

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the**

Master's degree

Major: Digital Management

THEME:

**The Psychological Mechanisms
Influencing Generation Z's Consumer
Behavior on Social Media
CASE: Higher School Of Management
and Digital Economy**

Submitted by :

Miss. BOUHARKAT Zahra

Supervised by :

Mrs. KOUADRI Norhene

Academic year

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Dedication

Dedication

To my mother,

I wouldn't have done it without you.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation represents one of my proudest achievements, and I am deeply grateful to all those who made this journey easier each day.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Mrs. KOUADRI Norhene, for her trust, guidance, and support in helping me bring my vision to life.

I am equally thankful to my family and closest friends, whose encouragement and presence accompanied me every step of the way.

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List of Abbreviations

BDS	Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions
FCB	Foote, Cone, and Belding
LTR	Learning to rank
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound
SMM	Social Media Marketing
KOL	Key Opinion Leaders
AR	Augmented Reality
VR	Virtual Reality
UGC	User-Generated Content
WOM	Word-Of-Mouth
LCS	Live Streaming Commerce
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIM	Affect Infusion Model
B2B	Business-to-Business
B2C	Business-to-Consumer
FOMO	Fear of Missing Out
LTC	Limited-Time Scarcity
LQS	Limited-Quantity Scarcity
HSMDE	Higher School of Management and Digital Economy
GRWM	Get Ready With Me

Abstract

Generation Z has been shaped by different societal, economic, and technological events, growing up in a world where change happens faster than ever before. In a world where today's media icons can easily become tomorrow's forgotten names, Generation Z is maturing at a fast pace, marked by a high level of self-awareness, contrary to common misconceptions. Their way of thinking and acting, especially in daily routines and consumption habits, is both complex and fascinating. To build meaningful connections with this audience, it's important for marketers to understand their emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses, as well as the underlying motivations behind them.

To address this issue, this research began with an exhaustive literature review and an exploratory qualitative study, which helped shape the initial hypotheses. These hypotheses were then tested through a quantitative survey distributed to students at the Higher School of Management and Digital Economy. The collected data were analyzed using XLSTAT software, applying Chi-square tests.

The findings revealed which psychological mechanisms most strongly influence Generation Z's consumer behavior, how they respond to these triggers, and which types of social media content are most effective in driving purchase decisions.

This analysis forms the foundation of the theoretical and methodological contributions of this thesis, as well as recommendations for industry professionals who want to connect more effectively with today's young, digitally-native consumers.

Keywords: Generation Z, behavioral responses, psychological mechanisms, social media, consumption habits.

ملخص

لقد مر الجيل زاد بسلسلة من الاحداث الاجتماعية، الاقتصادية والتكنولوجية المختلفة، حيث نشأ في عالم يتغير بسرعة لم يسبق لها مثيل. في زمن يمكن ان تصبح فيهمهم الوجوه الاعلامية اليوم مجرد اسم منسي في الغد، ينمو جيل "زد" بسرعة كبيرة، ويمتلك قدرا كبيرا من الوعي الذاتي، على عكس المعتقدات الشائعة. طريقة تفكير هذا الجيل وتصرفاته في الحياة اليومية، وخصوصا في عاداته الاستهلاكية ملهمة و مثيرة للفضول. من اجل فهم افرادة والتواصل معهم بشكل فعال، من الضروري أن يطلع المسوقون على استجابات هؤلاء الافراد النفسية والمعرفية والسلوكية، إلى جانب الدوافع العاطفية التي تحرك قراراتهم.

انطلاقا من هذه الاطروحة، استند هذا البحث في بدايته على مراجعة أدبية معمقة وشاملة، تلتها دراسة نوعية استكشافية ساعدت في صياغة الفرضيات الأساسية. وقد تم التحقق من هذه الفرضيات من خلال دراسة كمية، باستخدام استبيان وُزِع على طلاب المدرسة العليا للتسيير والاقتصاد الرقمي. وتم تحليل البيانات باستخدام برنامج XLSTAT عبر اختبارات Chi-square.

وقد أظهرت النتائج بوضوح الدوافع النفسية التي تؤثر بشكل كبير على سلوك المستهلك لدى هذا الجيل، وكشفت كيف يتفاعل معها، إضافة إلى أنواع المحتوى التي تترك أكبر أثر في قراراته الشرائية على مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي.

وتشكل هذه النتائج قاعدة للمساهمات النظرية والمنهجية في هذا البحث، كما توفر مجموعة من التوصيات العملية للمختصين في التسويق الذين يسعون إلى بناء علاقة حقيقية وفعالة مع هذا الجيل الرقمي الواعد.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الجيل زد، الاستجابات السلوكية، الدوافع النفسية، مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي ، العادات الاستهلاكية.

Résumé

La génération Z a grandi au cœur de nombreux bouleversements sociétaux, économiques et technologiques, en grandissant dans un monde où le changement se produit plus rapidement que jamais. Dans une époque où les icônes médiatiques d'aujourd'hui peuvent facilement tomber dans l'oubli demain, la génération Z évolue à un rythme accéléré, avec une conscience de soi particulièrement développée, contrairement aux idées reçues. Leur manière de penser et d'agir, notamment dans leur quotidien et dans leurs habitudes d'achat, est à la fois complexe et fascinante. Pour établir des liens significatifs avec cette audience, il est essentiel que les marketeurs comprennent leurs réactions émotionnelles, cognitives et comportementales, ainsi que les motivations profondes qui les inspirent.

Afin d'aborder cette problématique, cette recherche a commencé par une revue de littérature approfondie, suivie d'une étude qualitative exploratoire, qui a permis de formuler les premières hypothèses. Ces hypothèses ont ensuite été testées grâce à une enquête quantitative menée auprès des étudiants de l'École Supérieure de Management et d'Économie Numérique. Les données recueillies ont été analysées à l'aide du logiciel XLSTAT, en appliquant des tests du khi-deux.

Les résultats ont mis en évidence les mécanismes psychologiques ayant le plus d'impact sur le comportement d'achat de la génération Z, les réactions qu'ils suscitent, ainsi que les types de contenus sur les réseaux sociaux les plus efficaces pour inciter à l'achat.

L'analyse de ces résultats a servi de base pour formuler les contributions théoriques et méthodologiques de ce mémoire, ainsi que des recommandations à l'intention des professionnels souhaitant mieux engager cette génération numérique.

Mots clés : Génération Z, réactions comportementales, mécanismes psychologiques, réseaux sociaux, habitudes d'achat.

General Introduction

General Introduction

The presence and interaction of different generations in the market today is not only an interesting and unusual situation, it is also a challenge for different groups of people: managers, marketers, human resources specialists, psychologists, and the media. The youngest generation, called Generation Z, was born and raised in completely different circumstances than the other, older generations, being the first generation that never lived in a world without internet. Unlike Millennials, who witnessed the emergence and growth of technology and social media, Generation Z was born into a world where it was already present, where information is available, and social media is widespread. Although members of Generation Z have only recently entered the market, they are reshaping the modern consumer behavior models and the retail landscape. Characterized by their digital nativity, social consciousness, and demand for authenticity, presents both challenges and opportunities for marketers. Being considered the “most challenging” consumer generation to date because they have a completely different approach to shopping than previous generations, understanding and adapting to their preferences and values is not optional anymore, it’s essential for staying competitive in today’s market.

As the first generation born into a fully digital and hyper-connected world, they don’t distinguish between online and offline experiences, for them, screen time is blended with time offline, and both together they represent real life, this makes social media not only their first source of information, inspiration and product discovery, but a part of their identity that cannot be overlooked when studying their characteristics, behaviors, and decision making. This deep integration of social media into their daily lives makes them vulnerable to the psychological factors it triggers such as The Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO), which is a powerful emotional trigger activated by the emergence of fast changing trends, it drives young consumers to engage in unplanned behaviors, such as Impulsive Buying, making it a strong tool for marketers to drive people to interact and act fast.

This study explores these emotional and cognitive factors triggered by social media as the root of “how” and “why” Generation Z’s consumers make certain decisions.

The choice of this topic is a combination of personal and academic interests. On a personal level, as a member of Generation Z myself, I have always been curious about the

factors that drive the behaviors of people my age, and my passion for psychology from a very young age has deepened this curiosity, especially in understanding how psychological mechanisms influence the way we think, feel, and act as consumers since it is my field of study. In parallel, I have developed a strong interest in digital marketing, especially in content marketing during my academic years, and plan to pursue a career in this field. This research allowed me to bring together these two areas of interest, creating a subject that reflects both my academic curiosity and professional aspirations. On an academic level, although many studies explore social media's impact on consumer behavior, fewer focus specifically on Generation Z and the psychological factors influencing their behavior, making this a timely and underexplored area for academic research. This combination of personal interest and academic necessity leads to the following core research problem:

How do psychological mechanisms triggered by social media influence Generation Z's consumer behavior?

