authors also state members of Generation Z have poor interpersonal skills and poor listening abilities, and their communication is usually reliant on the use of the World Wide Web to a high extent. On the other hand, Dolot (2018) states that the ability of Generation Z to function in both the physical and digital worlds is highlighted by experts and that individuals of Generation Z regard these two worlds as complementary to one another, thus they may readily transition between them.

Francis and Hoefel (2018) conclude that young people have always been a powerful force in shaping trends and behavior because they represent the current pulse of their cultures. With the pursuit of truth at the core of its distinctive behavior and consumption habits, Gen Z the first generation of true digital natives is now exerting an outer effect. Young people nowadays are more connected than ever before to one another and to the rest of society thanks to technology.

This increases the significance of generational shifts and accelerates technological trends. This change will present businesses with both difficulties and lucrative opportunities, and being open to opportunities is the first step towards seizing them (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). However, Dolot (2018) states that given that Generation Z is the youngest generation now employed, it presents the most difficulties in determining its age range and is still undergoing little research.

2.2. Generation Z as Consumers

When it comes to understanding the individual or a group as a customer, as well as identifying market categories and segmenting the market, it is important to analyze their lifestyles, values, and attitudes. According to Wijaya *et al.* (2020), understanding lifestyles can be a key component in creating marketing strategies tailored to the target market, particularly for Generation Z, which has established a lifestyle reliant on digital or information technologies.

The advancement of information technology has altered daily routines making them

increasingly digital. With this global change, in which younger generations are taking the main role, it is anticipated that gaining a better grasp of Generation Z's lifestyle can be very useful in many areas of the socioeconomic field. Besides technological changes, Thangavel *et al.* (2019) state that due to the constant political, cultural, and socioeconomic changes that take place in society as a whole, the youthful generation of today loves to shop in ways that are very different from those of earlier generations. Majeed *et al.* (2021) listed shared values, interests, and enthusiasm as the foundation for consumer relationships.

Due to the numerous opportunities created by digitalization and the globalization of economies, Generation Z is widely perceived as having significant purchasing power. Lanvin & Evans (2016), predicted that by 2020 they will make up about 22% of the global workforce and Kahawandala *et al.* (2020) anticipated that by 2020 these "digital natives" would represent around 40% of all consumer spending.

Dolot (2018) presents a distinctive observation about labeling Generation Z by stating that:

None of the previous generations have as many terms as Generation Z, for example, iGeneration, Gen Tech, Online Generation, Post Millennials, Facebook Generation, Switchers, "always clicking". (Dolot, 2018:45)

Given that it is the one driving innovation and change, Generation Z appears to present the greatest marketing challenge in the future (Wood, 2013). Additionally, since both traditional and contemporary marketing concepts are built on the foundation of consumer expectations and the desire to meet them (Baruk & Iwanicka, 2016), as a result, Generation Z is anticipated to have a significant impact on retail marketing strategies from a technology and product-specific standpoint.

Since Gen Z has more influence than any previous generation to redefine production and consumption (Steiner *et al.*, 2016), it is crucial to investigate Generation Z's expectations about the future of commerce as expectations are congruent with the market's progress.

Consumer purchasing intention and perceived value are mediated by perceived brand quality. Products with well-known brand names have an impact on young generation customers' perceptions of the brand's high quality and overall value, which affects their intentions to buy, suggesting that the more valuable something is seen to be, the more likely they are to make a purchase (Majeed *et al.*, 2021).

Besides having influence to redefine production and consumption, Wijaya *et al.* (2020) categorize Generation Z as one that has independent purchasing power and tends to influence family consumption. According to Wijaya *et al.* (2020), this group is also more creative, self-assured, upbeat, and lateral; and prefers to get involved and make an attempt to form relationships. The authors proceed by stating that:

Generation Z has similarities with Generation Y because it is a continuation of Generation

Y, preferring social media in communication and self-expression. Generation Z tends to focus on innovation. This generation was born in the era of internet technology and is instant like touch screen media. Technological innovations become the hope for this group to provide comfort for them (Wijaya et al., 2020:29).

According to Francis & Hoefel (2019), Generation Z's primary motivator for consuming is the pursuit of truth, both on a personal and a collective level. This generation is at ease with having multiple identities. Greater freedom of expression and a greater willingness to understand various types of individuals result from its quest for authenticity:

Companies should be attuned to three implications for this generation: consumption as access rather than possession, consumption as an expression of individual identity, and consumption as a matter of ethical concern (Francis & Hoefel, 2019:2).

Wood (2013) states that Generation Z consumers are most likely to exhibit the following four trends: an emphasis on innovation, a requirement for convenience, a nagging need for security, and a propensity for escape. The author explains this emphasis on innovation by the fact that this Generation has always had more options than previous generations of consumers, making them likely to place a heavy emphasis on design-based or aesthetic differentiation when making purchases.

Convenience requirements are further explained as the increased pressure on Generation Z to succeed at a young age, resulting in a greater reliance on convenience in product attributes (such as time-saving devices or mobile devices), product delivery (such as retail channels that increase ease of acquisition), product experience (such as products that are easy to cook, consume, set-up, etc.), and product messaging (such as ads that are delivered in a shortened manner). The need for security of Generation Z when making purchase decisions is explained by the author as a result of their distinct parental influences and the state of the economy, making them more realistic and scarcity-focused. It's possible that Generation Z is more picky and cautious about where they spend their money. This may produce customers that are very brand-sensitive but not especially brand-loyal, similar to Generation X (Wood, 2013).

As predicted by Browne *et al.* (2004), the buying experience has altered significantly over time, and online shopping has seen a sharp rise in popularity. According to Liu *et al.* (2013), society exchanges information via smartphones, laptops, and multi-touch tablets, and retailing makes use of a variety of cutting-edge (smart) technologies to enhance the shopping experience for customers. This movement of shopping and exchange in general to online platforms, especially by younger generations, is in accordance with Wood's (2013) explanation of the fourth trend of consumption for Generation Z - a propensity for escape.

Technology advancements that make entertainment items like video games more realistic and enticing, provide greater all-day access to social networks and greater mobility in

devices that allow escapism are likely to aid this demand for an opportunity to escape. Since many of the escapism-inducing consumer activities available to young people are computer-based and foster trends in sophisticated virtual interactions, they have a negative impact on their ability to engage in and form real-world relationships. Generation Z is becoming more driven to construct or find “virtual” or “produced” worlds where reality more closely resembles a desired ideal.

Not only does the new digital environment foster the change in consumption habits of society, but age also plays a significant influence in the prism of the new digital culture (Lee, 2009), which explains why there are disparities in the expectations based on different age groups among customers. Having in mind that Generation Z is naturally at ease in the virtual environment since the Internet has always existed for them, this generation has high expectations for the rate of “more, smaller, and better” versions of technical products and is not surprised by product obsolescence (Wood, 2013).

As stated by Majeed *et al.* (2021), according to different research, brand participation, brand image, product quality, brand loyalty, product characteristics, brand awareness, and product quality all have an impact on consumers’ choice to make a purchase. Last but not least, using social media platforms to create, promote, and manage various sites to engage customers increases awareness, product interest, and is likely to affect buying intention.

3. GENERATION Z VALUES AND ATTITUDES

3.1. Values and Attitudes as Motives for Consumer Behavior

Value research has been highly influenced by the theoretical contributions of Milton Rokeach in the area of marketing and consumer behavior since the end of the 1960s. *To say that a person 'has a value', as the author highlighted, is to say that he has an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally and socially preferable to alternative modes of conduct or end-states of existence* (Rokeach, 1968: 167). Therefore, our values are responsible for the selection and maintenance of the ends or goals toward which we strive and, at the same time, regulate the manner in which this striving takes place.

Milton Rokeach's seminal study *The Nature of Human Values* (1973) was extremely influential. In its Preface, Rokeach explicitly stressed that it is difficult for him *to conceive of any problem social scientists might be interested in that would not deeply implicate human values.*

Vinson *et al.* (1977) further adapted Rokeach’s work to marketing and developed three categories of the individual’s belief system in an organization of the customer’s value-attitude system: global values, domain-specific values, and evaluations of product attributes. Values that are at the core of an individual value system and also generalizable

can provide important information for marketing professionals (Eibel-Spany *et al.*, 2013:401). Vinson *et al.* (1977) state that the importance of personal values in affecting judgment of decisions about individuals, things, or ideas implies the connection between values and conduct.

As more recent studies have shown, values have also played an instrumental role in assessing the shift away from *'materialist' concerns about economic and physical well-being towards more emphasis on freedom, self-expression, and the quality of life, or what is referred to as post-materialist values* (Eibel-Spany *et al.*, 2013:404). However, as Eibel-Spany *et al.* remarked (2013:404), *this shift towards post-materialism does not necessarily mean an abdication of interest in consuming material goods. Instead, it may simply mean that non-material values take on increasing importance*, as manifested among Gen Zers.

The immediate function of values and value systems is to guide human action in daily situations. In this sense, behavior is instrumental to the achievement of a particular value state. Behavior instrumentality implies that a specific behavior will either enhance or block the attainment of some value or constellation of values: *Consumers are motivated to engage in behaviors which will enhance the achievement of certain values* (Gutman, Vinson, 1979: 336).

According to Gutman (1990), there is a link between individual values and intended customer advantages. According to the author's research, some values might have multiple meanings based on the consumer advantages they were connected to. As a result, marketing managers had to take into account these results as well as the idea that values may serve as a guide when creating corporate strategies. However, as Gorton reminded (1979:57):

The entire process, as described in the literature, typically implies a high degree of rationality and objectivity, and it can surely be argued that those conditions are desirable for effective decision-making. But what is often not discussed, much less recognized, is that in reality, the decision-maker's own personal values frequently intervene and affect the rationality and objectivity of the decision-making process.

Mintzberg *et al.* (1976) came to the conclusion that latent cultural values might influence consumer behavior and the decision of what is or is not valued among various product categories.

Erdem *et al.* (1999) also accentuate the importance of values and their connection with consumer needs, by stating that once the markets have been divided into value-based market segments, marketers may design new retail outlets or organize retail store marketing and promotional campaigns so that store characteristics are seen as ways to meet the specific needs of the targeted based on value market segments.

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that store characteristics are seen as ways to meet the specific needs of the targeted based on value market segments (Erdem *et al.*, 1999).

3.1.1. Values Affecting the Consumer Behavior of Generation Z

Generation Z members have seen significant political, social, technological, and economic changes in their brief lives (Ernst and Young, 2015). As a result, they are more adamant about the experience, have lower brand loyalty, and have higher expectations. Due to these reasons, retailers are under pressure to come up with new strategies to capture and hold customers' attention since consumers have less loyalty to retailers and expect shops to deliver the product to them.

Wells *et al.* (2018) state that Generation Z is practical and driven, and relates their values with trends in their consumer behavior, one of the most important being – seeking purpose. This generation highly values companies that are doing something good, and engaging in purpose besides only trying to make money. Valuing companies that have a purpose is not a completely new trend, but has now become an expectation that puts the responsibility on the company. As was pointed out in the research by Wells *et al.* (2018), beyond loving their jobs, Generation Z workers also want to love the companies they are working for.

When anticipating consumer behavior, besides values, lifestyle is also a significant consideration. According to Wijaya *et al.* (2020), lifestyle refers to how a person as a whole engages with their surroundings, but since lifestyles frequently change faster than the values of an individual that are relatively constant, values are taken as a more important consideration (Fig. 2).

However, according to Yadav and Rai (2017), personal characteristics including social and economic status, morality and preferences, lifecycle stage, maturity, and culture or subculture do have a significant impact on how accessible Gen Z is as customers. Education, family income, and material belongings are all apparent reflections of Gen Z's socioeconomic status. Environmental conditions and current political policies will also have a significant impact.

For instance, as Areola *et al.* remarked, in terms of consumer behavior, Generation Z prefers sustainable purchasing behavior, with various psychological factors influencing their overall sustainable purchase attitude. As the authors highlight, Gen Z wants to buy an ecologically safe product, they know how to recycle, and they recognize sustainability symbols, and the current environmental and social issues. According to the authors' research, *Gen Z also strongly agrees that they feel good about themselves when buying sustainable products* (Areola *et al.*, 2022:33).

Gen Z was introduced to healthy lifestyle choices, and they are much more knowledgeable about living a sustainable lifestyle compared to previous generations (Areola *et al.*, 2022:31). In short, Generation Z is aware of the environmental issues that the world is

facing and this is to be taken into account when analyzing values affecting the Gen Z consumer behavior.

Figure 2. Millennial Vs. Gen Z

Millennial Vs Gen Z	
▪ Tech savvy	* Tech Innate
▪ Communicate with Text	* Communicate with images
▪ Curators & Shares	* Creators & Collaborators
▪ Now Focused	* Future Focused
▪ Optimistic	* Realistic
▪ Want to be discovered	* Want to work for success
▪ Dependent / Self Centered	* Self Reliant / Aware
▪ Entitled	* Persistent

Source: Yadav and Rai, *The Generation Z and their Social Media Usage: A Review and a Research Outline*, p. 111.