To better explore this topic, it is important to break it down into sub questions:

- 1. What types of social media content have the greatest impact on Generation Z's purchasing behavior?**
- 2. To what extent do psychological mechanisms play a role in impulsive buying decisions?**
- 3. How does trust in influencers and social validation influence Generation Z's product purchase decisions?**

In order to answer these questions, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

- H1: Content that shows real-life use of a product has a stronger impact on Generation Z's purchase decisions.**
- H2: Psychological mechanisms like FOMO and emotional storytelling significantly increase the likelihood of impulsive purchases among Generation Z social media users.**
- H3: Generation Z is more likely to purchase a product if it is recommended by a trusted influencer or receives high engagement on social media.**

This dissertation is structured into two chapters to guide the research:

The first chapter consists of three sections, it gives a theoretical perspective on the topic building on an exhaustive literature review covering various studies related to the

psychological traits of Generation Z, the evolution of social media platforms, and the psychological mechanisms that drive purchasing decisions in digital context using psychology and studies like “*The Characteristics of Generation Z*” by Anna Dolot, Albert Bandura’s “*Social Learning Theory*”, and Leon Festinger’s “*A Theory of Social Comparison Processes*”. The chapter also explores how social media has changed over time and become a powerful tool in marketing, using Simone Edosomwan’s “*The History of Social Media and its Impact on Business*” and Petruța Vinerean’s “*Importance of Strategic Social Media Marketing*”. Finally, This chapter looks at how Generation Z reacts to emotional content and social pressure, using ideas from Herbert C. Kelman’s “*Social Influence Theory*” and the article “*FOMO Related Consumer Behavior in Marketing Context: A Systematic Literature Review*” by Feni Alfina, Sri Hartini, and Nadya Mardhiyah.

The second chapter presents the practical framework of the research. To investigate the core hypotheses, a mixed-methods approach will be adopted to explore students’ consumer behavior on social media platforms, with the Higher School of Management and Digital Economy (HSMDE) serving as the host institution for the research. The qualitative phase will involve conducting semi-structured interviews with 25 students, five from each academic year, to gather insights into their online habits and decision-making processes. The findings of these interviews will be used in the creation of a quantitative survey, which will then be distributed to a larger student population. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods, this approach gives a deep analysis of students’ digital engagement and the psychological mechanisms driving their consumer behavior. To understand the results of the survey, two types of analysis are used: univariate and bivariate. First, univariate analysis examines each question independently to provide a clear picture of how Generation Z uses social media and what they are exposed to. Then, bivariate analysis is applied to explore the connections between specific psychological mechanisms and various consumer behaviors. This helps reveal how psychological factors can influence students' purchasing decisions.

Finally, the integration of multiple academic disciplines like psychology, digital marketing, and consumer behavior in this research makes it an innovative topic as it builds a strong foundation for comprehensive analysis and critical thinking.

Chapter 01:

The Influence of Psychological Mechanisms on Generation Z's Consumer Behavior on Social Media: A Theoretical Perspective.

Introduction

In today's hyper-connected digital world, defined by speed, screens, and endless scrolling, members of Generation Z can't separate their identity from social media as they navigate reality through smartphones, and constant connectivity, their relationship with technology is not optional, it's native.

From a young age, they have interacted with content, influencers, trends, and algorithms that respond instantly to their preferences, which makes this interaction go beyond entertainment or communication. It engages with deep psychological processes, behaviors, and decisions that need to be studied in order to understand how to satisfy this generation's needs.

This chapter explores the psychological theories behind the behavioral emotional and cognitive reactions of Generation Z, the way marketers can apply them to engage young consumers and maintain their attention, and the evolution of social media platforms throughout the years, the algorithms of the major platforms (TikTok and Instagram), and the most recent trends on social media marketing such as Live Streaming Commerce and Virtual Influencers.

Section 01: Psychological and Behavioral Profile of Generation Z

This section provides an overview of Generation Z's demographic traits, behavioral patterns, and the psychological theories that help explain how they engage with and respond to digital content, in the context of consumer decision-making.

1.1 Definition and Demographics: The characteristics and socio-cultural background of Generation Z

This part outlines the concept of a generation, situates Generation Z within today's generational landscape, and highlights their key traits shaped by a digital and socio-cultural context, laying the groundwork for understanding their psychological and consumer behavior.

1.1.1 The Concept of Generation

First and foremost, it is important to define the concept of "Generation", as it forms a crucial foundation for this research.

The term "Generation" comes from the Latin "generatio", which means "begetting" or "creation," derived from "generate" (to beget, produce), the earliest known use of this term is in the Middle English period (1150-1500) in the context of reproduction, ancestry, and time periods.¹

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines "Generation" as *'all of the people born and living at about the same time, regarded collectively'*.

A generation refers to a group of individuals born around the same time and share similar characteristics, values, beliefs and by experiencing and sharing significant historical events such as war or, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as economic and technological changes, individuals develop common values and characteristics. This phenomenon leads to the formation of a generational identity. The concept of "Generation" is

¹ <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=generation> (consulted 14/03/2025 at 02:48 PM).

therefore widely used to explain and understand social changes and differences across demographic groups.¹

1.1.2 The Five Generations in Today's Society²

According to The Center for Generational Kinetics,³ modern society is composed of five generations, each one is shaped by factors like education, economic conditions, and technological advancements:

- The Silent Generation (born before 1945).
- Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964).
- Generation X (born 1965–1976).
- Generation Y / Millennials (born 1977–1995).
- Generation Z (born 1996–2015).

The exact birth years defining each generation may vary slightly depending on the source. Moreover, generational traits and timelines can also differ across geographical regions.

According to sociologists specializing in intergenerational studies⁴, the main dividing line runs between two camps of generations: the first includes people born before 1980. This group is further divided into those aged 50 and above, including the Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) known as Generation X. The second, younger group consists of the rebellious Generation Y who witnessed the digital revolution and the rapid development of social media platforms and their successors Generation Z, who were born between 1995 and 2011⁵ and make up the youngest generation, often referred to as "Digital Natives" or "Generation C", this expression comes from "computerized, connected, always clicking." This generation grew up "plugged into the internet", making it natural for them to blend virtual

¹ Zoé ALLEGAERT, (2021-2022), Comment les jeunes issus de la génération Z perçoivent-ils leur rapport au travail et leur engagement organisationnel?, Master's Thesis in Management, Louvain School of Management, France, P.4, 5.

² Mario DADIC, (2024), Understanding Generation Z As a New Generation of Consumers, 6th International conference Contemporary Issues in Economy and Technology, Croatia, P.478,479.

³ <https://genhq.com/> (consulted 14/03/2025 at 01:46 PM).

⁴ M. ŚWIERKOSZ-HOŁYSZ, (2016), Pokolenie Z wkracza na rynek pracy, Społeczeństwo i Edukacja, P.440.

⁵ Stefaniia KAZANINA, (2024), AI vs. Authenticity: Evaluating the Perception of AI-generated Branded Content on Instagram Among Generation Z Students in Higher Education, Degree Thesis in International Business, Arcada University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki, P.8.

reality into their daily lives. As a result, they are key contributors to online content creation and a valuable target audience for social media marketing.

The age range of Generation Z varies considerably. Examples of various ranges are shown in Table 1. It should also be noted that another generation follows Generation Z, known as the Alfa generation that includes individuals born after 2010.

Table 1 : Generation Z's age range – literature review

Age range	Author(s)
born 1990 or later	Świerkosz-Hołyś (2016,p.441); Żarczyńska-Dobiesz and Chomątowska (2014, p.407); Wiktorowicz and Warwas (2016, p.22); Wojtaszczyk (2013)
between 1990 and 1999	Half (2015)
between 1991 and 2000	Tulgan (2009, p.5)
between 1993 and 2012	White (2017)
between 1993 and 2005	Turner (2013, p.18)
after 1995	Opolska-Bieleńska (2016, p.37); Ensari (2017, p.53); Dudek (2017, p.144)

Source: DOLOT (Anna), *The characteristics of Generation Z*, “e-mentor”, 2018, P.44,50.

Unlike previous generations, Generation Z has developed a special bond with many digital platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, whereas Facebook is becoming less and less popular with them. Despite being highly active on social media, they are often perceived as emotionally distant from people around them. They excel at multitasking, such as receiving, processing, and sharing information. They are more environmentally conscious than previous generations and tend to be more skeptical of large corporations. Besides, they are more likely to switch jobs and career paths, they are mature at a faster rate, and begin learning at an earlier age than their predecessors. As digital natives, they prioritize visual experiences over text and place significant emphasis on social responsibility. Experts predict that Generation Z will bring about major transformations in the job market, with many of its members pursuing careers as scientists, researchers, and specialists due to their inherent skills and adaptability.

As a globally connected, socially conscious and highly visual generation, Generation Z is the most connected and educated group in history. Many of today's influencers, both on social media and in pop culture, belong to this generation. With an estimated global population of around 2 billion, they play a crucial role in shaping the future. Growing up in an age of terrorism, economic crisis and climate change, Generation Z is expected to drive major economic and social changes.

1.1.3 Fundamental Characteristics of Generation Z ¹

- **Diversity:** one of the important traits of Generation Z is their exposure to diverse social and cultural environments. They have grown up in a time of rapid globalization, technological advancements, and changing family structures, such as single-parent households or households with shared responsibilities. As a result, they tend to be more open-minded and accepting of differences in culture, traditions, and social backgrounds. Their access to digital platforms can expand their understanding of global perspectives, making them more adaptable to change.
- **Digital natives:** having grown up in a world where smart devices are an integral part of daily life, Generation Z has a core connection with technology that goes beyond basic use, it shapes their expectations, behaviors, and even their language. Unlike millennials, who witnessed the rise of digital advancements, Generation Z seamlessly blends their online and offline lives, using digital platforms for communication, education, and entertainment. This fluency also impacts their consumer behavior, as they are highly receptive to social media recommendations and integrated shopping experiences that combine online and in-store interactions. However, their heavy screen use can lead to feelings of isolation and underdeveloped social skills, as virtual interactions often replace face-to-face communication.
- **Pragmatic and financially aware:** financial awareness is one of the fundamental traits of Generation Z as they grew up witnessing their parents go through economic challenges. They prioritize financial stability, and smart investments. Although, their purchasing power is significant, their concept of value goes beyond price, they seek brands that align with their values, beliefs, and lifestyle.
- They face mental health issues with many people referring to them as the “loneliest generation” because they spend so much time online, which can lead to isolation and depression, because more screen time means less time in the real world and less physical

¹ Ibid, P.479.

interaction with others. Generation Z also believes that their mental health is affected by the global issues, they are more and more involved in politics and advocating for issues such as climate change and human rights, which can also lead to increased stress.

- Savvy consumers: this generation relies on technology and social media to make purchasing decisions. They are constantly investigating and evaluating the best option before making a purchase. They value feedback and reviews from other users and are more into sustainable products and companies. They are also willing to spend more on them, as well as on personalized products and brands that align with their political values.
- Politically active and progressive: Generation Z is actively engaged in social and political debates, advocating for inclusivity, equality, and environmental sustainability. They support government intervention in addressing societal issues and recognize the impact of human actions on climate change.

Overall the socio-cultural background of Generation Z is shaped by their engagement in politics, emphasis on diversity, digital immersion, financial awareness, mental health concerns, and ethical consumption. Their attitudes and actions reveal a generation that is eager to influence the future, socially conscious, and globally connected.

1.2 Behavioral and Cognitive Patterns: Theoretical insights into instant gratification, attention span, and social learning theory

This subsection focuses on key psychological tendencies such as the desire for instant gratification, shortened attention spans, and the role of observation and imitation in learning behavior.

1.2.1 Instant Gratification

Instant Gratification is the immediate desire to feel pleasure or joy. Sigmund Freud was the first to introduce the concept of the Pleasure Principle in 1895. The Pleasure Principle is the tendency to seek immediate gratification of needs, desires, and impulses to avoid discomfort or pain. According to Freud, this principle primarily governs the Id, the unconscious part of the mind responsible for instinctual drives. However, something called the Reality Principle,

or the Ego, ensures that our desires and needs are manifested in an appropriate way. The psychological development of a healthy ego is imperative for a child's growth and success.¹

In modern times, the Pleasure Principle cannot be studied without the context of social media. Over 500 million people use Instagram daily, and its tendency to be addictive stems from the activation of the ventral striatum, the brain region responsible for processing rewards and reward prediction errors. This same area is triggered by food, money, and drugs, making social media a powerful tool for instant gratification.²

Patience is a characteristic found in both humans and animals. In humans, there are two key aspects of patience: the ability to wait for a desired outcome and the ability to remain calm when faced with an undesirable outcome or when an outcome is delayed. Some theorists also propose a third subset of patience, known as "interpersonal patience," which is demonstrated when maintaining composure in the presence of a frustrating or irritating person. It is especially relevant in social situations.³

Social media and globalization have collectively contributed to decreasing levels of patience. Whether it's essentials like food and groceries delivered by platforms such as Amazon, the media and entertainment industry enabling binge-watching of entire seasons in a single day, or even relationships that can be conveniently filtered and chosen based on location, age, and preferences, everything is instantly accessible.⁴

This level of convenience from an early age fosters Instant Gratification among members of Generation Z, as they grew up in a world where everything competes for their attention at all times and is available at the touch of a button. As a result, some members of this generation may come across as entitled or impatient simply because they are accustomed to a faster pace of life.⁵

¹ Harin BANWARI, (2021), A Study of Various Factor that have contributed to the Alarming Surge in the Need for Instant Gratification in Generation Z, International Journal of Indian Psychology, Vol.9, No.3, P.1,2.

² Idem.

³ Idem.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ <https://reba.global/resource/4-challenges-of-managing-generation-z-in-the-workplace.html#:~:text=Because%20they%20grew%20up%20in,a%20faster%20pace%20of%20life> (consulted 15/03/2025 at 06:17 PM).

The pandemic intensified these challenges as well. Extended isolation at home led to a higher dependence on digital devices for social connections and entertainment, simultaneously fueling the growth of the flexible labor market. The expansion of food and grocery delivery services transformed daily tasks into outsourced conveniences. However, many people appreciate these advancements, claiming that they enhance productivity and provide more time to focus on work or strengthen personal relationships.¹

1.2.2 Attention Span

Attention is a cognitive function that enables us to direct and maintain awareness of a significant information and respond accordingly. This ability plays a crucial role in our daily lives, and fortunately, it can be strengthened and enhanced through targeted cognitive training. It's a multifaceted process that influences nearly all aspects of our daily activities. Researchers have determined that attention is not a singular function but rather consists of multiple sub-processes. The most widely accepted model for these components is the hierarchical framework proposed by Sohlberg and Mateer (1987, 1989), based on neuropsychological research. According to this model, attention can be categorized as follows:²

- Arousal: the state of alertness and energy levels, influencing whether we feel fatigued or active.
- Focused attention: the ability to concentrate on a specific stimulus.
- Sustained attention: the ability to maintain focus on a task or stimulus over an extended duration.
- Selective attention: the capacity to focus on a particular stimulus while ignoring distractions.
- Alternating attention: the capability to shift focus between different stimuli or tasks.
- Divided attention: the ability to process multiple stimuli or perform multiple tasks simultaneously.

¹ Anna WELSH, (2023), Why Gen Z is bad at consuming good news: news habits of an “instant gratification” generation, The Independent Student Newspaper at Boston University.

² <https://www.cognifit.com/attention#:~:text=Focused%20Attention%3A%20Refers%20to%20our,presence%20of%20other%20distracting%20stimuli> (consulted 16/03/2025 at 12:10 AM).

According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, attention span is “*the length of time an individual can concentrate on one specific task or other item of interest*”¹

The attention span refers to the duration for which an individual can focus on a particular task or stimulus without distraction. In the context of reading, it is the length of time a person can concentrate on the material without their mind wandering, it varies depending on factors such as age, physical and mental health, emotional state, and the nature of the material being processed. Attention allows an object or piece of information to enter consciousness, and the number of objects that can be held in consciousness at a given time is known as the span of attention. On average, a child's span of attention is limited to 4 to 5 items, whereas for adults, it typically ranges from 6 to 7 letters or digits.²

Our attention spans are impacted by every new technological development, especially those related to digital technology. This influence has been significantly driven by the widespread presence of social media, video content, smartphones, television, and radio. Many articles assert that a 2015 Microsoft Canada report found that the average attention span of Generation Z is only eight seconds. However, the original cited the figure from "Statistic brain," a research firm that doesn't seem to have an online presence. Even if these statistics were accurate, Microsoft's study only looked at Canadian adults and excluded Generation Z participants because they were between the ages of two and 17 at the time, they didn't qualify to participate.³

On the other hand, influencers show their two-hour morning routines in just 20 seconds. Entire hour-long sports matches are reduced to one-minute highlight reels. Teenagers display their massive shopping hauls, featuring 30 items, in 30 seconds. As users scroll through social media, they are faced with an endless stream of content, most of which lasts less than a minute. The rise of short-form content has conditioned an entire generation to consume information quickly and in an engaging manner.⁴

¹ <https://dictionary.apa.org/> (consulted 15/03/2025 at 10:06 PM).

² Muhammad IDREES, (2015), Attention & Concentration, P.25.

³ <https://podcastle.ai/blog/gen-z-attention-span/> (consulted 16/03/2025 at 01:02 AM).

⁴ <https://vnhsmirror.com/224754/opinion-comment/gen-zs-shrinking-attention-span/> (consulted 16/03/2025 at 02:32 AM).

1.2.3 Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory suggests that learning occurs through interactions in a social context. Specifically, individuals develop behaviors by observing others. When people witness certain actions, they tend to adopt and replicate those behaviors, especially if their observations are associated with positive outcomes or rewards. emphasized that imitation involves the direct reproduction of observed motor activities.¹

The Social Learning Theory (SLT) consists of three key concepts. Firstly, people can learn by observing others which is known as observational learning. Secondly, mental states are an important factor for learning, often referred to as intrinsic reinforcement. Finally, learning does not always result in an immediate behavioral change but instead progresses through the modeling process.²

Figure 1 :The Bobo Doll experiment



Source : <https://medium.com/recycled/social-learning-theory-generation-z-fortnite-and-the-modern-day-bobo-doll-4265dae31004> (16/03/2025 at 08:39 PM)

Albert Bandura's Bobo Doll Experiment (1961) was a breakthrough study in psychology that proved how individuals, particularly children, learn behaviors by observing others. His research significantly shifted psychology from strict behaviorism to a more cognitive

¹ Razieh TADAYON NABAVI, Mohammad Sadegh BIJANDI, (2012), Bandura's Social Learning Theory & Social Cognitive Learning Theory, P.5.

² Albert BANDURA (1971), Social Learning Theory, General Learning Press, New York, NY.

approach by showing that behavior isn't solely shaped by rewards or punishments but can also be learned through imitation. This process consists of four key elements:¹

1. Attention – The observer must pay attention to the model's behavior.
2. Retention – The observer must remember the behavior so he can replicate it later.
3. Reproduction – The observer must have the physical and cognitive ability to replicate the behavior.
4. Motivation – The observer must have a reason to imitate the behavior, there are three types of motivation :
 - External reinforcement (rewards, praise).
 - Vicarious reinforcement (seeing someone else get rewarded or punished for an action).
 - Self-reinforcement (feeling personal satisfaction after performing a behavior).

Bandura identified three models people learn through observation:²

- Live Model – Watching a person perform a behavior in front of them.
- Verbal Instructional Model – Learning through explanations of behaviors.
- Symbolic Model – Learning from characters in books, TV, or social media.