‘Purchase decision-making style’ is described by Sproles and Kendall (1986) as a mental orientation describing a consumer’s approach to making decisions. They claimed that consumers adopt a ‘shopping personality’ that is largely predictable and stable, similar to how psychologists view the personality.

Namely, to profile an individual's decision style, Sproles and Kendall already in 1986 developed a *Consumer Style Inventory (CSI)*, based on the consumer characteristic approach, which focuses on different cognitive dimensions of consumer decision-making. Since then, CSI has been extensively tested on consumers of different countries by different researchers, in developed countries, countries with emerging economies and those drawing inputs from both. According to some more recent re-evaluations of the CSI model, such as shown in Jain and Sharma's study (2013), there are five characteristics that are indispensable to all consumers irrespective of country, gender, age, culture and religion and according to which Sproles and Kendall's inventory can be very well used as a basic model. These are, according to the mentioned authors:

„High quality conscious consumer, Brand conscious price equals quality consumer, Recreational/Hedonistic consumer, Price conscious value for money consumer, and Confused by over choice consumer“.

When it comes to buying, Generation Z can be said to be unconcerned with brands; having quality is what matters most, which is in accordance with the aforementioned findings of Wood (2013) that Generation Z members are not really brand loyal. According to Rahayu (2019), generation Z is a group of people who are still searching for their identity and are therefore particularly open to being influenced by, provoked by, persuaded by, or exposed to new things as a result of their surroundings. Francis and Hoefel (2018) state that Gen Zers believe that belonging to many groups is natural for everyone, and they have no issues

switching between them.

3.1.2. Digital Environment Affecting Attitudes

Since Generation Z, as mentioned earlier, is the one born and raised with exposure to the Web's vibrant images and massive volumes of data, as a result, this generation is particularly adept at navigating different digital landscapes and interacting with new online apps. Generation Z has shown a level of familiarity and competency with technology at such a young age, unlike any other generation. As a result, it is anticipated that their confidence and value in technical sources will be strong (Wells *et al.*, 2018). Hardey (2011) states that Generation Z not only consumes online content but also produces and regulates it.

With an emphasis on how the Internet may affect the process of collaborative innovation, Sawhney *et al.* (2005) argued that businesses were beginning to recognize the Internet's potential as a platform for jointly developing value with consumers. The authors describe the unique advantages of using the Internet as a platform for customer engagement, such as interactivity, increased reach, persistence, velocity, and adaptability, and they recommend that businesses make use of these advantages to involve customers in cooperative product innovation through a wide range of Internet-based systems. According to Hampton *et al.* (2011), social media's impact on customer behavior has an intriguing component in today's market.

Sriram *et al.* (2021) state that according to several experts, internet advertisements seem more credible than those in traditional media, since in contrast to traditional advertising methods, social media commercials allow for the addition of numerous eye-catching features and they may be customized to appeal to that specific user. On the other hand, some authors believe that the authenticity of online advertisements causes concern to consumers (Waller, 2006).

Gen Z's use of social media can be classified as a content contribution, information sharing, information usage, searching for facts and data, online participation, and entertainment usability. As a result, user behavior with regard to social media is changing rapidly (Fazith & Nithya, 2023).

On the other hand, Wijaya *et al.* (2020) classify the e-lifestyle of Generation Z through four motivating factors: e-activities, e-interests, e-opinions, and e-values. According to the authors e-activities, which are actions that can be seen using services or products enabled by information technology, can be used to identify digitally oriented lives (Fig. 3). These actions include work, hobbies, social activities, entertainment, and sports. E-values are fundamental beliefs about the services or products supported by information technology, such as expectations, needs, and relationships with other people. E-opinion is a fundamental response to the issues with such services or products, including social, economic, political, and educational needs (Wijaya *et al.*, 2020).

Figure 3. Gen Z living online



Source: Richard Carufel, *Gen Z ushers new digital paradigm, resetting expectations for brand experiences*, <https://www.agilitypr.com/pr-news/public-relations/gen-z-ushers-in-a-new-digital-paradigm-resetting-expectations-for-brand-experiences/> (20.4.2023)

Summarizing the general characteristics of the e-lifestyle of Generation Z, Wijaya *et al.* (2020:29) stressed that Generation Z values peer groups more and prefers social media in cyberspace. This group is more imaginative, confident, optimistic, and more lateral. Generation Z likes involvement and efforts to build relationships. Generation Z has similarities with Generation Y because it is a continuation of Generation Y, preferring social media in communication and self-expression. Generation Z tends to focus on innovation. This generation was born in the era of internet technology and is instant like touch screen media. Technological innovations become the hope for this group to provide comfort for them. This generation is classified as a generation with free choices on products that tend to be influencers for family consumption.

Due to the propensity of Generation Z to use the Internet, many members of this demographic hardly ever use alternative comparative research materials like newspapers, periodicals, or books (Kahawandala *et al.*, 2020). So, for this generation, accessing the large pool of knowledge when needed merely requires a click. Therefore, this generation ideally has excellent cognitive decision-making skills based on easily available knowledge sources, which results in consumers of Generation Z being exposed to and highly valuing online resources when making decisions. According to Shaouf, Lu & Li (2016), online purchase intentions are now a crucial factor that can affect how beneficial online stimuli are.

Brands have recently benefited from the rapid rise in the use of web-based media in connecting with both their existing and potential customers. Businesses are putting more effort into developing and diversifying their social media presence, which allows them to create and launch new social initiatives more frequently (Lalwani *et al.*, 2021). According to Kumar *et al.* (2016), marketing managers are aware of the importance of understanding the impact of social media communication on brand perception and as a result brand

equity.

According to Sharma *et al.* (2010), customers who purchase online do so as a result of their feelings, impulsive actions, or a lack of cognitive restraint. Additionally, they assert that eye-catching items prompt impulsive behavior, leading customers to make purchases without considering the cost or other factors involved in online shopping.

Similarly, Wu *et al.* (2015) stated that online marketing influences reduce risk aversion in first-time online shoppers and make it simple for them to make an immediate purchase. Pavlou (2003) confirms this statement and according to the author, due to this perception of increased risk of harm, confidence is an important factor for online influence and online transactions. Other scholars like Verhagen and Van Dolen (2011) also argue that online buyers are more impulsive than customers who buy in physical stores.

One can make numerous acquaintances in this online community without ever meeting them in person. Therefore, according to Kahawandala *et al.* (2020), it is anticipated that this generation will have high levels of social pressure and connectedness. At the same time, Francis and Hoefel (2018) argue that the Gen Z generation is quite inclusive and that they do not differentiate between friends they make online and those they meet in person. This is in line with the findings of Fazith and Nithya (2023), stating that because Gen Zers are so familiar with using technology, it is frequently assumed that social media interaction accounts for a sizable portion of their socializing behaviors.

Generation Z's youth possess a strong "virtual bonding," which helps them get past the emotional and psychological obstacles they face in the real world. This is in accordance with the statement of Wijaya *et al.* (2020), that in social terms Generation Z prefers peer groups and social media in cyberspace.

Yadav and Rai (2017) define this generation as a social networking generation that is frequently labeled as technically innate and very style-conscious (Fig. 4). According to the authors, *„the need to be involved and informed to/with other people is the main rationale behind the use of online socializing“* (2017:111). Describing the behavioral impact of Gen Z's intense social media activities, the authors conclude that this generation is

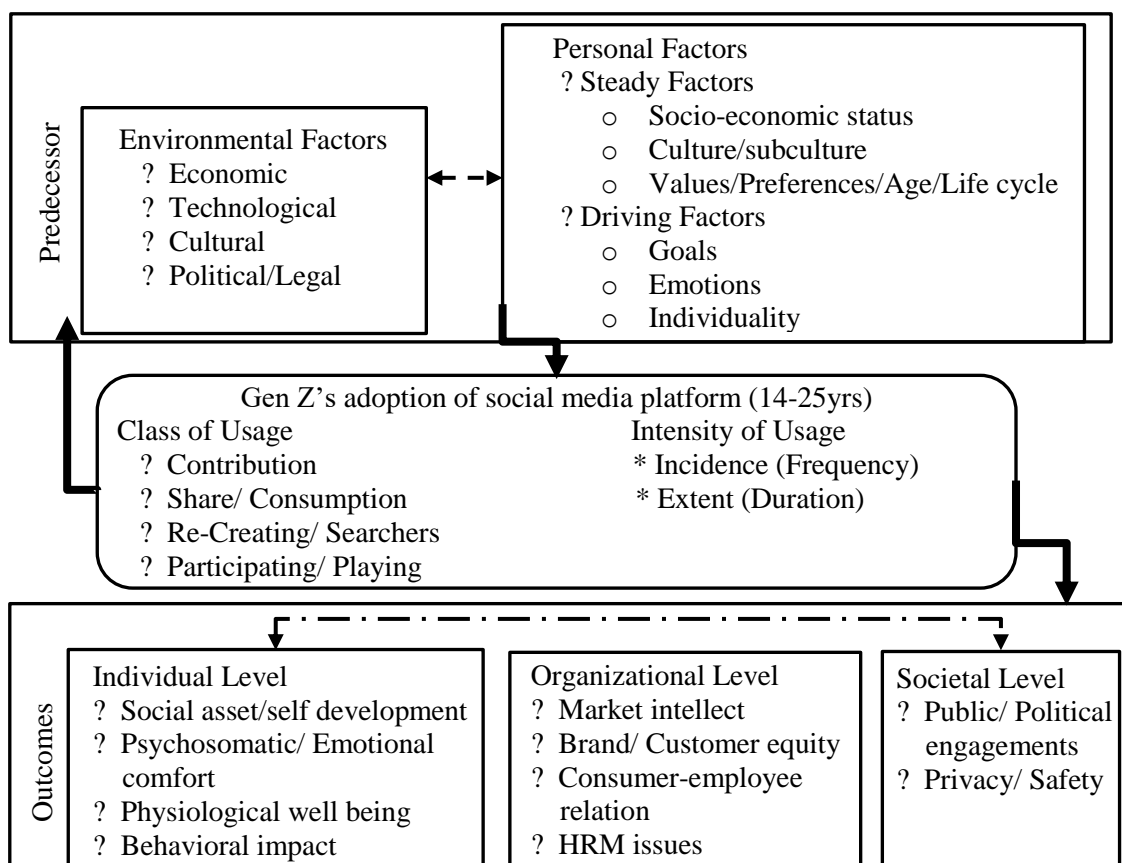
„a vigorous contributor, high consumer of online content, creative and mash-up experts; they have a strong gravitational bond for online communication that they prefer to participate and remain connected via technology available at fingertips“ (Yadav and Rai, 2017:111).

Yadav and Rai (2017) also state that Generation Zers are more likely than other generations to prefer online social networks for communication and interaction with people they know, and they also feel happy and compelled to actively provide feedback on the products, services, and issues in which they are either directly or indirectly involved. In addition, they value other people's opinions as well.

They move back and forth between groups that support their objectives by making use of the extensive mobilization that technology enables. Online communities are valued by Gen Zers because they enable people from various socioeconomic backgrounds to interact and unite around causes and interests (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). At the same time, according to Majeed *et al.* (2021), social interaction is agreed to be crucial in shaping a range of affective and behavioral outcomes, including satisfaction, attitude, decision-making, and encompassment.

Online convenience is one of the main factors promoting impulsive customer purchases (Gulfranz *et al.*, 2022). Consumers demand convenience and gravitate to online buying as they spend less time shopping and more time on other activities (Jiang *et al.*, 2013; Duarte *et al.*, 2018). Lalwani *et al.* (2021) also state that the majority of their research respondents firmly agreed that convenience, special discounts, and variety were the most important factors while making purchases online. At the same time, as argued by Djafarova and Bowes (2021), Generation Z was raised online, and as a result, they drew inspiration from social media. Due to their authenticity, a lot of people follow digital celebrities.

Figure 4. Predecessors and Outcomes of Social Media Usage by Gen Zer's



Model 2. The Reference Framework: Predecessors and Outcomes of Social Media Usage by Gen Zer's.

Source: Yadav and Rai, *The Generation Z and their Social Media Usage: A Review and a Research Outline*, p. 113.

Mayrhofer *et al.* (2020) state that customers are found to be more happy when permitted to

define their attribute preferences when choosing items. On the other hand, even though consumers have high expectations for personalization, they are not yet completely at ease with giving their personal information to businesses. According to research done by Francis and Hoefel (2018), only 10 to 15% of them claim they have no issues exchanging personal information with businesses. Consumers are willing to share personal information with businesses to the extent of 35% when there is a clear counterpart from businesses to consumers, which is still a tiny percentage.