Bandura's study remains very relevant today, especially in analyzing social media's impact on young people's behavior. His research set the groundwork for contemporary theories on media influence, and digital behavior, starting from how children pick up habits through YouTube videos to the rapid spread of trends on social media. This includes media platforms like TikTok, which expose users to unlimited content to engage with. Through exposure to TikTok trends and content, Generation Z users can develop new skills, adopt behaviors, and expand their knowledge and understanding of the world. This influence is evident in the increasing number of users transitioning into content creators, following in the footsteps of their favorite influencers.³

¹ Idem.

² Idem.

³ Joelyn P. DELA CRUZ, Jevissa C. PATATAG, Hendrich T. RUBIO, Marlon Jay D. DJIENO, (2023), Influences Of Viral TikTok Trends On The Social Cognitive Learning Of Generation Z, Bachelor of Arts in Communication, STI College Cotabato, Faculty of the Arts and Sciences Program, Philippines, P.7-8.

This theory also translates into consumer mimicry desire, or the tendency of consumers to imitate the consumption behaviors of influencers they admire to feel more connected to them. Unlike impulsive actions, this mimicry is intentional and conscious (attentive, retentive, reproductive, motivated). When consumers perceive influencers as role models, their recommendations influence their purchasing decisions.¹

1.3 Application of consumer behavior and psychological models relevant to Generation Z

Consumer behavior represents the way individuals make purchasing decisions according to cultural, psychological, social, and personal factors. Understanding consumer behavior is important when analyzing Generation Z's purchasing patterns, since their purchasing behavior is driven by specific psychological mechanisms and can be categorized in specific consumer behavior models.

1.3.1 Psychological Models

This part explores the psychological theories that explain Generation Z's consumer behavior, including the social comparison theory, the cognitive dissonance theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

- **Social Comparison Theory²**

The social comparison theory, first introduced by psychologist Leon Festinger in 1954, explains how individuals compare themselves to others, particularly on social media. These comparisons can be upward (looking at someone perceived as better) or downward (comparing oneself to someone perceived as worse). For example, when women compare themselves to idealized body types, they may feel dissatisfied with their appearance, leading them to purchase more beauty products used by their role models.

¹ Kiseol YANG, Elisha MENCHACA, Brenda LIZARRAGA, (2024), Unraveling the Role of Social Media Influencers' Characteristics in Increasing Consumer CSR Engagement: A Perspective from Social Learning Theory, 57th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, University of North Texas, Texas, P.2817.

²Nisreen AMEEN, Jun-Hwa CHEAH, Satish KUMAR, (2022), It's all part of the customer journey: The impact of augmented reality, chatbots, and social media on the body image and self-esteem of Generation Z female consumers, Psychology & Marketing, Wiley Periodicals LLC, P.2112.

Generation Z has been classified as the least confident generation compared to previous generations. This has led to heightened anxiety and increased pressure among its members, especially with the growing influence of social media, which can make issues like bullying or body image concerns more intense than in the past. For younger and older women alike, body image is strongly linked to self-esteem, self-concept, and mental health. Generation Z women tend to be less confident and more cautious in their attitudes and behaviors compared to earlier generations. Additionally, social media, which often presents an idealized lifestyle, has been associated with lower self-esteem in young women. This decline in self-confidence often drives increased consumer demand for products perceived as essential for achieving a higher level of self-esteem. Today's celebrities have been shown to influence consumer behavior. When consumers trust a product promoted by a celebrity or influencer, they feel more confident about purchasing it, which boosts their self-esteem. These consumers often rely on others' opinions before making a purchasing decision because they may lack confidence in their decision-making abilities. As a result, excessive social media use has been linked to lower self-esteem among Generation Z consumers but also to higher life satisfaction.

▪ **Cognitive dissonance**

Leon Festinger defined cognitive dissonance as an inner drive to maintain the attitudes and behaviors of a human in harmony and to avoid any incongruity. The cognitive dissonance theory, recognized as one of the most significant developments in social psychology, suggests that when individuals experience such dissonance, it creates psychological discomfort and regret that they actively seek to reduce.¹ This theory enhanced the understanding of the psychological effects associated with purchasing decisions, such as the uncertainty or the disappointment that consumers feel post-purchase when a product fails to meet their expectations. In this context, post-purchase dissonance describes a psychological discomfort stemming from the inconsistency between cognitive elements after making a purchase,² which is particularly relevant to Generation Z as a generation that values authenticity and

¹ Tom Y. CHANG, David H. SOLOMON, Mark M. WESTERFIELD, (2016), Looking for Someone to Blame: Delegation, Cognitive Dissonance, and the Disposition Effect, The Journal of Finance, Vol. 71, No.1, P.271.

² S. FERNANDEZ-LORES, N. CRESPO-TEJERO, R. FERNANDEZ-HERNANDEZ, (2024), Online product returns: The role of perceived environmental efficacy and post-purchase entrepreneurial cognitive dissonance, Journal Of Business Research, Vol.174, P.4.

transparency, they are quick to question their choices if a product doesn't meet the perceived value, or if social media opinions contradict their experience. This can lead to buyer's remorse, dissatisfaction, and even brand switching.

Consumers take in consideration many objectives when making a purchasing decision, but the four major ones include maximizing decision accuracy, minimizing decision effort, minimizing negative emotions during decision making, and maximizing the ease of justification of a decision. However, due to limited information, they often rely on mental shortcuts (heuristics) to simplify the process, like familiarity heuristic, social proof heuristic, or scarcity heuristic. While access to more information can enhance decision-making, so many details can create confusion and make the decision making process more difficult.

Some of the ways consumers cope with this discomfort include seeking post-purchase reassurance from the brand, such as follow-up messages or positive online reviews, justifying their decision by downplaying alternative options, and relying on brand loyalty and past experiences to reduce uncertainty.¹ However, when it comes to Generation Z, their responses can be unique because of their digital habits, values, and experiences, unlike previous generations who might silently regret a purchase, Generation Z is quick to express both satisfaction and disappointment online, expecting transparency and ethical business practices from brands. They actively hold companies accountable, exposing misleading marketing or unethical behavior and responding through online call-outs or organized boycotts.²

A recent and highly relevant example of how Generation Z responds to cognitive dissonance is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against brands supporting Israel or being linked to companies operating in Israeli settlements. Many Generation Z consumers worldwide experienced cognitive dissonance; a conflict between their beliefs (supporting Palestine) and their purchasing behavior (buying from brands associated with Israel). To respond to this, they took direct actions, including:³

¹ Seyed Shahin SHARIFI, Mohammad Rahim ESFIDANI, (2014), The impacts of relationship marketing on cognitive dissonance, satisfaction, and loyalty, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol.42, No.6, P.5-7.

² Saul MCLEOD, (2024), Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, *Simply Psychology*, The University of Manchester, P.6.

³ Idem.

- Spreading awareness on social media, the hashtag #BoycottIsrael has trended multiple times on different platforms demonstrating the generation's collective power in shaping consumer behavior.
- Boycotting brands like McDonald's, Starbucks, Puma, and Coca-Cola, who faced backlash and calls for boycotts.
- Seeking ethical alternatives, many consumers opted for local or independent brands as substitutes for those they boycotted.

This movement proves how Generation Z actively works to reduce cognitive dissonance by aligning their purchasing decisions with their values and beliefs, demonstrating that ethical considerations are deeply rooted in their consumer behavior.¹

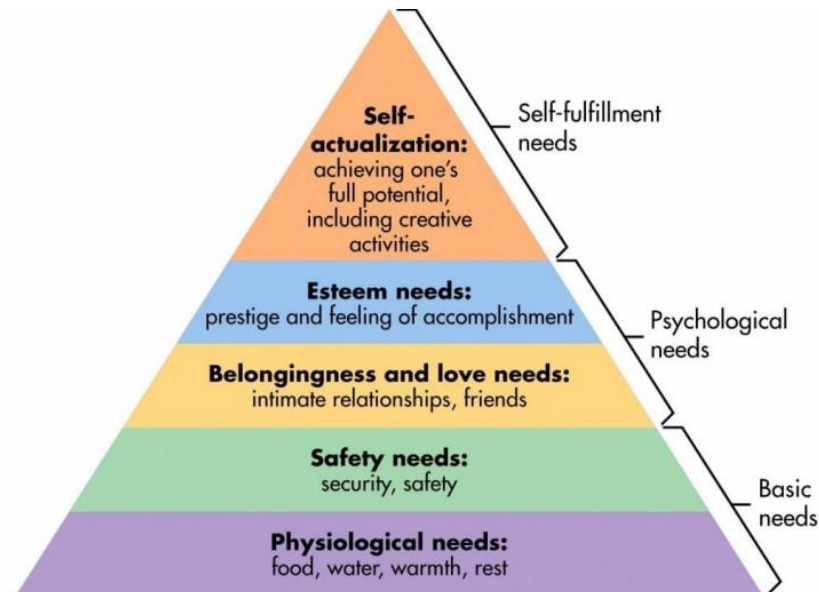
▪ **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs²**

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a psychological theory introduced by Abraham Maslow in 1943, defining human motivation through a hierarchical five-level structure of needs, with basic and physiological (survival) needs at the bottom, and psychological and self-fulfillment needs 'self-actualization' at the top. Maslow argued that survival needs must be satisfied before the individual can satisfy the higher needs. This theory is widely applied in different fields, including marketing and consumer behavior to understand what drives human decision-making and actions.

¹ Idem.

² Mark E. KOLTKO-RIVERA, (2006), Rediscovering the Later Version of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Self Transcendence and Opportunities for Theory, Research, and Unification, Review of General Psychology, Vol.10, No.6, P. 302-317.

Figure 2 :Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Source: Saul MCLEOD, (2024), *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, Simply Psychology ,The university of Manchester, P.6.

It's important to mention that Maslow's hierarchy of needs does not always follow a rigid linear progression. People can experience different needs simultaneously or shift between different levels. Over the years, Maslow developed his theory, emphasizing that the hierarchy of needs is not as fixed as he initially suggested. In his later work, he acknowledged that the order of needs is more fluid than previously described. For example, he pointed out that for some individuals, the need for self-esteem is more important than the need for love, while others might prioritize creative fulfillment above all else.

▪ **The expanded Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow began to question whether self-actualization was truly the highest level of human motivation. His doubts were closely tied to the concept of peak experiences—intense moments of joy, creativity, or deep spiritual connection. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, he explored these experiences in several papers and later included them in his collection *Toward a Psychology of Being*. Over time, Maslow expanded his hierarchy by

introducing transcendence, acknowledging that personal growth could go beyond self-actualization toward a higher level of purpose, connection, and spirituality.¹

Table 2 :The expanded version of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Motivational level	Description of the person on this level
Self-transcendence	Seeks a deeper purpose beyond oneself through peak experience
Self-actualization	Seeks fulfillment of personal potential
Esteem needs	Seeks esteem through recognition or achievement
Belongingness and love needs	Seeks affiliation with a group
Safety needs	Seeks security through the law
Physiological needs	Seeks the basic necessities of life

Source: Mark E. KOLTKO-RIVERA, (2006), *Rediscovering the Later Version of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Self-Transcendence and Opportunities for Theory, Research, and Unification*, Review of General Psychology, Vol.10, No.6, pp. (302-317).

This theory, while developed in the mid-20th century, offers interesting insights into the motivations and behaviors of Generation Z, as they adapt to a constantly evolving world.²

For Generation Z, physiological needs may go beyond basic survival necessities, with access to the internet and smartphones increasingly falling into this category as essential tools for communication, education, and information access. Digital connectivity represents a modern layer of physiological needs, where a lack of access can significantly affect an individual's ability to fully participate in society.³

For Generation Z, safety includes both real-world and online protection. Online dangers like hacking and data privacy issues highlight the need for digital security. The rise in mental health struggles, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, has also made emotional wellness

¹ Idem.

² <https://medium.com/change-your-mind/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-and-its-resonance-with-generation-z-7d08c8c7e5e7> (consulted 20/03/2025 at 10:40 PM) .

³ op.cit

a priority, emphasizing how important it is for this generation to feel safe both offline and online.¹

When it comes to love and belonging, social media has changed the way individuals of Generation Z build relationships and feel connected. It makes it easier to meet people but also more challenging to form real connections. The need for likes, followers, and social validation plays a role in diminishing their self-confidence; however, social media also provides a space for self-expression and support, especially for those who feel left out in society.²

As a result, their self-esteem is strongly connected to their online presence. In this generation, “being seen” is important, and success and recognition are often measured by the number of followers. However, the pressure to present a perfect image can also cause self-doubt and comparisons with others, negatively impacting their self-esteem and mental well-being.³

Generation Z is also reshaping self-actualization by prioritizing social and environmental causes. For them, transcendence can be seen in their strong sense of purpose beyond personal success. Unlike previous generations that may have prioritized individual achievement, Generation Z seeks to contribute to something greater than themselves, whether through activism, social justice, or environmental sustainability. Their digital connectivity reinforces this drive, allowing them to raise awareness and support causes they believe in. Whether advocating for climate action, human rights, or mental health awareness, they use their platforms to inspire change, reflecting a deep commitment to values that extend beyond personal fulfillment.⁴

1.3.2 Consumer behavior models

This part presents key consumer behavior models, such as the FCB Grid and the Theory of Planned Behavior, to help understand the patterns of Generation Z when making purchasing decisions.

¹ op.cit

² op.cit

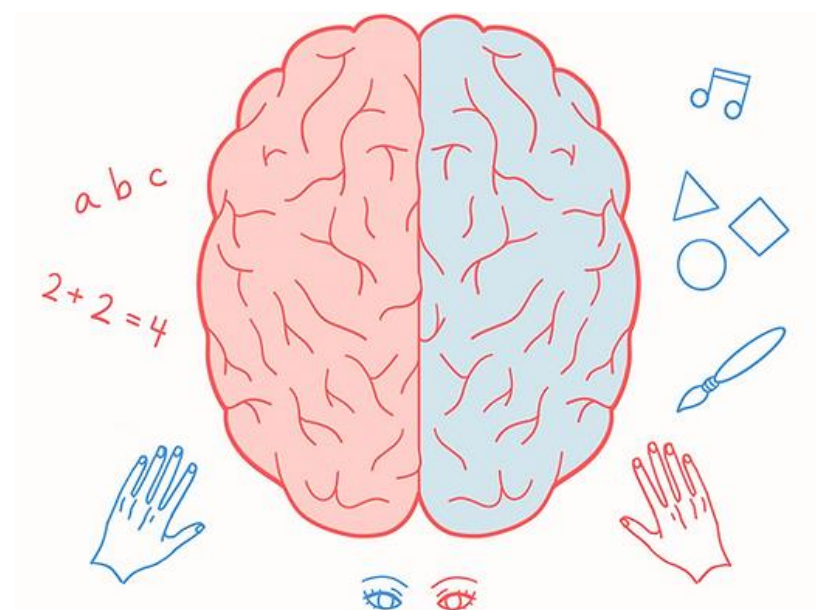
³ op.cit

⁴ op.cit

▪ **The FCB Grid**

The FCB Grid (Foote, Cone, and Belding Model) is an approach used to understand consumer behavior and help marketers analyzing their strategies. It compares consumer involvement (high/low) with a purchase decision and what type of mental process/motivation is driving that decision (thinking/feeling), the result is a planning model that outlines four primary advertising planning strategies that are called informative, affective, habitual, and satisfaction. This model was introduced in 1980 by Richard Vaughn, who was then a Senior Vice President at the FCB advertising agency. The model is influenced by the concept of left-brain and right-brain thinking. The left side of the brain is linked to logic and reasoning, just like the "thinking" category of the model, which applies to practical and fact-based purchases. The right side of the brain is associated with emotions and creativity, similar to the "feeling" category, which relates to purchases driven by emotions and personal experiences.¹

Figure 3 :the Left Vs. Right Brain



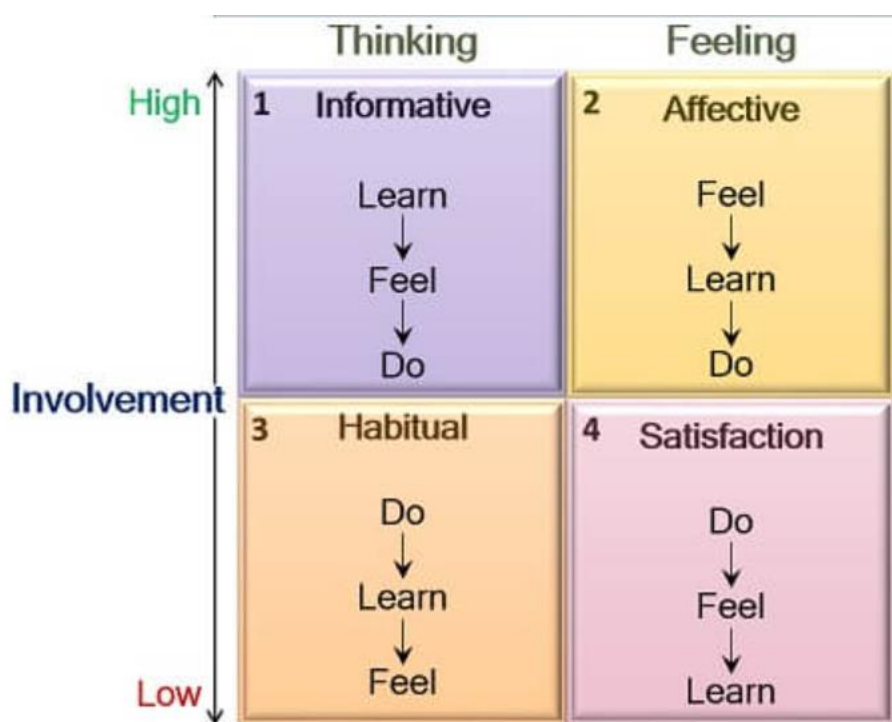
Source : <https://www.marketingweekly.in/post/what-is-an-fcb-model-why-is-it-important-for-your-advertising-strategy> (consulted 21/03/2025 at 01:50 AM) .

In high-involvement and rational decisions, such as buying a car, consumers take time to research and compare options before purchasing, so what they need is detailed information

¹ <https://theinvestorsbook.com/fcb-grid.html> (consulted 21/03/2025 at 02:27 AM) .

and logical benefits. On the other hand, high-involvement emotional decisions, like purchasing luxury items, are based on feelings first, with consumers justifying their choices afterward. Here, advertising should create strong emotional appeal. In low-involvement situations, decisions are made quickly. For products like household essentials, consumers buy first and form opinions later, meaning marketing should provide trial and easy accessibility. Similarly, low-involvement emotional purchases, such as snacks or beauty products, are often impulse-driven, requiring engaging and entertaining advertising. By categorizing consumer behavior into these different types, the FCB Grid allows marketers to tailor their strategies more effectively, moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach to one that aligns with how consumers think, feel, and act.¹

Figure 4 :The FCB Grid



Source : <https://theinvestorsbook.com/fcb-grid.html> (consulted 21/03/2025 at 02:22 PM) .