However, it is important to state that there are several factors that influence the differentiation of behavior among customers of Generation Z, as stated by Yadav and Rai (2017), individuals' personal goals, sentiments, and social conventions may readily affect and be influenced by their shown online behavior over time, and this has a lasting effect on how Gen Z uses social networking.

3.1.3. Effect of Large Amounts of Product Data on Purchase Decision

Gen Z processes a lot more data than previous generations did when they were their age because they live in an age of constant updates (Thangavel *et al.*, 2021). According to Wells *et al.* (2018), the popularity of social media has made it quite simple to follow news sources.

In addition to making news more accessible, social media has also increased the number of social media channels that share the news. The rapid expansion of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest has been shown to be a contributing factor to the prevalence of impulsive buying among Generation Z (Priporas *et al.*, 2017; Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). Before committing to a purchase, consumers typically go through a process of understanding the intended good or service, research, and analysis of the product (Majeed *et al.*, 2021).

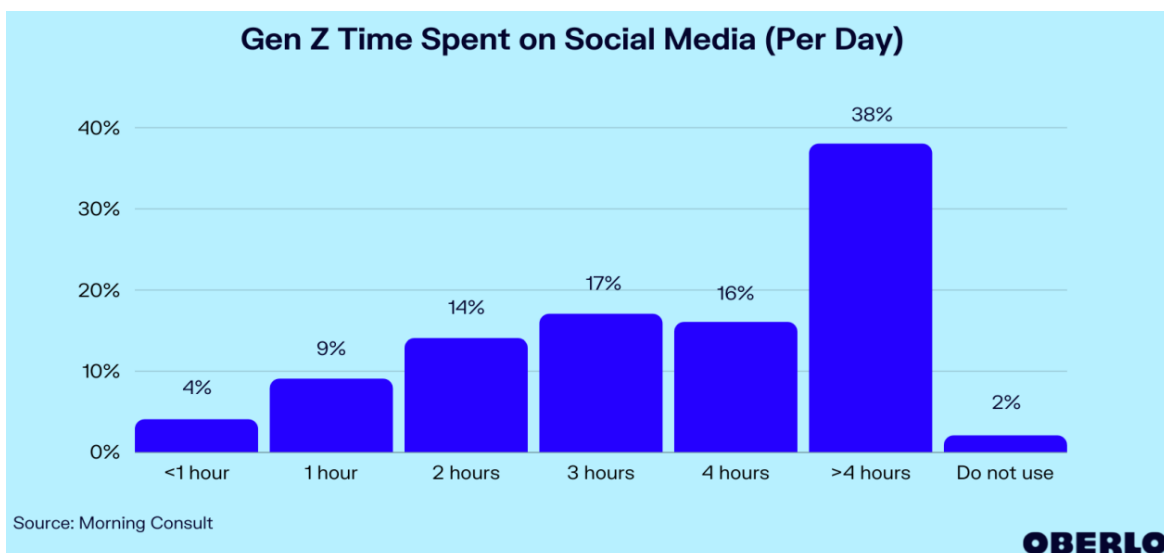
The most important reason why people use the internet has been identified as gathering information in various formats, and levels of information and attitudes about the website have been proven to be positively correlated. One of the key benefits of consumer engagement in online brand communities is the search for and receipt of brand information (Majeed *et al.*, 2021). Muntiga *et al.* (2011) also state that numerous researchers have looked at the conditions that consumers will share sponsored content. Personal identification, integration, and social connection have been shown to be the main drivers behind user contributions and the creation of brand-related material by researchers. In order to demonstrate their affinity for a brand's reputation and image as well as their membership in the social group that employs the brand, many users submit images of brands (Muntiga *et al.*, 2011).

Additionally, as the use of social media has increased, a new category of celebrities known as social media celebrities, such as social media influencers, vloggers, and bloggers, has emerged. As to Rukmana *et al.*, several factors influence the effectiveness of social media

influencers on Gen Z's purchase intentions. These include mostly the perceived credibility of influencers, the entertainment value of influencers' content, the perceived expertise of influencers, and peer review and recommendation. (Rukmana, 2023:1029). Even though the new sources of news have grown, they have also become specialized and prejudiced, and as a result, consumers could get an extremely biased news perspective because social media platforms frequently target people based on their past activity and posting habits, which results in users frequently unfollowing certain influences and creating their own fake news funnel, in order to eliminate opposing viewpoints from their social media feeds (Wells *et al.*, 2018). We can conclude that the large quantity of news channels has made the issue of false news unmanageable, which can lead to trust eventually deteriorating, including trust in brands.

According to Fazith & Nithya (2023), the desire to interact with and learn about particular people is the primary driver behind Gen Z's use of online socializing (Fig. 5). These Generation Z'ers, who range in age from 14 to 25, are happier and feel it is essential that they give feedback and comments about the brands, services, and issues in which they are either directly or indirectly involved. Wijaya *et al.* (2020) state that the communication carried out also works as a form of self-actualization. People can build trust and overcome concerns on social media platforms through the sharing of information, ratings, and comments, which makes them more ready to purchase a company's goods (Majeed *et al.*, 2021).

Figure 5. Gen Z and Time Spent on Social Media Per Day



Source: Morning Consult, Oberlo Statistics How Much Time Does Gen Z Spend on Social Media? (oberlo.com) (10.9.2023)

The importance of information exchange and communication is confirmed by Dolot (2018), who states that the information that Generation Z requires may be easily found and verified by them and that they also communicate knowledge to others swiftly and constantly process communication because they use a wide range of communication tools

or social media.

Marketing and work ethics are becoming more similar for customers. Therefore, businesses must not only clearly define the issues on which they will take a stance, but also make sure that everyone throughout the value chain is on board. Companies should carefully consider the marketing representatives who represent their brands and goods for the same reason. Also, keep in mind that consumers are becoming more aware of the fact that some businesses pay influencers. Customers tend to pay greater attention to closer connections, such as Instagram personalities with 5,000 to 20,000 followers, perhaps in part because of this. As channels become more fragmented and dynamic, marketing in the digital era presents issues that are getting more and more complicated (Francis and Hoefel, 2018).

Besides having social media and influencers as a source of information about new products and potential buying, consumers – especially of the younger generation, also relate to the opinions of their friends and acquaintances. According to the research of Kahawandala *et al.* (2020), 52% of people say that their friends have some influence over them, while 22.5% say that they only consider friends' opinions when making purchases, and a similar percentage says that recommendations from relatives are taken into account. Social media can serve as social proof for Gen Z.

When consumers see their friends and other influential people recommending a product or service, they are more likely to trust it and purchase it (Fazith & Nithya, 2023). Because of the advantages of engagement, users who participate more actively in social networking communities are more likely to recommend the brand community (Majeed *et al.*, 2021). According to Hofman and Hodor (2010), businesses are even recommended to change their social media marketing objectives to incorporate brand engagement.

However, the authors have found a rather high level of individuality among Generation Z consumers, with 72% of Generation Z preferring to rely on their own judgment when making decisions rather than deferring to the opinions of others (Fazith & Nithya, 2023).

Kahawandala *et al.* (2020) research shows that twenty-eight percent of respondents rely on the media and advice before making a purchase, and more than sixty-eight percent look to friends for recommendations when making purchases of products; which demonstrates the degree to which friends have an impact on the choices made by this generation. Francis and Hoefel (2018) have found through their research that 63 percent of the customers polled stated that recommendations from friends are the source they trust the most to learn about products and brands. The good news is that customers, especially Gen Zers, are understanding of firms making mistakes as long as they fix them.

According to Xiang *et al.* (2016), online celebrities may influence a user's propensity for impulsive purchases. Through the Internet, which has become an integral part of daily life, customers may easily find information about products or services. Majeed *et al.* (2021) state that the first and most important marketing plan is to make sure that social media

platforms provide consumers with information and educational possibilities. Their study emphasizes how crucial it is to provide current and relevant information about the business and its goods in social media activities (SMA) in order to meet consumer requirements, with a focus on Generation Z consumers because they are the ones who are born and raised in the era of social media and digital platforms.

Internet purchasing enables more spontaneous purchases than traditional retail. The viability of social media in particular is a novel technique to significantly increase marketing efforts and may have a significant impact on consumer purchasing decisions, including impulsive purchases (Kapoor *et al.*, 2018). The term impulsive buying refers to non-essential and unplanned purchasing behavior, that happens instantly and without a thorough analysis of the products and the effects of the purchase (Lee *et al.*, 2021).

On the other hand, Thangavel *et al.* (2021) state that even though consumer goods companies believed for a long time that consumers like to have a wide variety of options, recent research studies contend that having too many options frequently results in “analysis paralysis and indecision.”

According to scholarly research by Iyengar and Lepper (2000), having too many options causes buyers to get “mind frozen” at the point of purchase. Generation X consumers are faced with the paradox that no matter which alternative they choose, there always seems to be a better choice (Tugend, 2010).

The findings from studies undertaken by Iyengar and Lepper (2000) imply that when compared to environments that give a constrained range of choices, offering a wide range of options does not always result in increased motivation.

According to the authors, people really seem to prefer to use their opportunity to select in situations when their options were restricted in both trials and even to perform better in these types of situations, and although extensive-choice scenarios may first seem more alluring they are ultimately more likely to undermine people’s intrinsic motivation.

One theory is, according to the authors, that people who are presented with excessively many options employ a decision-making heuristic that compels them to feel less committed to acting on their preferences.

Using social media has significantly increased a user’s exposure to information, thus raising their cognitive load (Gomez-Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014). As a result, according to Janssen *et al.* (2016), intensely focused consumers might not be able to react affectionately to content.

Fazith & Nithya (2023) also discuss the effects of large amounts of data on young generations’ decision-making, stating that the behavior of Gen Z consumers may also be influenced by the fear of missing out (FOMO). Through social media, Gen Z can learn about new products and discounts, and they might feel pressured to buy them to avoid

missing out.

According to Moe & Trusov (2011), prospective purchasers are depending more and more on online sources of information, such as forums and rating sites, whose popularity has skyrocketed since the advent of the internet. These could potentially have a big impact on product sales. Because of the aforementioned rating dynamics, user-provided reviews did not necessarily represent a product's performance but yet had the potential to have a major impact on sales. This might be rather unsettling for product marketers, therefore many of them began investing in initiatives designed to improve the ratings setting for their goods in an attempt to increase sales (Moe & Trusov, 2011).

However, this generation was exposed to the "era of information" and "social media" at a young age, which would have helped them become acclimated to regular updates and navigate through vast amounts of information with ease (Thangavel *et al.*, 2021).

3.2. Targeting Generation Z

3.2.1. Targeting Generation Z Based on Their Values

According to Francis and Hoefel (2018), this generational shift, when combined with technological advancements, is reshaping the consumer general picture in a way that affects people of all socioeconomic levels, goes beyond Gen Z, and permeates the entire demographic pyramid. The opportunities that are currently opening up for businesses are both transformational and difficult, putting businesses in a position to reevaluate how they provide value to customers, compare and balance mass production versus customization, and take into consideration marketing and work ethics.

According to research done by Priporas *et al.* (2017), the majority of young people accentuated the importance of self-checkouts, informative touch points, digital signage, as well as new payment methods via smartphones without using bank cards directly or contactless payments as smart technologies they mostly use while shopping offline in actual physical stores. This is a sign of a high degree of reliance on technological advances that is present among young people even when shopping offline. When talking about online shopping, they primarily made reference to social media apps and unique smartphone programs, with PayPal as their favorite mode of payment.

The respondents went on to say that the main benefits of using smart technologies while shopping at the moment are the simplicity and speed of transactions, the freedom from having to carry cash or credit cards, and the convenience of finding information to locate products and skip lines. All these perceived benefits of technological and digital support in shopping that customers find very useful can be summed up in three words: *convenience, portability, and efficiency* (Priporas *et al.*, 2017).

As concluded by Kahawandala *et al.* (2020), the Generation Z segment of the market is

different from other generations in terms of its traits, demands, and work styles. They have a high level of computer literacy and frequently ask their peers' opinions before making purchases. The three primary strategic information sources are friends and family, retail stores, and YouTube and the top three mobile phone features that they use are web browsing, social networking, and music listening. Fazith and Nithya (2023) also accentuate the power that social media has to influence how Gen Z views the reputation of a brand. A brand's social media presence, the content it produces, and its interactions with customers can all have an impact on Gen Z's perception of that brand and desire to purchase from it.

Additionally, this generation works hard to uphold and develop their individuality and sense of self in the context of social media. The decisive variables of these buyers' features and activities need to be looked into in order to properly cater to their expectations (Kahawandala *et al.*, 2020).

The potential of media entertainment to satiate viewers' demands for escapism, enjoyment, emotional release, and anxiety alleviation is considered the value of the medium (Majeed *et al.*, 2021). The authors proceed stating that consumer opinions regarding advertising are directly influenced by entertainment: a positive advertising message not only boosts user brand attitude but also favorably influences user attitude toward the advertising. Users who perceive social media advertising to be engaging participate more and have favorable sentiments about the company. Shaouf *et al.* (2016) also accentuate a positive correlation between attitudes towards certain advertisements and purchasing behavior by stating that a person's attitudes are crucial in establishing the motivations behind his or her conduct.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that attitude plays a mediating role in the relationship between site stimuli and the effects of advertising messages on purchase intention. Cho (1999) accentuates the connection between attitudes toward web advertising and other types of advertising, by stating that people are more likely to view a banner ad favorably if they have a more positive attitude toward web advertising in general. Even though attitude plays a significant part in shaping an individual's behavioral choices and intentions, according to Sundar and Noseworthy (2014), visual components of marketing communications may have the capacity to affect behavioral intentions without the mediating effect of attitude.

When making purchases, Gen Z customers are more convincing (Lee *et al.*, 2022). They desire new goods more quickly (Agrawal, 2022). They lack brands and are addicted to fashion (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Yadav and Rai (2017) also point out the importance of fashion for Generation Z by stating that these social networking generations, who ideally fall into the category of high school to college students or are relatively new to the workforce, are generally characterized as being the most technically savvy and fashion-conscious of all preceding generations.

To appeal to this market, brands must develop marketing strategies (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021; Agrawal, 2022). Due to the fact that the lifestyles of Generation Z consumers are

facing rising constrictions due to the increasing professional duties, they want to save time and energy and as a result, they choose retail formats that need the least amount of time (Bhatnagar *et al.* 2020).

Besides desiring products more quickly and in a more convenient way, according to Van den Bergh and Pallini (2018), Gen Z is also the least loyal to sellers and tends to choose them more carefully than any previous generation. While this generation seems to place little value on long-term advantages like loyalty programs or coupons to be redeemed in subsequent purchases, Gen Z finds short-term benefits like discounts, free gifts, and free delivery to be very appealing. According to Ernst and Young (2015), Gen Y is more involved with prices than Gen Z, while Gen Z tends to be less brand loyal.

According to Francis and Hoefel (2018), the important thing for Gen Zers is to experiment with numerous ways of being themselves and to gradually create their distinctive identities rather than defining themselves through a single stereotype. In this regard, we could refer to them as “identity nomads.”

Since Generation Z is used to technological advances that help get things done quickly, convenience is a crucial element in the relationship between customers and service providers, according to empirical data currently available. If there is an abundance of convenience offered, customers are more likely to remain (Lloyd *et al.*, 2014). Contrarily, their departure has typically been prompted by a loss of convenience (Lovelock and Patterson, 2015).

Marketers also need to engage in social media interaction and include it in their marketing plan since it has never been simpler to reach the target consumers at lower cost levels, which may be achieved by creating digital promotion activities that are tailored to match and resonate with their target audience-Generation Z, to whom they can communicate their ideologies in order to increase revenue and advance through the marketing funnel (Majeed *et al.*, 2021).

3.2.2. Product and Service Creation to Satisfy Generation Z Values and Beliefs

According to earlier research, purchase decisions are substantially influenced by one’s generation, and peers frequently influence brand and product choices either directly or indirectly (Kahawandala *et al.*, 2020). Due to significant technological advancements and increased consumer connectivity, it is simple for businesses to modify their product to meet the specific demands of younger customers. Consumers of Generation Z, according to Francis and Hoefel (2018), are eager for more personalized items and willing to pay more for goods that emphasize their uniqueness. Based on the research the authors have undertaken, a high percentage of consumers would be willing to pay more for individualized services and for goods from companies that support issues they care about.

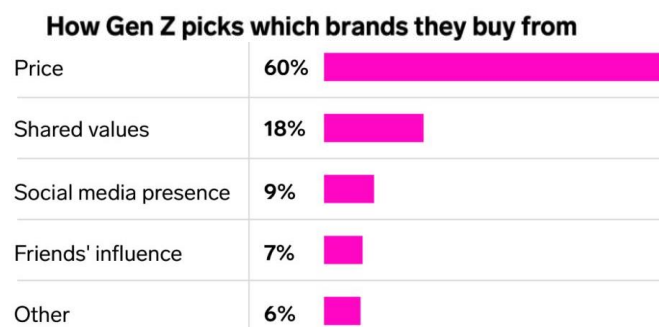
Consumers place a great value on transparency, so when businesses try to conceal

something, it always comes to light. Long-lasting connections can be maintained by gaining the patrons' confidence. Consumers want companies to explain why prices are what they are and to demonstrate the efforts being made to cut costs by removing unnecessary components from goods. Transparency is valued by shareholders and employees in addition to customers. For instance, businesses can decide to disclose the wages of all of their employees as well as the formulas used to determine those salaries (Wells *et al.*, 2018).

Before making purchases, members of Generation Z expect to access and carefully consider a wide range of information. Gen Zers consider everything they buy, including the act of consumption itself. Consumption now has a new significance. Consumption for Gen Z means having access to goods or services rather than necessarily possessing them. Unlimited access to products and services (such as car-riding services, video streaming, and subscriptions) provides value when access acts as the new mode of consumption. Products turn into services, which link consumers (Francis and Hoefel, 2018).

Besides prerequisites needed for the purchase decision to be made by Generation Z, like information research and environmental influence, it is also very important to analyze reasons why the members of Generation Z would not buy a certain product or pay for a service. According to the research done by Gubiniova *et al.* (2021), the most chosen reason by respondents was “high prices”, as the element that has the greatest potential to deter them from making a purchase (Fig. 6). According to microeconomic theory, it is typically true that a product's price plays a significant role in determining how it is appraised and that it should be as low as possible. There are, however, certain exceptions to this association, where customers associate a product's exclusivity or excellent quality with its high price level (category of luxury goods). “Lack of information” came in second place as an answer. “Distrust” was the third most often selected response. Despite that in this research the option “recommendations” are not placed in the top three, Gubinoiva *et al.* (2021) similarly to aforementioned authors like Kahawandala *et al.* (2020), also state that this fact needs to be addressed.

Figure 6. Gen Z and Product's Price



Source: Business Insider, in: Eden Dronoff, *What Motivates Gen Z's Shopping?, What Motivates Gen Z's Shopping? – Data/Society/Decision-Making (wordpress.com)*(2.4.2023)

Finding that high prices are the most important reason why Generation Z would not make a purchase is in line with Accenture poll result (2017), which states that three main elements that Gen Z shoppers typically consider when making purchases: lowest price/best deal, display of the goods, and user ratings. Social media has a stronger impact on Gen Z than it does on Gen Y. They were also observed to be giving more weight to asking friends and family for recommendations before making a purchase (Accenture, 2017). However, those findings are rather contradictory to the findings of Ernst and Young (2015), which showed that Gen Z is less brand loyal than Gen Y and that Gen Y is more concerned with pricing than Gen Z.

Francis and Hoefel (2018) point out an example of car manufacturers that rent out their cars directly to customers, which allows them to sell one car 1,000 times rather than 1,000 new ones. Similarly, the role of sporting goods companies has changed to focus on assisting individuals in improving as athletes by giving them access to tools, technology, coaching, and communities of like-minded customers. According to the authors, conventional consumer goods companies ought to think about developing platforms of goods, services, and experiences that group or link clients to brands. By utilizing new distribution channels and more direct relationships with customers, companies that have traditionally been characterized by the things they sell or consume can now rethink their value-creation strategies.

Contrary to the theory of linking customers to brands is Thangavel *et al.* (2021) statement that evidence exists to support the idea that brand loyalty, defined as customers' propensity to continuously choose one brand over rivals for goods and services, is less important to Gen Z customers. Virtually no young customer purchases a product solely based on the brand name due to the ease with which information (reviews, product comparisons, etc.) can now be accessed online.

Consumers now demand more than ever to use products and services whenever and wherever they choose, therefore omnichannel marketing and sales must advance to a new level as the online and offline worlds merge. The border between online and offline doesn't exist for consumers who are online constantly and everywhere. Therefore, leading businesses should have a data strategy that will equip them to gather and analyze data about specific consumers while maintaining data privacy in order to produce commercial insights (Francis and Hoefel, 2018).

Fazith and Nithya (2023) highlight five main factors that affect the consumer behavior of the young generation that companies should keep in mind when designing their product and services in order to target Generation Z and those are price and discounts, being transparent about the product, ignoring false brand, new product awareness, and last but not the least - online reviews from others.

According to Lalwani *et al.* (2021), businesspeople and entrepreneurs around the world are advised to engage in practices of incorporating social networking sites into all of their

significant business operations in order to reach customers easily and improve their functioning through efficient customer feedback mechanisms, because the world is expanding on a regular basis with wider options available to the customer. This will make it easier to identify the changing demands of customers, foster connection, and increase client/customer involvement in decisions about products and services through cost-effective communication tools. Additionally, customers should be encouraged to visit social networking websites in order to access new information and stay current on changes to how businesses are operating.

Consumer goods businesses and merchants have benefited for years from economies of scale.

Francis and Hoefel (2018) state that they may now have to adopt a two-track approach, with the first focusing on scale and broad consumption and the second on personalization for niche markets or the most devoted customers. In this case, greater agility and flexibility would be needed in the supply chain, manufacturing, and marketing operations. According to the authors, that kind of future poses several issues for corporations. How long will gender-specific clothing collections, for instance, make sense? How could businesses sell their vehicles or diamonds in a diverse, impartial manner? How much should internal business operations and organizational structure change as a result of the need for a two-speed economy?

3.2.3. Promotional Campaigns Targeted at Generation Z

Due to its persuasiveness, advertising has an effect on the audience's attitude. Additionally, advertising appeal, which is defined as the management and layout of the ads for potential customers (Wang *et al.*, 2013) shapes attitudes, which in turn influence behavioral intentions. Due to its direct impact on attitude, advertising appeal has the ability to play a significant role in the development of behavioral intentions (Raza, Bakar, & Mohamad, 2017).

According to the survey done by Kahawandala *et al.* (2020) on the level of influence of social media on product purchases, 90% of Generation Z think that social media has a significant impact on their decision to buy, and at the same time, 80% of respondents stated that they use social networking on their mobile phones daily. That suggests that when attempting to reach this group, both elements are crucial and the most successful. When creating social media marketing campaigns for Generation Z, this is what must be kept in mind by marketing employees.

Social media contributes to increased sales in the information technology era, particularly for Generation Z, who are very accustomed to using social media and other technological media. According to Subawa and Widhiasthini (2020), producers can hegemonize the consumer market by using social media and promotional networks. This causes a change in mindset and in conduct. Raza, Bakar, & Mohamad (2017) also argue the importance of

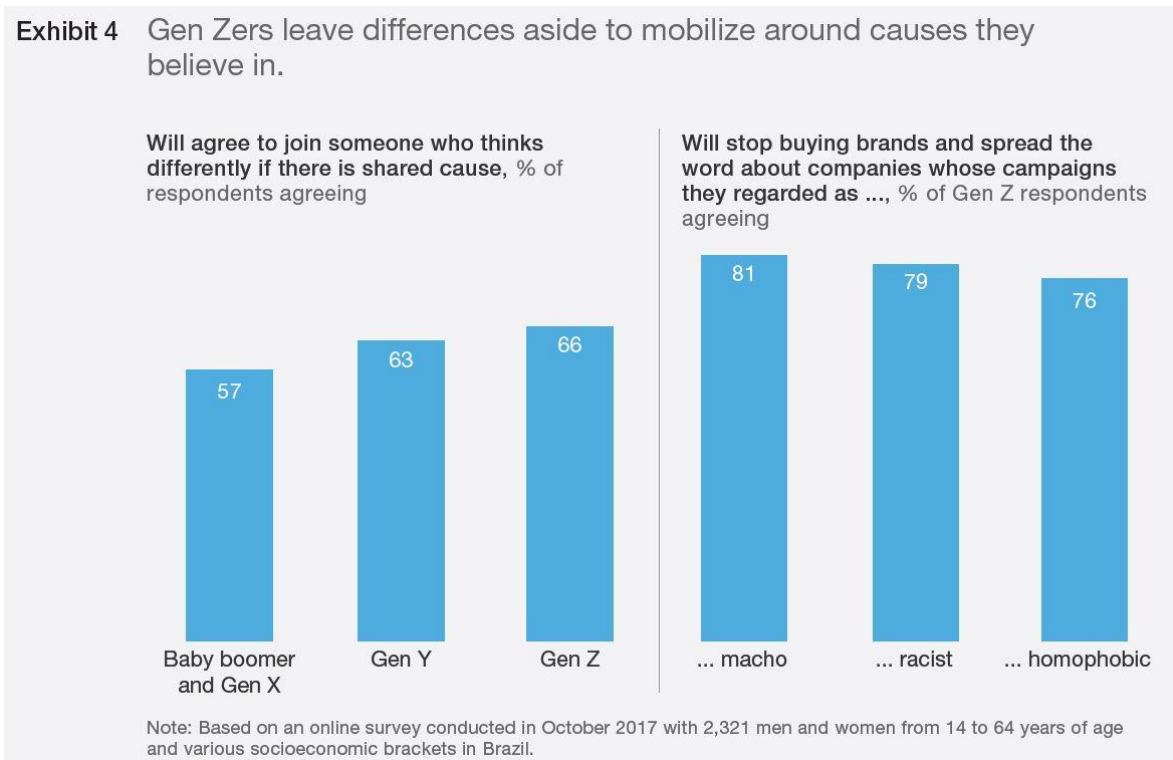
social media marketing aids in brand recognition and recall, especially during the purchasing process. Research done by Lalwani *et al.* (2021) shows that Instagram is preferred among post-graduate consumers for shopping over the other Facebook and YouTube, where in-store promotions and advertisements have a significant impact on their purchasing decisions.