By integrating the FCB Grid model in marketing strategies, advertisers can create specific campaigns that resonate with Generation Z's different preferences, enhancing their digital connectivity, self-expression, and social responsibilities. Given that this generation is highly

¹ Eric HALEY, Matthew PITTMAN, (2022), Remembering the FCB Grid: Thinking, Feeling, and Involvement in the Age of Social Media, Journal of Advertising, University of Tennessee, Vol.51, No.3, P.324,325.

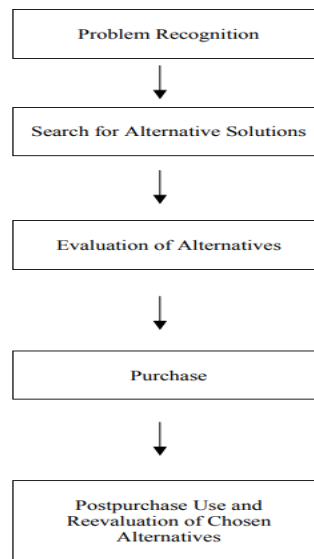
digital, socially conscious, and values authenticity, the FCB Grid can be applied in analyzing their consumer behavior.

▪ **Impulsive Buying¹**

In 1982, Engel and Blackwell developed a general model to explain how consumers make decisions (Figure N°05). According to this model, the decision-making process unfolds in five different stages. It begins with the recognition of a need or problem, prompting the consumer to identify a gap between their current and desired state. This is followed by a search for possible solutions, either through external sources or internal memory. In the third stage, consumers evaluate the available alternatives based on the perceived outcomes. The fourth stage leads to the actual purchase, and finally, the post-purchase stage involves reflecting on whether the decision was a good one, based on the product's performance. Each stage is goal-oriented, and the importance of that goal influences how deeply each stage is processed. However, this model has left out a very important stage, the impulsivity stage. Emotional responses often drive consumers to skip directly from recognizing a need to making a purchase, ignoring the stages of information search and evaluation. This impulsivity stage, shaped by emotional reactions and limited self-control, should arguably be positioned immediately after the problem recognition phase. If the consumer responds with self-control, the process continues through the traditional steps, but when emotional impulses arise, a spontaneous purchase may occur without further deliberation.

¹ Amanda Leigh COLEY, (2002), Affective and Cognitive Processes Involved in Impulse Buying, Master's Thesis in Science, The University of Georgia, Georgia, P.1-5.

Figure 5 : Engel and Blackwell Model of Consumer Decision Making



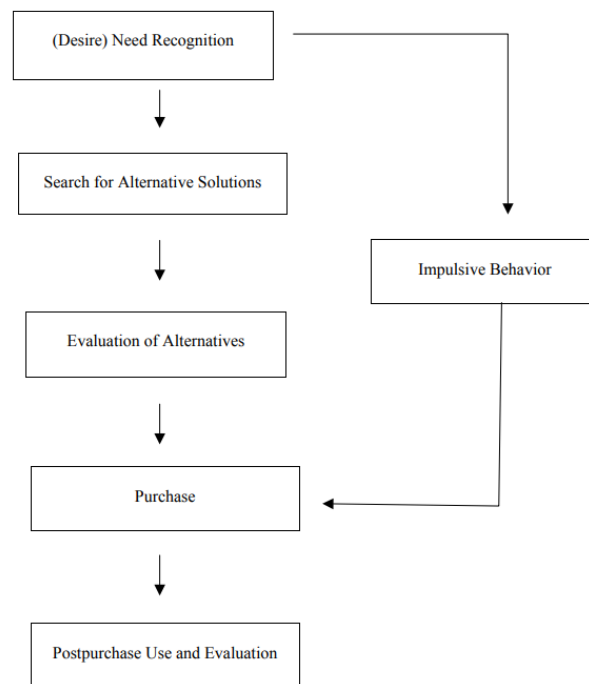
Source : Amanda Leigh COLEY, (2002), *Affective and Cognitive Processes Involved in Impulse Buying*, Master's Thesis in Science, The University of Georgia, Georgia, P.2.

Figure N°06 shows the adjusted model, which attempts to illustrate how impulsivity is part of the decision making process.

Impulse buying is a sudden, emotionally charged purchasing behavior where the decision is made so quickly that rational evaluation of alternatives is not taken into consideration. This behavior is a dynamic interplay between affective (emotional) and cognitive (rational) processes. On the affective side, factors such as an irresistible urge to buy, mood changes, and the pleasure associated with purchasing play a central role. Conversely, cognitive responses like unplanned purchasing and limited thinking highlight how logical control weakens in the face of strong emotional impulses. When emotions dominate, the likelihood of an impulsive purchase increases, often skipping the stages of careful consideration that's in traditional consumer decision-making models. Gender also plays a role, with women more driven by emotional motivations (mood management and buying joy), while men tend to be more influenced by cognitive factors like spontaneous but less emotionally driven purchases. Certain product categories, such as clothing, accessories, tech items, and beauty products were identified as particularly susceptible to impulse buying, confirming that emotional triggers can often dominate planned intentions. Framing impulse buying through a dual-

process lens, helps understand how and why consumers make sudden, emotionally driven purchases, filling in the theoretical gaps left by traditional models like Engel & Blackwell's, which overlooked impulsivity as a stage of its own.

Figure 6 : *The Adjusted Engel and Blackwell Model of Consumer Decision Making*



Source: Amanda Leigh COLEY, (2002), *Affective and Cognitive Processes Involved in Impulse Buying*, Master's Thesis in Science, The University of Georgia, Georgia, P.4.

Section 02: Social Media Platforms: Evolution, Features, and Marketing Trends

This section explores the evolution of social media platforms over the years, highlighting the unique features and content strategies that define the major platforms in today's world. Finally, it addresses their evolving role in modern digital marketing, including immersive technologies that are reshaping brand-consumer interactions.

2.1 Historical and Market Context: The Evolution of Social Media Platforms

Social media is a phenomenon that has transformed the interaction and communication of people throughout human history. However, it is not a modern concept, it has been evolving since the beginning of human interaction. Today, social media has impacted many aspects of human communication, and it has become a daily practice in this among individuals of this generation.¹

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines social media as *“forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content.”*²

It also defines social networking as *“the creation and maintenance of personal and business relationships especially online.”*³

Social media has been around in different forms long before the internet. In 1792, the telegraph allowed people to send messages over long distances. In the late 1800s, sociologists Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies studied how people form social groups based on shared values, beliefs, or conflicts. Around the same time, the telephone and radio made communication easier, though the radio only allowed one-way interaction. In the 1950s, some people hacked telephone networks (a practice called phone phreaking) to communicate and even create early versions of blogs and podcasts. Email was introduced in the 1960s, but at first, both computers had to be online at the same time to exchange messages. The launch of ARPANET in 1969, a network of time-sharing computers, laid the groundwork for the internet, while CompuServe, also established that year, provided early online services but was expensive for most users. Over time, these innovations led to the social media platforms we use today, showing that people have always found ways to connect through technology. In the 1990s, several social networking sites emerged, including Six Degrees, BlackPlanet, and MoveOn, catering to different communities and interests. Blogging platforms like Blogger and Epinions also appeared, allowing users to share opinions and product reviews, helping

¹ Simeon EDOSOMWAN, Sitalaskshmi Kalangot PRAKASAN, Doriane KOUAME, Jonelle WATSON, Tom SEYMOUR, (2011), The History of Social Media and its Impact on Business, The Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship, Vol. 16, No.3, P.3.

² Idem.

³ Idem.

consumers make informed decisions. Software applications such as ThirdVoice, which let users post comments on web pages, and Napster, a peer-to-peer music-sharing platform, gained popularity but were later removed due to concerns over inappropriate content and copyright violations. In 2000 social media received a great boost with the rise of many social networking sites. This transformed the interaction of individuals and organizations who share common interest in music, education, movies, and friendships, based on social networking. Several social networking platforms were launched during this period, including LunarStorm, Six Degrees, Cyworld, Ryze, and Wikipedia. In 2001, Fotolog, Skyblog, and Friendster emerged, followed by MySpace, LinkedIn, LastFM, Tribe.net, and Hi5 in 2003. The year 2004 saw the rise of well-known platforms such as Facebook (originally for Harvard students), Dogster, and Mixi. By 2005, major names like Yahoo! 360, YouTube, Cyworld, and BlackPlanet had also entered the scene.¹

- MySpace (2003)

MySpace is a social networking website that was created in 2003 by Tom Anderson and Chris DeWolfe and that has its head office in Beverly Hills, California, where it shares a building with its owner, News Corporation. In 2006, MySpace became the most popular social networking website in the United States but was overtaken in 2008 by its competitor Facebook that internationally became the most popular social networking site worldwide. MySpace was the first social media site to reach a million monthly active users, it achieved this milestone around 2004. This is arguably the beginning of social media as we know it. A special feature of this site is that it allows users to personalize their profiles with detailed information about themselves and their interests. Additionally, MySpace offers a special profile for musical artists where they can download their entire music into mp3 songs.²

- LinkedIn (2003)

A professional-focused community platform, LinkedIn was the original business networking tool and has maintained its social position for 20 years. Both users must mutually agree to connect, but anyone can "follow" a member to view their public posts, it helps professionals develop their networks and follow the careers of those they know. LinkedIn has

¹ Ibid, P.4.