Kahawandala *et al.* (2020) through their research found that 64.7% of Generation Z listen to their peers while making a buying decision because it can help them gain better recognition from their social circle. The aforementioned statistics show that this generation places a relatively high value on acceptance and connectivity, which is usually spread and shared on social media. Most importantly, it shows how hard this generation works to uphold and cultivate their sense of self and personality in the context of social media. As a result, social media impact would be yet another crucial factor for marketers to take into account when launching a marketing advertising plan. On the other hand, Francis and Hoefel (2018) state that the concept of displaying personal identity is at the heart of Gen Z ideology. Consumption thus becomes a form of self-expression, as opposed to purchasing or donning brands in order to conform to social norms.

According to Fazith and Nithya (2023), the way that Gen Z behaves when purchasing may also be influenced by user-generated content, such as reviews, comments, and social media posts. This is in accordance with the findings of research done by Lalwani *et al.* (2021) that the majority of young people surveyed frequently browse social networking sites for product information and user reviews. Companies should support user-generated content on their social media platforms because in that way they are more likely to win over Gen Z's trust.

Members of Generation Z view themselves as objects for experimentation, evaluation, and transformation. Gen Zers are more concerned with human rights, issues relating to race and ethnicity, lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, and transgender concerns, as well as feminism, than preceding generations have been (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). These are highly important factors to consider when creating a promotional campaign, in order to promote the inclusive values of Generation Z, and in the first place not to violate those values (Fig. 7). When it comes to the importance of promoting values to customers, Majeed *et al.* (2021) also state that in order to get a decent return on their investment, domestic businesses must also communicate their values to customers effectively.

Figure 7. Generation Z opinions towards certain promotional campaigns



Source: Francis & Hoefel, 'True Gen': Generation Z and its implications for companies, McKinsey & Company, http://www.drthomaswu.com/uicmpaccsmac/Gen%20Z.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2T_UDHUHDadktHZlxQDTlctmin-URLjhuxhNM5v3WUEGgyFjSnP2Jt6yE (3.5.2023)

Ling *et al.* (2010) asserted that the perspectives of entertainment and the veracity of advertising have a significant impact on behavioral intention. In light of the numerous research available in the prior literature that suggested the involvement of certain elements like attitude as the predictor or mediator between the relationship of the advertising appeal and behavioral intention, it is clear that advertising components including providing consumers with knowledge about the product or service being promoted have a favorable impact on consumers' behavioral intentions.

Branded social campaigns, according to Ashley and Tuten (2015), provide more touchpoints to influence ongoing communication between the brand story and consumers, which can strengthen brand relationships, influence online users to interact with social media content, and help managers find recurring trends in customer feedback.

Social media marketing tactics and the propensity for online interaction have a large and beneficial influence on user engagement on social media. Therefore, placing a lot of emphasis on how companies interact with their customers online results in favorable or unfavorable interactions that further impact their brand equity (Majeed *et al.*, 2021).

When it comes to the promotion of products and services using online platforms, there are

several tactics that companies must concentrate on using if they want to foster loyalty among current clients of Generation Z and generate more leads. According to Lalwani *et al.* (2021), those are seeking to increase traffic to their social media and websites; interacting with potential customers by responding to their questions and concerns or assisting current customers with the use of goods and services through a question-and-answer chat window; encouraging clients to talk about and recommend the business's brand to others and monitoring target customers' internet activity to determine which networks are most beneficial to the company's goods and services. Besides that, the authors state that the brand identity of the company should be consistent across all channels by emphasizing not only strengthening the brand but also fostering awareness and loyalty among both present and potential customers.

Majeed *et al.* (2021) state that social media activities should be carefully structured to offer intellectual and educational experiences, social communications, and personal holistic assistance that are likely to boost reputation. According to the authors, managers might rely on social media advertisement by creating and sustaining strong brand-consumer linkages in social media contexts with images, ideas, physiological sensations, problem-solving, and inquisitiveness.

According to Francis and Hoefel (2018), customers of the younger generation also want firms to "take a stand." The goal is not to take a viewpoint that is politically right on all issues. It involves picking the precise subjects (or causes) that make sense for a brand and its target audience and having a strong opinion on those specific problems. Younger customers can't see the difference between a brand's principles, the company that owns it, and its network of partners and suppliers in a transparent world. The ideals of a corporation must be reflected in both its actions and the stakeholder system as a whole.

When it comes to the reasons why Generation Z members consider certain promotional campaigns and advertising not reliable and why they dislike them, according to Gubiniova *et al.* (2021) in the first place they find advertising to be irritating, followed by cliché-filled advertising and unrealistic advertising. The authors proceed to state the two key factors of dishonest tactics utilized in marketing communication based on the analysis of Generation Z members' attitudes. Product deception is the first factor. Significant digital alteration of images, films, and other visual components that are either insufficient or deceptive; product comparisons, and inadequacies of the requirements for information retrieval and product usage instructions. Reverse product placement in movies, TV shows, and websites is likewise a significant problem, as is the copying of goods or brands and smart advertising that confuses such goods with their originals.

The final aspect of this component is blatantly and openly deceptive in regard to product origins, features, product properties, and repercussions of product use. Survey findings from Francis and Hoefel (2018) unravel that customers want to know where and how anything they buy was created, as well as what materials it was constructed of. Approximately 80% of people say they won't purchase anything from scandal-plagued

corporations. Their survey also shows that seventy percent of the people make an effort to buy goods from businesses they believe to be moral, while eighty percent of people claim to remember at least one incident or dispute involving a business.

Communication is the second element of deceptive techniques. It also involves extensive digital editing of images, films, and other visual components. Deception that results from careful word choice and sentence structure is covered. They also criticized the use of fictitious emotions when marketing and offering services. False consumer qualities that are created by brand image, excessive advertising, and nonsensical message contents of marketing communication instruments are another significant issue (Gubinova *et al.*, 2021).

4. GENERATION Z CONSUMER BEHAVIOR MOTIVES: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

4.1. Research methodology

The research was conducted through focus groups since it is a very suitable method to get insight into deeper data like personal opinions, feelings, and attitudes. This is a flexible approach that allows further elaborations. Focus groups allowed participants to encourage some new sub-topics and ideas that activated other participants to state their attitudes towards those statements. Focus groups were conducted with the aim of getting insights into following research questions:

- What are the underlying values and attitudes of Generation Z and in which ways do they affect their consumer behavior?
- Do technological improvements affect Generation Z's shopping habits?
- How do Generation Z consumers approach risk, in the context of the large amount of data available?

Two focus groups with eight participants each were conducted. Research participants were young people, more precisely from age 18 up to 26. As defined earlier, Generation Z represents all people born after 1995, so even individuals younger than the age of 18 could have been analyzed, but for this specific study age of 18 is taken as the lowest border because of the goal to analyze the behavior of people that are in a position to work and make their own money, and purchase decisions accordingly. Research participants are people that are working or studying at the university, and are living alone or with their families or partners.

The participants are represented in the following table through their basic demographic information.

The aim of the focus groups conducted was to get a deeper insight into research questions about the underlying values and attitudes of Generation Z and ways in which they affect their consumer behavior; technological improvements affecting Generation Z's shopping habits as well as Generation Z consumers' approach to risk, in the context of the large amount of data available.

Table 1. Focus groups participants' demographic data

Initials	Age	Gender	Education	Employment	Marital status	Children
A.B.	23	F	Master's degree	Employed	Not married	No
A.S.	24	F	University student	Unemployed	Not married	No
L.E.Č.	24	F	Bachelor degree	Unemployed	Married	1 child
S.K.	26	M	Bachelor degree	Employed	Not married	No
B.R.	23	M	University student	Unemployed	Not married	No
F.N.	18	M	High school	Unemployed	Not married	No
I.L.	22	F	University student	Unemployed	Not married	No
S.A.	24	M	University student	Employed	Not married	No
A.B.	24	M	High school	Employed	Not married	No
N.L.	26	M	Bachelor degree	Employed	Married	No
E.H.D.	26	F	Bachelor degree	Employed	Married	No
A.K.	26	F	Bachelor degree	Employed	Married	1 child
M.M.	26	F	Master's degree	Employed	Not married	No
N.K.	25	M	Bachelor degree	Unemployed	Not married	No
M.H.	26	F	Master's degree	Employed	Married	No
I.M.	24	F	Bachelor degree	Employed	Not married	No

Source: Author of master's thesis

The respondents for our study were carefully selected to ensure a diverse and representative sample. Individuals from both genders were included, spanning a range of ages within the Generation Z cohort. Furthermore, their living arrangements were considered, encompassing those who reside with parents, and partners, or live alone. To prevent bias, participants from various occupational backgrounds were intentionally included, avoiding an overrepresentation of individuals from sectors heavily influenced by technological advancements or exposed to social interactions that only focus on commerce.

Additionally, bias related to financial or marital status was mindfully not introduced, particularly in matters concerning financial decision-making and spending habits. The results obtained from this diverse sample were indeed interesting, reflecting a rich tapestry of perspectives and behaviors. These findings were not surprising, given the groundwork laid by previous research mentioned in the opening section of our paper. Several discernible patterns among participants who shared similar demographics were identified, clarifying the perspective on the interplay between various demographic factors and decision-making processes. Focus group reminder is created on the basis of research questions mentioned earlier in the paper, and it is listed in the Appendix.

Based on the focus group answers, several key themes, ideas, and opinions emerged related to determining the worth of a product or service, shopping preferences, online consumer behavior, and decision-making processes as a result of Generation Z members' values and attitudes.

4.2. Interpretation and Grouping of Findings

4.2.1. Analyzing effects of underlying values and attitudes on Generation Z consumer behavior

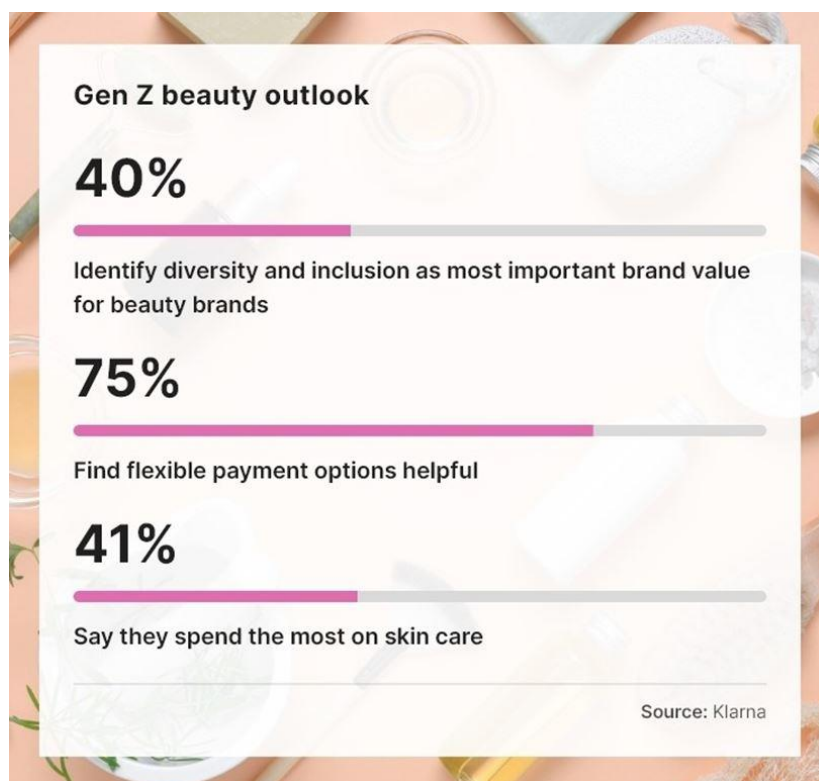
Answers to the first non-demographic question, which was: *On which products do you spend the most money on a monthly basis?* are in accordance with the theoretical background from the opening part of the paper. Some of the most frequent answers were makeup and cosmetics products (Fig. 8). Generation Z consumers, who rely heavily on digital and information technologies, seem to be influenced by social media trends and online beauty influencers. The answers in our case do not explicitly mention any specific brand names. However, Generation Z consumers stated the importance of perceived brand quality. If the makeup products in question are from well-known brands with a reputation for high quality, these consumers are more inclined to perceive them as valuable and make a purchase.

Even though in the focus groups conducted females were slightly prevalent, even male respondents talked about decisions when buying cosmetics, hairstyle products, clothing, etc. These findings about the quality perception of a product are in accordance with Majeed *et al.* (2021) statement provided in the opening part of the paper that products with well-

known brand names have an impact on young generation customers' perceptions of the brand's high-quality and overall value, which affects their intentions to buy, suggesting that the more valuable something is seen to be, the more likely they are to make a purchase.

Another frequent remark was skincare products, that align with the emphasis on personal care and well-being, which are important lifestyle values for Generation Z. Skincare is perceived as an essential aspect of Generation Z's daily routines and self-care rituals. Similarly to the makeup purchases, the purchasing intention and perceived value of cosmetics are for Generation Z respondents influenced by the brand's reputation and quality. However, the answers did not specify concrete brand names, so it's challenging to determine the impact of brand influence on skincare product purchases.

Figure 8. Gen Z Beauty Consumers



Source: Amanda Lim: How to Win over...the Multidimensional Generation Z Beauty Consumers, Gen Z beauty consumers: How to win over... this multifaceted generation (cosmeticsdesign-asia.com) (4.5.2023)

Respondents also stated “regular stuff, food, and cosmetics” as their most frequent purchase. This response indicates a balance between practicality and self-expression in their spending habits. A decent amount of respondents state that they spend the most money on clothes. With clothing as a significant area where Generation Z consumers invest their money, and their lifestyle being reliant on digital technologies, this might confirm their aim to keep up with fashion trends, and at the same time seek out unique

styles that reflect their individuality.

However, the most frequent answer was *food*. Food is a basic necessity for everyone, but for Generation Z, it may also represent an opportunity to express their values and lifestyle choices, such as opting for eco-friendly, organic, or locally sourced products or on the other hand fast food, which is by the portion of respondents accentuated to be in accordance with their lifestyles. Both food and clothing are essential aspects of daily life, and respondents also showed the tendency to be drawn to fashionable clothing choices that are popular among their peers, as well as trying to make wise food choices in terms of health effects.

Provided answers show that Generation Z consumers' spending habits are not so diverse among each other, which aligns with their values and lifestyle choices. They are likely to be influenced by digital media and social trends, making online marketing and influencers vital in targeting this demographic. Their focus on personal care and self-expression plays a significant role in their purchasing decisions. To effectively cater to Generation Z, businesses should consider creating marketing strategies that resonate with their lifestyles, interests, and shared values.

When asked whether the most important characteristic of the product is that it best addresses their needs, that it presents them in a certain way, or that makes them feel a certain way, almost the same number of respondents stated the importance of satisfying their needs and making them feel a certain way. These responses align with the findings that consumers' different shopping orientations and decision-making behaviors are influenced by value-based market segments and shopping personalities.

Consumers who express the importance of satisfying their needs are likely to be value-driven and practical in their approach to buying products, while the importance of evoking a certain feeling indicates that the emotional aspect plays a significant role in the purchasing decision for a decent amount of respondents. Consumers with this preference may prioritize products that evoke positive emotions or align with their personal values and identity. When it comes to targeting such consumers, marketers should focus on creating advertising and messaging that appeals to emotions, using storytelling and brand association to connect with them.

The conclusion that can be made based on this question is that marketers should tailor their strategies to resonate with these different consumer preferences, whether by evoking emotions through branding or emphasizing the practical benefits of their products to meet specific needs.

The next question asked was how the respondents determine if a product or service is worth the price. Some of the answers given were: *'If it's doing what it's supposed to do'*; *'If it is good enough and based on the quality of that product'*; and *'Testing'*. These responses align with Generation Z's focus on the functionality and performance of the

product or service. They expect products to fulfill their intended purpose, and if a product meets these expectations, it is likely to be perceived as worth the price.

Generation Z consumers through this research have shown that they carefully consider the quality of a product before making a purchase. If they find the quality to be satisfactory and meet their standards, they are more likely to believe the product is worth its price. These findings are aligned with the statement of Wells *et al.* (2018), that consumers want companies to explain why prices are what they are and that transparency is valued by customers. They want companies to be transparent about their products' quality, and the perceived brand quality can influence their purchasing intention and perceived value. If a product is associated with high-quality standards, it is more likely to be considered worth the price by this demographic.

When it comes to *'Testing'* as a remark for determining the accuracy of the price for certain products, it confirms Generation Z's expectation to access a wide range of information before making purchases and is in accordance with Wells *et al.* (2018) statement that Generation Z is practically driven. Testing aligns with their desire for information and careful consideration. Trying out a product can help them assess its functionality and determine if it meets their needs, which is crucial in deciding its worth.

On the other hand, there were a certain amount of responses that put emphasis on feeling, such as *'If I feel good while using it, it's worth the price'*. Generation Z's consideration of the overall consumption experience aligns with this response. They want to feel satisfied and have positive experiences with the products they buy. If a product brings them joy or meets their emotional needs, they are more likely to view it as worth the price.

The answer *'According to the quality, composition, and our own opinion or view of a product'* - combines various factors; including quality and the individual's perspective. Generation Z consumers take into account both objective information about the product's quality (which can be influenced by transparency), and their subjective evaluation to make an informed decision.

A decent amount of respondents also agreed on not being sure until the first use. This cautious approach to purchasing aligns with Generation Z's expectation of carefully considering information before buying. They may want to experience the product firsthand to evaluate its performance and determine if it meets their expectations.

In summary, the provided answers are consistent with Generation Z's expectations and shopping behaviors. They prioritize quality, functionality, and transparency when determining if a product or service is worth the price. Visual appeal and the overall consumption experience also play a role in their evaluation process. The emphasis on information, transparency, and careful consideration are key factors to consider when marketing products to Generation Z consumers.

All of the answers indicate that it is important for people that products fit their personality,

while the majority of them specifically mention “*clothes*” as a product for which personality fit matters. One respondent mentioned “*cosmetics and clothes*” as the types of products for which personality fit is essential, as well as “*clothes and footwear*”. This importance of products to fit the personality of Generation Z members is mostly connected with the products that are worn and seen by others - their colleagues, friends, and members of their generation. This is in accordance with Francis and Hoefel (2018) assert that young individuals have a significant influence on shaping trends and behaviors due to their representation of current cultural dynamics. The data mentioned supports the notion that this generation highly values acceptance and interconnectedness, often facilitated through social media. Additionally, it highlights their dedicated efforts to foster and express their unique identities and personalities.

Furthermore, Francis and Hoefel (2018) emphasize that the core of Generation Z’s ideology revolves around displaying their personal identities. As a result, consumption becomes a means of self-expression rather than merely conforming to social norms or brand endorsements. Authors also state that Generation Z is comfortable embracing multiple identities, fostering a greater sense of self-expression and a willingness to empathize with diverse individuals in their quest for authenticity, which is confirmed by the answers provided by focus group respondents.

When asked have they ever purchased a product or service solely based on its price, even if the quality was lower and to explain why, the majority of respondents stated that it was not the case, or very rarely, with some respondents stating that they would opt for product solely based on lower price only if they find it to be ‘not that important’. They further explain that remark as the products that do not affect their lifestyle or health and that they do not use frequently or they do not plan on using for a long period of time.

These findings derived from the answers of the majority of respondents are not in accordance with Gubiniova *et al.* (2021), showing that the most chosen reason by respondents to not buy something was “high prices”, as the element that has the greatest potential to stop purchasing decisions. However, there were some respondents who accentuated lower prices in purchasing decisions as a more important factor than it is to other respondents, stating that they would buy a product solely based on its lower price because they believe that even if the price is lower products “*can always be used in the way it is intended, regardless of the period of use.*”

Analyzing the answers provided to the question “*Have you ever purchased a product or service solely based on its price, even if the quality was lower? If yes - why?*” we can conclude that they are in accordance with the findings of Francis & Hoefel (2019) about Generation Z’s motivations for consumption and their pursuit of truth, authenticity, and multiple identities.

Response “*Yes, higher price to make me feel important*” represents the desire to feel important which aligns with the generation’s need for recognition and connectivity within

their social circles, as found by Kahawandala *et al.* (2020).

There were several respondents stated that they do not discriminate based on price at all, which reflects a consideration for ethical concerns, which is one of the implications highlighted by Francis & Hoefel (2019) that Generation Z's consumption choices are not solely about material possessions, but also about ethical considerations and personal values.

Overall, these responses showcase a mixture of behaviors and motivations that are in line with the findings of Francis & Hoefel (2019) regarding Generation Z's consumption patterns. The influence of social media and the desire for self-expression without putting emphasis solely on price are all evident in the responses. It highlights the complexity of Generation Z's relationship with consumerism, where consumption becomes a means of expressing their identity rather than merely conforming to norms or possessing material items.

The answers to the question "*Have you ever purchased a product or service because of the feeling it evokes, even if the price was high? Why?*" can be analyzed in the context of consumer motivations and emotions. Again on this question, a significant number of respondents denied buying products based on the feeling it evokes, which suggests a more practical and value-driven approach to purchasing decisions, where the emotional aspect does not seem to heavily influence their choices. These consumers are likely to prioritize meeting their functional needs and getting value for their money. An interesting remark was that several confirmatory answers were related to food, especially chocolate, which indicates that the taste and enjoyment of the product play a significant role in the purchasing decision. Positive emotions associated with the product's taste led to the purchase. There were several confirmatory answers not related to food, that highlighted the importance of emotional satisfaction in the purchasing decision, which aligns with Generation Z's focus on the overall consumption experience and the consideration of the emotional impact a product has on them. Even though this question was directly connected to emotions, even on this question several respondents gave answers like "*If the product really suits me*" or "*If it fits me*". These responses suggest that alignment with personal identity and values plays a role in the purchasing decision, again accentuating Generation Z's preference for products that reflect their individual identity and values. In line with the findings, it's clear that emotions play a significant role for some respondents when making purchasing decisions.

Emotions can arise from factors like taste and overall positive feelings associated with a product, but also positive emotions can arise from the feeling that the product suits a consumer, which shows the connection between the feelings evoked by a product and the product being representative of one's personality. This aligns with the trend observed among Generation Z, where the emotional impact of a product and its ability to satisfy their emotional needs contribute to their decision-making process. Marketers looking to appeal to such consumers should focus on creating emotional connections through their

products and messaging, emphasizing how the product can enhance the consumer's overall experience and emotional well-being.

4.2.2. Influence of technological improvements on Generation Z's shopping habits

The next group of questions is intended to provide a deeper understanding of Generation Z's online behavior (Fig. 9). A decent amount of respondents show high online engagement, stating that they spend 10-12 hours, 14 hours, and "*too many, probably 10 in total if I'm counting work*" per day. This level of engagement makes them more exposed to various online marketing tactics including encountering price and discount information, as well as online reviews and consumer behavior, as discussed by Fazith and Nithya (2023).

The majority of respondents mentioned spending from 4 to 8 hours online daily, and we can state that they fall into the moderate engagement category. On the other hand, respondents who mentioned spending 3 hours, 2 hours, and 30 minutes online daily have relatively low online engagement, which makes them less likely to be influenced by online marketing tactics due to their limited exposure to them.

In general, the majority of respondents stated they spend more than 5 hours per day online, implying that companies should adapt their strategies accordingly, ensuring that they align with the higher online activity levels of their target audience. This includes strategies related to price and discounts, transparency, brand authenticity, new product awareness, online reviews, and social media marketing tactics, as well as maintaining consistency in brand identity (Fazith and Nithya, 2023; Majeed *et al.*, 2021; Lalwani *et al.*, 2021).

Another question was more directly focused on online shopping, asking the participants how often they shop online and when was the last time they made an online purchase. The majority of the respondents answered that they purchase online on a weekly or monthly basis, with more than half of them stating they have made an online purchase within the last week. While further explaining their preference towards online shopping, the respondents have accentuated the benefits of using smart technologies while shopping like simplicity and speed of transactions, freedom from carrying cash or credit cards, and the convenience of finding product information quickly. These benefits are closely related to the findings of Priporas *et al.* (2017). Respondents' statements about "convenience, portability, and efficiency" echo the key advantages of smart technologies in shopping identified in the research. This suggests that Generation Z values these aspects in their shopping experiences, both online and offline.

In summary, the responses from Generation Z customers regarding their online shopping habits align with the aforementioned findings, while demonstrating a spectrum of online shopping frequencies and highlighting the significance of technology, convenience, and efficiency in their shopping preferences, whether it's online or offline.