² Idem.

been owned by Microsoft since 2015 and has become a popular platform for individuals to showcase their work histories and post their achievements.¹

- Meta (2004)

Previously known as Facebook, probably the most well-known platform of the modern age, with an average of 2 billion daily active users. Meta was created by Mark Zuckerberg in his Harvard dorm room in 2004. Originally only available to Harvard students and then those with an American college address, it expanded so fast and was the third-most visited website of 2022, after Google.com and YouTube.com. The platform allows users to be "friends," share photos and videos, interact with each other's posts, and organize events. In 2016, Meta launched Marketplace, an online buying and selling platform integrated within the application that has expanded over the years to become a powerful tool for both casual sellers and professional retailers.²

- YouTube (2005)

YouTube is the most popular platform for video content, counting more than 2.5 billion monthly visitors who collectively spend a billion hours consuming content daily. It launched in February 2005 and was bought by Google in 2006. YouTube is now the second-most visited website in the world, after Google Search. Although primarily a platform for viewing videos, YouTube's comment section, interactive live stream and "Community" feature enable the kind of collaborative engagement that defines social media. Users can subscribe to channels, create their own and respond to each other's content.³

- Reddit (2005)

Reddit is a social media platform and online forum founded in June 2005, by Steve Huffman, Alexis Ohanian, and Aaron Swartz. It allows users to share content such as links, text posts, images, and videos within communities called subreddits. Subreddits cover a wide range of interests, from news and technology to humor and hobbies. In 2016, Reddit launched its official mobile application for iOS and Android to improve accessibility and user

¹ <https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/feature/The-history-and-evolution-of-social-media-explained> (consulted 23/03/2025 at 01:30 AM) .

² Idem.

³ Idem.

experience. These applications brought features such as threaded comments, themes, and a more user-friendly interface compared to the desktop version.¹

- X (2006)

X, formally known as Twitter has been the platform of choice for many writers and creatives due to its focus on micro blogging; each post has a set character limit of 280, so users must be concise. Twitter functions with the “follower” model, where anyone can see public posts (or tweets) of other users in a central newsfeed. Elon Musk acquired Twitter in October 2022, subsequently rebranding it as X. In April 2023, the platform transitioned from its legacy "blue check" verification system to a subscription-based model, introducing various checkmark colors to differentiate account types. As of February 2025, X offers a voluntary ID verification option for certain features, enhancing platform integrity and trust.²

- Instagram (2010)

Although originally favored by photographers and artists, Instagram quickly became popular across all ages and backgrounds. Like X, following people on Instagram can be a one-way relationship, which has made it popular with celebrities and other public figures. It was created in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and was officially launched in October 2010 and has been owned by Meta since 2012.³

- Snapchat (2011)

Its appeal lies in short-form content, featuring peer-to-peer communication and public "Stories" functions. This emphasis on temporary communications and inclusion of various fun filters has made it popular with a younger crowd. Snapchat was created in 2011 by Evan Spiegel, Bobby Murphy, and Reggie Brown while they were students at Stanford University. It was officially launched in July 2011. Most recently, Snapchat introduced a new AI chatbot called My AI, which can respond to queries. My AI is a generative AI tool powered by OpenAI's ChatGPT.⁴

¹ Idem.

² Idem.

³ Idem.

⁴ Idem.

- TikTok (2017)

TikTok is a video-sharing social media app created in 2016 by the Chinese company ByteDance. It was initially launched in China under the name Douyin before being introduced to international markets as TikTok in 2017. The platform quickly gained popularity especially among young people and became one of the fastest-growing social media networks, with over 1 billion monthly active users and 2 billion downloads worldwide. Users of TikTok upload short videos between 5 and 60 seconds long, accompanied by captions and hashtags to reach audiences interested in similar topics.¹

2.2 Platform Features and Content Strategy: Analysis of social media's algorithm, video format, and content dynamics.

In this subsection, we will explore the key features and content strategies of the two major social media platforms, Instagram and TikTok. By analyzing their algorithms, video formats, and content dynamics, the aim of this study is to understand how these platforms shape user engagement and influence digital marketing strategies.

2.2.1 Social Media Algorithms

Algorithms are step-by-step mathematical calculations or computational instructions that guide computers in completing specific tasks. Initially focused on calculations and models, algorithms have evolved to play a larger role in shaping digital interactions. Through online networks, algorithms contribute to the storage of vast digital information and the formation of technology-driven communities based on user behavior. Machine learning systems constantly improve their models based on real-time interactions with users. This allows them to adapt to changing market conditions and individual preferences effectively. The way algorithms make decisions influences the content recommended to users, helping to share ideas, values, and viewpoints among people from various backgrounds. Since content-filtering algorithms apply

¹ Mindy D. SZETO, Andrina MAMO, Antara AFRIN, Michelle MILITELLO, Cara BARBER, (2021), Social Media in Dermatology and an Overview of Popular Social Media Platforms, Current Dermatology Reports, Vol.10, P.100.

on social media, they highly impact user experiences, shaping perceptions and influencing engagement by determining which content is prioritized and displayed.¹

Learning to rank (LTR) is a class of supervised machine learning algorithms designed to arrange a list of items based on their relevance to a search request. Unlike classical machine learning problems such as classification and regression, which focus on predicting a single value from a feature vector, LTR algorithms work with a set of feature vectors to determine the most optimal order of items.²

2.2.2 Instagram's features and algorithm³

Instagram doesn't have only one algorithm that oversees what users do and don't see on the platform. There is a variety of algorithms, classifiers, and processes, each with its own purpose. Each part of the platform – Feed, Stories, Explore, Reels, Search, and others – operates with its own algorithm designed according to user interactions. Users usually seek out their closest friends in Stories, use Explore to find new content and creators, and enjoy entertainment through Reels. Different ranking methods are applied across these various sections, and features such as Close Friends, Favorites, and Following have been introduced to offer a better experience.

First, there is the Feed, it is as a personalized home base on Instagram, designed to help users stay connected with friends, family, and interests. It has a variety of content from followed accounts, recommended posts from accounts that may be of interest, and advertisements. Users have various formats, including videos, photos, and carousels within the Feed, the ranking algorithm behind it can be summarized in several steps to ensure that the Feed remains dynamic and tailored to user preferences while promoting engaging content :

1. Defining Content to Rank: The Feed considers the latest posts from followed accounts and introduces posts from new accounts that may align with user interests. Several factors,

¹ Júlia Isabel ANDRADE FARIA, (2024), Instagram Algorithm Changing the Cultural Identity The impact of the content recommended by the Instagram Algorithm on the users' cultural identity formation, Master thesis in information management, NOVA Information Management School, Lisboa, P.7.

² <https://towardsdatascience.com/introduction-to-ranking-algorithms-4e4639d65b8/> (consulted 25/03/2025 at 03:18 PM) .

³ <https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/instagram-ranking-explained/> (consulted 08/04/2025 at 12:47 PM) .

including recent follows, likes, and engagements, are taken into consideration to determine interest.

2. Personalization: The goal is to balance content from followed accounts with interesting posts from non-followed accounts.

3. Information Collection: All the data about posts, the creators of those posts, user preferences, content format preference are analyzed. For example, if a preference for photos is noted, more photo content will be presented, and same with reels.

4. Signals Utilization: These signals, inform the algorithm, they include different elements, like the timing of a post, the device used (phone or web), and the frequency of video interactions. The most significant signals, in order of importance, include:

- User Activity: Engagements such as likes, shares, saves, and comments give a better understanding of interests.
- Post Information: Popularity indicators (likes and engagement rates) and basic details about the post, like posting time and associated locations, are taken into consideration.
- Poster Information: Understanding the person behind the post helps evaluate their potential relevance, based on interactions over recent weeks.
- Interaction History: analyzing the history of interactions with specific individuals helps understand general interest levels in their posts, like mutual comments.

Then, there are the Stories, which serve as a tool to share everyday moments and ensure connections with people and interests. The displayed Stories are from accounts that have been followed, along with advertisements. Similar to the Feed, the ranking of Stories begins by identifying all potential Stories, excluding ads, from followed accounts while eliminating any that violate Community Standards. Different signals are then considered, including:

1. Viewing history: This checks how often someone views stories from certain accounts to show the most relevant ones first.
2. Engagement history: This examines how frequently interactions occur with an account's stories, such as likes or direct messages.
3. Closeness: This evaluates the overall relationship with the author, indicating the likelihood of a friendship or familial connection.

Another tool is the Explore, which is designed to help users discover new content, it consists of recommendations, including photos and videos sourced from non-followed accounts. The initial step for the algorithm involves defining a set of posts for ranking. To identify relevant photos and videos, past activities such as liked, saved, shared, and commented posts must be analyzed. After collecting a group of potentially interesting photos and videos, they are ordered based on predicted user interest, similar to the ranking method used for Feed and Stories. The main way to measure interest is by estimating how often a user interacts with a post. The most significant actions considered in Explore include likes, saves, and shares, and the main factors evaluated, in approximate order of importance, are:

1. Post Information: This checks the popularity of a post, based on likes, comments, shares, and saves. These signals are more influential in Explore than in Feed or Stories.
2. Explore Activity: This includes signals from posts that have been liked, saved, shared, or commented on, as well as previous interactions within Explore. If a specific type of post receives interaction, similar content will be prioritized.
3. Interaction History with the Poster: If a post belongs to an unfamiliar account, previous interactions with that account can indicate potential interest in the shared content.
4. Poster Information: This tracks how often users have interacted with the account in recent weeks, helping in finding engaging content from various sources.