This portion of questions, as mentioned earlier, was themed around technological advances

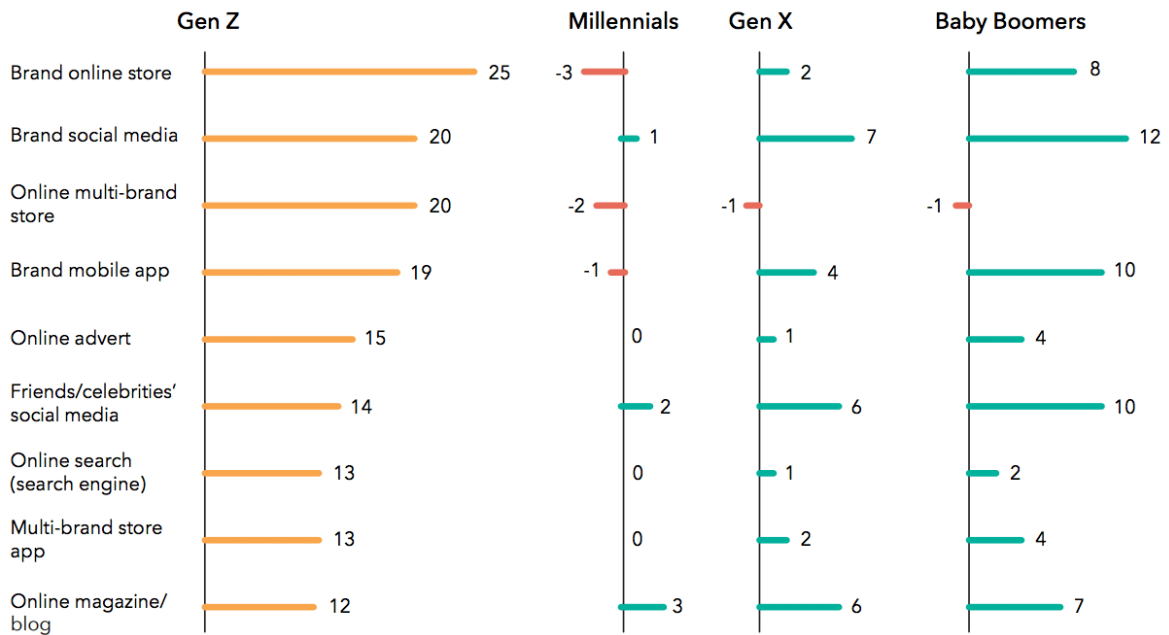
and possibilities it enables for online shopping and shopping in general, in order to get more insight into how technology affects the consumer behavior of Generation Z.

In order to get insight into this topic, the next question was whether the respondents believe that technology has improved their shopping experience in any way and if so, how?

Figure 9. Gen Z and Online Sources of Inspiration

Gen Z online sources of inspiration

% Selecting answer as source of inspiration for most recent purchase



Source: Richard Carufel, <https://www.agilitypr.com/pr-news/public-relations/new-gen-z-study-reveals-true-influencers-and-implications-for-communicators/>, (20.3.2023)

The responses from Generation Z regarding the impact of technology on their shopping experience align to a high extent with several of the findings mentioned in the previous part of the research. The fact that can be accentuated in the first place is better marketing possibilities, with one respondent mentioning that technology has improved their shopping experience due to “better marketing possibilities (social media).” This resonates with the notion that Generation Z is highly engaged with social media platforms, using them for content contribution, information sharing, and entertainment (Fazith & Nithya, 2023).

Another point is certainly quicker shopping, with the majority of respondents stating that technology has made their purchasing process quicker (“Yes, quicker”; “Quick and effective”). This emphasis on speed and efficiency in shopping aligns with the desire for convenience and efficiency mentioned in the previous research, with the author Wood (2013) stating that Gen Z values technology for making processes faster and more streamlined.

Accessibility and information are elements that are also highlighted by multiple

respondents mentioning that technology has made products more accessible and provided them with more information about products. This connects with the idea that technology plays a significant role in meeting consumer expectations and desires (Baruk & Iwanicka, 2016). Gen Z's use of technology for information gathering and fact-checking is evident here. Respondents also mentioned that technology has allowed them to have access to a lot of information about products and make purchases from home, reducing time consumption. This also reflects the Gen Z trend of using technology for online participation and information usage (Fazith & Nithya, 2023)

One respondent specifically mentioned AI, highlighting the role of artificial intelligence in enhancing the shopping experience. This aligns with the concept of technology-driven innovation and change, with Gen Z using technology for comfort and convenience (Wijaya *et al.*, 2020).

Comparative shopping is another interesting remark that can be taken out from the focus groups' answers since the majority of respondents mentioned that technology makes it easier to compare prices, compositions, availability, and other product details. This aligns with the desire for interactivity and increased reach through technology, as discussed in the research by Sawhney *et al.* (2005) and Hampton *et al.* (2011).

One respondent mentioned the ability to pay for items in installments, which is facilitated by technology. This reflects the convenience offered by technology in terms of payment options, and not only focusing on technology in terms of the Internet, web shops, and social media, which shows the wider spectrum of elements that technology affects when it comes to buying.

In summary, the responses from Generation Z regarding their shopping experiences emphasize the importance of technology in providing convenience, information access, and efficiency in the shopping process. These findings are consistent with the research indicating that Gen Z's behavior is heavily influenced by technology, social media, and the desire for a seamless and interactive shopping experience.

With the aim to get an insight into whether the technological advances would foster the consumption of Generation Z consumers, they were asked if they would say that they are more likely to make a purchase online compared to in-store, and more detailed about the reasons for it.

The majority of respondents accentuated the preference for online shopping over shopping in-store, with several remarks that the reason for it is that they do not like interacting with salespeople, and sometimes even people in general. This sentiment aligns with the idea of escapism discussed by Browne *et al.* (2004) and the trend of Generation Z seeking opportunities to escape through technology (Wood, 2013). The respondent's aversion to in-person interactions is reflective of the shift towards digital interactions, especially among younger generations. Other respondents mentioned that they prefer online shopping

because it's clearer to them and offers the convenience of delivery to their address. This reflects the expectation of “more, smaller, and better” versions of technical products among Generation Z, as they are comfortable with the virtual environment and expect efficient online experiences (Wood, 2013).

The mention of lower costs related to fuel and parking fees when shopping online aligns with the convenience aspect discussed by Liu *et al.* (2013), where technology is used to enhance the shopping experience by reducing the friction associated with physical shopping.

Conversely, some respondents expressed a preference for in-store shopping. One respondent feels more comfortable shopping in-store, especially for clothes and shoes. This aligns with the idea that certain product categories, like fashion, may still benefit from the tactile and sensory experience of in-person shopping since even for this consumer group quality is what matters most.

Some respondents mention using both online and in-store options. This reflects the flexibility and convenience that technology has brought to the shopping experience. Generation Z's comfort with digital tools allows them to seamlessly switch between online and offline channels as needed confirms the findings of Francis and Hoefel (2018) that today's consumers have elevated their expectations, seeking the flexibility to access products and services at their convenience, regardless of time or location, and the evolution of omnichannel marketing and sales becoming imperative as the digital and physical realms seamlessly converge. For individuals who are consistently connected online, the traditional boundary between online and offline has effectively dissolved.

The mention of being more likely to buy online, because items can usually be returned to the store, aligns with the concept of reducing risk aversion in online shopping. Online shopping platforms often provide return policies that reduce the perceived risk of making a purchase (Wu *et al.*, 2015). This risk reduction through online influence and transactions is highlighted in the responses.

In summary, the responses from Generation Z regarding their shopping preferences showcase the impact of technology and digital culture on their buying behavior. Their choices are influenced by convenience, cost considerations, comfort levels, and the desire for efficient and hassle-free shopping experiences, all of which are in line with the findings from the previous authors. This generation's ability to navigate both physical and digital shopping environments reflects their adaptability and high expectations for technology-driven solutions.

4.2.3. Analysis of the Generation Z consumers' risk approach

The next portion of questions was intended to find out more about how Generation Z consumers approach risk, in the context of the large amount of data available (Fig. 10). To

gain more insight into this matter, respondents were first asked if they conducted some type of research prior to buying, and respondents' answers showed a high rate of difference among one another.

While some answers stated a high degree of prior research, others mentioned completely different habits, including terms like *buying frenzy*, without a high level of risk evaluation. However, the number of Generation Z members conducting prior research was significantly higher.

Figure 10. How do Generation Z consumers approach risk?



Source: Georgi Todorov, *Top Generation Z Marketing Statistics 2023 [Facts and Trends]*
<https://thrivemyway.com/gen-z-marketing-stats/> (5.6.2023)

The answers provided by the people from Generation Z in the focus group survey can be analyzed in light of the previous findings from different authors, with statements like “*I check all product reviews*”; “*I always use Google*” and “*Yes, I do. I search for other prices and models and make comparisons*” aligning with the research findings mentioned by Fazith and Nithya (2023) and Moe & Trusov (2011). Moe & Trusov (2011) also mentioned forums as a source of information, which was confirmed by the respondents. This information is quite surprising, since with the rise of social media and influencer reviews, forums could be considered a bit old-fashioned, but as we can see they have not lost their influencing power. Generation Z heavily relies on online sources of information, including product reviews and price comparisons, before making purchasing decisions. They seek out user-generated content and use platforms like Google for research. This behavior reflects their comfort with navigating through vast amounts of information, as mentioned by Thangavel *et al.* (2021).

Response “*I will check if the same or similar item is available in another branch at a*

better price” indicates that Generation Z is not only concerned with online research but also actively explores offline options, such as checking other physical stores for better prices. This behavior is in line with the findings of Kahawandala *et al.* (2020), which highlight that Gen Z considers a wide range of information sources, including physical retail stores, before making purchases.

However, as mentioned earlier several responses show that not all members of Generation Z engage in extensive online research before making a purchase. Some still rely on social connections (“*No, I just talk with my family or friends who already bought these or similar products*”) and impulsive buying tendencies (“*No, I just kinda get swept up in a 3 am buying frenzy*”). These answers are in line with the research findings from Kahawandala *et al.* (2020) and Francis and Hoefel (2018) emphasizing the importance of friends and acquaintances in shaping Gen Z’s purchasing choices. A significant percentage of respondents in Kahawandala *et al.*’s study rely on the recommendations of friends with the goal of getting better recognition from their social circle, and Francis and Hoefel’s research indicates that recommendations from friends are the most trusted source of information for Gen Z.

In summary, the survey responses from Generation Z in these focus groups reflect a diverse range of consumer behaviors, as highlighted by the various authors’ findings. While some members conduct thorough online research, others rely on social connections or make impulse purchases. However, the overarching trend is that Gen Z places a significant emphasis on information access and user-generated content in their purchasing decisions, in line with the “era of information” and social media exposure they have had from a young age. Companies looking to target this generation should consider the importance of online reviews, price comparisons, and social media influence in their marketing strategies.

When asked for what type of products they conducted the most extensive research, almost a proportional amount of them mentioned clothes and cosmetics, while there was also a remarkable amount of them who mentioned technological devices. The majority of respondents conducting the most extensive research when buying clothing confirms the statement of Yadav and Rai (2017) about Generation Z’s tech-savvy nature and heightened fashion awareness. The responses emphasizing the importance of research before buying fashion products are also in line with Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) asserting that certain individuals may not adhere to particular brands and instead exhibit a strong attachment to fashion trends.

Based on the responses to the question *How important are social media influencers or product reviews to you when making a purchasing decision?* we can draw several conclusions and make connections with the previous findings mentioned. Generation Z, being born in the era of internet technology and instant communication, places significant importance on technology and social media in their lives (Wood, 2013; Wijaya *et al.*, 2020), which aligns with the responses of a group of respondents stating that to them

influencers and their reviews are “*very important, especially when it comes to materials and clothing items.*” Since comments in this context were repeated, we can conclude that the statement from Fazith & Nithya (2023) about Gen Z’s usage of social media in order to content contribute, share information, use information, and search for facts and data with online participation is also confirmed.

The majority of responses suggesting that social media influencers and product reviews play a role in their purchasing decisions is also consistent with the research indicating that social media has a substantial impact on Gen Z’s buying behavior (Kahawandala *et al.*, 2020). Many respondents mention the importance of peer opinions, with some explicitly stating that they listen to others when making buying decisions, but that they rather follow the reviews from people who are not “internet famous” and influencers, as stated by Fazith & Nithya (2023), when consumers observe product or service being used by their friends, their trust in the product or service increases as well as the likelihood of making a purchase. This aligns with the significance of social interaction and connectivity among Gen Z mentioned in the text (Majeed *et al.*, 2021; Francis and Hoefel, 2018), as well as with the Kahawandala *et al.* (2020) research findings showing that 22.5% of consumers only consider friends’ opinions when making purchases.

However, as stated earlier Generation Z values individuality and self-expression, often howcased on social media platforms (Kahawandala *et al.*, 2020). This might explain why some respondents emphasized that they care most about their own opinions when making purchases, offering responses suggesting that they do not care about anyone else’s opinion in the purchase except their own. Several remarks suggested that consumers of Generation Z think “*everyone should know what is best for them*”.

The most significant portion of respondents stated that for them social media and influencers’ reviews are highly important and they are considered relevant - but not the main factor affecting the purchasing decision. Respondents’ reliance on product reviews and peer opinions resonates with the idea that user-generated content, including reviews and social media posts, can influence Gen Z’s purchasing decisions (Fazith & Nithya, 2023; Lalwani *et al.*, 2021). However, as stated by Majeed *et al.* (2021), when it comes to social media marketing strategies and the inclination for online engagement, the way companies interact with their customers online can lead to either positive or negative interactions, ultimately influencing their brand reputation. This is in accordance with the findings derived from the focus groups’ responses, that consumers rely on social media and influencers, but they mostly believe in themselves and their personal judgment is crucial to them.

When asked how important it for them is risk minimization when making a purchasing decision/choosing among many options, the majority of respondents showed a tendency of risk aversion and risk reduction. Asking someone they know if they’ve tried a product was mentioned often, which highlights the significance of information exchange and communication. Generation Z is known for its ability to quickly access and verify

information through various communication tools and social media, as mentioned by Dolot (2018). Respondents also showed to be more inclined to trust recommendations from people they perceive as closer connections, such as Instagram personalities with a moderate following, rather than high-profile influencers. This aligns with Francis and Hoefel's (2018) discussion of the evolving marketing landscape and the increasing awareness among consumers regarding influencer marketing practices.

Besides trying to reduce risk before purchase by researching others' opinions, product experience, and recommendations, some respondents mentioned practices like buying multiple products and returning those that do not fit. The respondents also emphasized that this practice is more available and easy to do through the rise in online shopping popularity, which enables them to pick up a lot of products and simply return those that they do not like. These responses align with the findings of scholars like Verhagen and Van Dolen (2011) who also contend that online shoppers tend to make more impulsive purchases compared to customers who make in-store purchases. However, their impulsive purchases are to a high extent substantiated and justified in their minds by the possibility of return.

A significantly smaller number of respondents expressed a more impulsive approach to purchasing decisions, stating that they do not put so much value on risk aversion, since they can always buy another product. An interesting remark is that this answer was provided by respondents from different demographics, both those living alone and those still living with their parents.

In conclusion, Generation Z's responses show a range of attitudes towards risk when making purchasing decisions, from impulsive to cautious, with risk aversion being more dominant in answers. Additionally, the importance of information exchange and the changing dynamics of marketing, especially influencer marketing, are evident in their responses.

The next question asked whether the consumers had ever made a high-risk purchase, and if yes what was the product and why they had made such a risk, the answers were differentiated, but with negation predominant. This can be rather surprising, since Generation Z, as mentioned earlier by various authors, showed tendencies to impulse buying especially with online shopping availability, the presence of many product offerings, and global connectivity. However, as stated by Dolot (2018), the exchange of information is highly important to Generation Z, and since the information they require can be easily accessed and corroborated, this Generation might be more risk-averse due to this fact that they can check anything before the purchase and in that way decrease the possibilities of being dissatisfied with the products bought.

Kahawandala *et al.* (2020) state that to Generation Z money has value, since this Generation experienced global financial changes that reflected in their homes, and that they tend to save money. Even though this can be surprising due to the young age of Generation

Z, and the impulsivity and carefreeness that are typical to young people, these statements were also confirmed by the answers in focus groups conducted. Respondents showed a high tendency to value money, realizing the importance of saving and mindful spending.

When it comes to affirmative answers on buying that involved a higher level of risk, all of the answers included online shopping. This aligns with Sharma *et al.* (2010) observation that online customers often make impulsive decisions without thorough consideration, due to the visual representation of the product and their feelings affecting their actions. Van Dolen (2011) also confirms that online shoppers show more impulsive buying behavior than buyers in physical stores, which is also confirmed by Wu *et al.* (2015) that marketing influences can reduce risk aversion when it comes to online shopping and motivate consumers to make immediate purchases. The fact that online shoppers tend to be more impulsive when it comes to buying can also be explained by the rapid expansion of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest that, with the content they offer, contributes to the prevalence of impulsive buying among Generation Z (Priporas *et al.*, 2017; Djafarova and Bowes, 2021).

The last question was focused on finding more about how consumers perceive the reliability of information sources. The answers were focused both on online sources, as well as real-life recommendations, and they showed a clear pattern. Almost an equal number of respondents mentioned their perception of website professionalism, as well as accepting the information from people they trust in general.

When it comes to focusing on online stores and websites, authors like Majeed *et al.* (2021) already argue that prior to making a purchase, consumers typically engage in a process involving understanding the product or service, conducting research, and analyzing the item.

The presence of convenience plays a pivotal role in retaining customers, as evidenced by Lloyd *et al.* (2014). In our case, respondents stated that they judge the reliability based on how “*professional the site seems*” or by “*trying to find the most realistic data, that can be seen through how detailed the products are described, reviewed, and so on*”.

Regarding this topic, Majeed *et al.* (2021) emphasize the importance of structuring online activities to provide intellectual and educational experiences, facilitate social interactions, and offer comprehensive personal assistance, all of which can enhance a company’s reputation. At the same time, Gubiniova *et al.* (2021) found that in terms of the reliability and appeal of promotional campaigns and advertising to Generation Z, members primarily find advertising to be irritating, followed by their dislike for cliché-filled and unrealistic advertising. The conclusion is that companies should be rather careful when trying to effectively promote products and services through online platforms and cultivate loyalty among Generation Z consumers while generating leads.

A significant portion of respondents focused their responses on trusting the sources only

from people they know, their friends - especially those who have used the product before. These responses offer a new prism and decrease the perception of Generation Z consumers as impulsive buyers, providing the perspective of rather rational and mindful consumers. Among such responses, there were also several remarks on trusting professionals in certain categories, like for example *“make-up artists when it comes to make-up, cosmetics, and anything concerning beauty”*.

According to a study conducted by Tari-Kasnakoğlu *et al.* (2020), most Generation Z individuals spend a significant portion of their day interacting with friends and family, engaging in conversations, and sharing their daily experiences, the responses putting focus on valuing their friends' recommendations are not a surprising fact. As mentioned earlier, research conducted by Kahawandala *et al.* (2020) revealed that 52% of respondents acknowledge the influence of their friends on their decision-making, with 22.5% admitting that they exclusively take their friends' opinions into account when making purchases. Similarly, research by Francis and Hoefel (2018) discovered that 63% of surveyed consumers consider recommendations from friends as their most trusted source for learning about products and brands.

On the other hand, a group of respondents stated only relied on their feelings and others on their intuition. This confirms the thesis of Akduman (2020) that in addition to valuing freedom, Generation Z also exhibits a strong aversion to authority and seeks to exercise autonomy in decision-making, while placing a premium on independence, both in terms of making choices autonomously and acquiring knowledge through self-imposed conditions.

The tendency to acquire knowledge through self-imposed conditions as stated by the aforementioned author, is also confirmed through the focus group responses, with several respondents stating that the only reliable source for them is their own judgment. They proceed to state that they buy products based on their own experience, alongside statements like *“I mostly buy everything from companies that I already know, and from which I have bought before”*.

5. CONCLUSION

This research has provided valuable insights into the diverse consumer behavior of Generation Z.. It delves into the core values, attitudes, and preferences that shape their purchasing habits, revealing a complex interplay of factors that marketers and businesses need to consider in their strategies.

Generation Z places significant emphasis on individuality and self-expression. Their buying decisions are often driven by a desire to assert their unique identity. Makeup, cosmetics, and fashionable clothing emerge as prominent monthly expenses. These choices are heavily influenced by the pervasive reach of social media trends, reflecting Generation Z's strong focus on personal care and well-being. The fact that many in this generation are still without children means they have the flexibility and inclination to allocate significant

portions of their budgets to such products.

Quality, functionality, and transparency are the main criteria when evaluating the worth of a product or service for this generation. The role of emotions and personal identity alignment should not be underestimated, as they also play a pivotal role in decision-making. Generation Z consumers value transparency in product quality, and brand reputation has considerable influence over their purchase decisions. Quality is shown to be more important than lower prices, especially concerning products that impact their lifestyle and health. In contrast, positive emotions, such as those associated with food products, can sway buying choices. Products that resonate with personal identity and values also hold a significant place in the decision-making process for certain consumers.

Furthermore, Generation Z's online behavior and its influence on shopping preferences is a significant aspect. The fact that a majority of respondents spend more than 5-6 hours online highlights the degree of importance of the role that technology plays in their lives. Technology has streamlined marketing possibilities through social media and simultaneously facilitated quicker, more convenient shopping. Accessibility to products and information has also increased, reflecting their inclination to use technology for information gathering. The ability to compare prices and product details easily, a key priority for Generation Z, is made simpler through technology.

Generation Z demonstrates a diverse range of behaviors when it comes to risk in their purchasing decisions. These behaviors are influenced by various factors, including online information access, social connections, and individuality. Some in this demographic conduct extensive research before making purchases, which involves checking product reviews, using search engines like Google, and seeking information on forums. On the other side, some still rely on social connections and follow impulse buying tendencies, underscoring the broad spectrum of consumer behaviors within the generation.

It's important to mention that certain product categories, such as clothing, cosmetics, and technological devices, demand more extensive research. This aligns with tech-savvy nature, fashion awareness, and strong desire for self-expression of the Generation Z. Social media influencers and product reviews hold considerable influence on their purchasing decisions. However, trust in recommendations from people perceived as closer connections, like friends, often outweighs high-profile influencers. This preference for risk aversion and risk reduction strategies is evident in the way they seek information from friends and online sources, as well as their propensity to buy multiple products with the option of easy returns. The popularity of online shopping enables more impulsive buying behavior, further reducing the risk associated with their purchases.

This study, while rich in insights, also comes with certain limitations. Variations in behavior and preferences can exist due to regional and cultural differences. Respondents' reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, as they may provide idealized responses rather than reflecting their actual actions. This discrepancy between reported and

real-world behaviors is a challenge in understanding consumer choices. The study has not deeply explored the influence of financial constraints on purchasing decisions, potentially leaving one aspect unexamined.

To conclude, understanding Generation Z's consumer behavior is of high importance to businesses and marketers. This generation exhibits diverse spending habits, prioritizing both practical and emotional aspects of their consumption decisions. The influence of social media, peer groups, and brand reputation is undeniable and should be central in shaping marketing strategies. Their desire for convenience, efficiency, and access to information highlights the significance of technology in shopping preferences of Generation Z. The ability to seamlessly navigate between online and offline channels demonstrates their adaptability.

Generation Z's approach to risk in purchasing decisions is characterized by a wide range of behaviors, influenced by factors such as online information access, social connections, and individuality. While some members conduct extensive research and value social media influencers and product reviews, others rely on personal connections or follow impulsive tendencies. Risk aversion and risk reduction strategies are prevalent, with the Internet providing information and increasing risk evaluation while at the same time allowing impulsive buying behavior.

Generation Z's complex relationship with consumerism reflects their desire for authenticity, self-expression, and a deep consideration of the impact of products on their lives. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for businesses seeking to engage effectively with this demographic. To sum up, the importance of adapting marketing strategies to align with the values and preferences of Generation Z and the need for further research to stay attuned to their ever-evolving consumer behavior in the dynamic landscape of the marketplace should be accentuated.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX

Focus group reminder

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your highest level of education completed?
4. What is your current employment status?
5. What is your marital status?
6. Do you have any children?
7. On which products do you spend the most money monthly?
8. When buying a new product, is it more important to you that it best addresses your needs, that it presents you in a certain way, or that it makes you feel a certain way?
9. How do you determine if a product or service is worth the price?
10. When buying products is it important to you that they fit your personality? If yes, which type of products mostly?
11. Have you ever purchased a product or service solely based on its price, even if the quality was lower? Why?
12. Have you ever purchased a product or service because you wanted to be perceived a certain way, or because it fits your social identity, even if the price was high? Why?
13. Have you ever purchased a product or service because of the feeling it evokes, even if the price was high? Why?
14. How many hours a day do you usually spend online?
15. How often do you shop online? When was the last time you made an online purchase?
16. Do you believe that technology has improved your shopping experience in any way? If so, how?
17. Would you say that you are more likely to make a purchase online compared to in-store? Why or why not?
18. Do you conduct some type of research before buying? If yes, in which ways?
19. For which kind of products do you conduct the most extensive research?

20. How important are social media influencers or product reviews to you when making a purchasing decision?
21. How important is it for you to minimize risk when making a purchasing decision/ choosing among many options?
22. Have you ever made a purchasing decision that involved a high level of risk, and if yes - what was the product, and why did you take the risk?
23. When faced with a large amount of data, how do you determine which sources are trustworthy and reliable?