Most Explore content comes from accounts that users do not follow, which changes the experience when encountering inappropriate content. When a friend shares offensive content, it becomes a matter between the user and that friend, with options to unfollow, block, mute, hide, or report. However, the goal is to minimize exposure to offensive content in Explore, as this content is recommended from accounts users have not actively chosen to follow. In addition to Community Standards, specific guidelines govern recommendations in areas such as Explore, Reels, Search, Suggested Posts in Feed, and Suggested Accounts—these are referred to as the Recommendations Guidelines. While posts that violate these guidelines are still allowed on Instagram, some users may find them sensitive or offensive. For example, recommendations typically avoid content that promotes violence or the use of regulated products such as tobacco or pharmaceuticals. If a post violates the Recommendations Guidelines, steps are taken to prevent it from appearing in recommendations. If an account repeatedly shares content that goes against these guidelines or Community Standards, all of its

posts may become ineligible for recommendations for a certain period. Understanding Account Status helps users determine whether their account and content qualify for recommendations on Instagram. Over time, new controls have been introduced to allow users to influence the types of recommended content, including Sensitive Content Control and the option to indicate “Not Interested” alongside posts.

There are Reels, which are designed to assist users in discovering new content, with a focus on entertainment. Similar to the Explore feature, most of the visible content comes from accounts that are not followed. The process of ranking involves sourcing reels that may be appealing and ordering them based on perceived interest. Surveys are used to find entertaining reels by asking people if they enjoy specific ones, their feedback helps improve how reels are selected for audiences. Key predictions include the likelihood of resharing a reel, watching it till the end, liking it, and visiting the audio page, which serves as an indicator of potential inspiration to create original reels. The primary signals, in order of importance, include:

1. Activity: Engagement is key, liked, saved, reshared, and commented reels provide insights into relevant content preferences.
2. Interaction History: Previous interactions with the content creator, even if the creator is unfamiliar, offer clues about interest in their shared content.
3. Reel Information: Signals regarding the video's content, including audio tracks, visuals, and overall popularity.
4. Poster Information: Popularity indicators, such as follower count and engagement levels, helps identifying engaging content from a diverse range of creators, ensuring opportunities for different audiences.

Ranking of Reels involves user activity, reel information, and details about the content creator. The same Recommendation Guidelines that apply to Explore also applies to Reels. Certain reels may be less visible due to factors like low resolution, watermarks, muted audio, excessive text, or prior postings on Instagram.

The way that people use Instagram can affect the content in their feed. Interactions, Likes, and comments improve the overall experience. However, there are additional steps that can be taken to influence the content further more like:

- Adjusting the Sensitive Content Control allows users to choose more or less exposure to certain types of sensitive content from the accounts that are not followed. However, the "more" option is not available for users under the age of 18.
- Selecting "Not Interested" on a recommended post helps improve future suggestions. Additionally, an "Interested" option is being tested to show more of the content users enjoy.
- Filtering out captions containing unwanted words, phrases, or emojis can hide certain suggested posts.
- Using the reporting tool on any post or profile reports content that violates policies, which helps manage and reduce similar content on the platform.
- Regarding specific content visibility, users can tap the three dots in the upper right corner of a post or advertisement and select "Why you're seeing this post/ad." This feature reveals the signals and factors that influenced the algorithm's decision to display the content.

Regarding the concept of "shadowbanning." While there is no clear or universally accepted definition of this term, many individuals use "shadowbanning" to indicate that a user's account or content is restricted or hidden without an explanation. When an audience shows interest in shared content, enhancing visibility for that content is beneficial for both creators and Instagram. The belief that enhanced reach requires payment for advertisements is a common misconception; the platform does not suppress content to encourage advertisement purchases. A more engaging Instagram is achieved by promoting the reach of highly engaging content creators while selling advertisements to others. The debate about "shadowbanning" highlights the need for more transparency in account visibility. Users should know what affects the visibility of their content. To address this, features like Account Status have been introduced to help users understand why their content may not be recommended. Additionally, users can remove content that might harm their accounts and reconsider decisions they believe are wrong. Investment in Account Status continues to enhance transparency within the community on the platform.

2.2.3 TikTok's features and algorithm

Short-video platforms are different from video-sharing platforms (YouTube) and social networking services (Facebook, Instagram) because they are created for people to engage with and through user-generated video content rather than with each other around it. After the downfall of Vine (2013-2017), the users of musical.ly (2014-2018) led to the recent increase

in short-video applications, such as Byte, Triller, Zynn, or Likee, among which TikTok is leader in user numbers and user engagement worldwide.¹

TikTok does not generate the feed based on content from accounts that the users follow, the recommendation algorithm generates video content for the individual user's 'for you' page based on user engagement with videos through viewing time, liking, commenting, and sharing. The 'for you' page feed is generated from videos that include trending hashtags or sounds. The result of the TikTok algorithm can appear to users through the personalized content feed that shows videos related to what they seem to like by continuously learning about their video interests. ByteDance, the company that owns TikTok, includes natural language processing to classify text elements and audio components in TikTok videos, and computer vision technology to automatically detect and classify visual objects. Along with analyzing hashtags and video captions, this information can help evaluate whether a video is selected by the recommendation algorithm. When creators post new videos, they are first shown to a small group of users who are likely to engage with them, and if they perform well, they're shown to a wider audience. Essentially, any video has the potential to appear on the "For You" page, which provides less well-known creators the same opportunity to be visible to the users as celebrities in the platform. Therefore, it is a successful beginning of recommendation algorithms being aware of fairness. The algorithm also responds to the sounds, hashtags, and captions of videos the user interacts with, recommending similar content. Experienced users often suggest strategies to boost reach, such as creating short videos, using trending sounds and hashtags, adding teasers or questions, and posting during specific times.²

The key factors that TikTok uses to rank content are mainly :³

- User interactions: this includes watching full videos, following or hiding accounts, liking or sharing videos, commenting, reporting a video as inappropriate, and adding videos to favorites list.
- Video information: this includes captions, hashtags, sounds, and key words written on the screen.

¹ Daniel KLUG, Yiluo QIN, Morgan EVANS, Geoff KAUFMAN, (2021), Trick and Please. A Mixed-Method Study On User Assumptions About the TikTok Algorithm, Virtual Event, United Kingdom, P.85.

² Idem.

³ <https://www.wordstream.com/blog/tiktok-algorithm> (consulted 08/04/2025 at 10:47 PM) .

- Device settings: like the language setting, country setting, and device type.
- TikTok factor weighting: TikTok's algorithm weights ranking factors based on how directly they reflect viewer preferences. Direct actions, such as watching a full video, has more influence than factors like geographic location. Therefore, while being aware of all ranking factors is helpful, the main focus should be on creating content that resonates with the audience and encourages engagement and sharing.

The main key feature that characterize TikTok are:¹

- Video recording, uploading and editing using editing tools that provide creativity and authenticity to the video.
- Filters, effects, and sounds which are popular aspects of the application.
- Voiceover, which allows the creator to add narration to pre-recorded videos and get the message across more effectively.
- Live video streaming, TikTok also allows users to stream live videos where creators and their followers can interact in real-time, while they can also go live with other creators on the platform. Users can even send Gifts to creators while they stream live videos.
- TikTok Shop, it is a new feature that allows users to shop directly from the application, either from videos or LIVE broadcasts. Users can also access the TikTok Shop through a dedicated Shop tab where they can check out different products, access detailed product information, and make purchases within the platform. Despite this feature's potential, it faced real challenges, especially in the United States. It was expected to lose over \$500 million in its first year because of the intense competition, and market complexities. However, the platform's rapid adaptation to these challenges, alongside its ability to engage users with its unique blend of entertainment and shopping, suggests that TikTok Shop has a chance to grow. Looking ahead, TikTok Shop is going to transform the e-commerce future by integrating advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and augmented reality. These innovations help personalize shopping experiences and immersive product interactions, combining social media with online shopping. As TikTok Shop evolves, it is expected to set new standards for social commerce, influencing how brands and consumers engage in the digital marketplace.

¹ <https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-tiktok/#toc-9> (consulted 09/04/2025 at 02:53 PM) .

- Family Safety Mode, this feature was introduced in 2020 allowing parents to manage their kids' screen time on TikTok, set a restricted mode, and even put a limit on the number of direct messages. Later, TikTok also introduced "Family Pairing," a feature that provides educational resources to parents to help them understand the content that their children are being exposed to on the platform.
- Tipping, this feature called Tips allows users to tip creators directly. The amount for tips starts at \$1. To receive tips, the creator must have a personal account that has at least 100,000 followers, adhere to Community Guidelines, be 18 years of age or above, and be a part of the Creator Next. The creator should have a Stripe account, too, because the tips are transferable directly to their bank.
- Creator Fund, this feature allows creators who are part of the Creator Funds to receive a monthly payout for their content, but it's not available in all countries.
- Creator Academy, an educational resource for creators to improve their content and learn about the latest trends on TikTok, using tutorials, tips, and best practices from the platform.
- Creative Assistant, which is an AI virtual assistant that helps creators make videos. Brainstorm ideas and get inspiration.
- Creator Studio, this is one of the latest TikTok features, which gives creators a set of tools to improve and manage their content creation.

Figure 7 : The key features of TikTok



Source: <https://influencemarketinghub.com/what-is-tiktok/#toc-9> (consulted 09/04/2025 at 02:53 PM).

2.2.4 The difference between Instagram and TikTok as two major platforms¹

As opposed to Instagram, TikTok is more focused on short-form videos, while Instagram is a fully established social media platform that focuses on promoting photos on top of any type of video (short-form and long-form videos through the IGTV feature). The main differences between the two platforms are:

1. Target Audience Demographics:

The largest audience segments for TikTok and Instagram based on age and gender according to Statista:

Table 3: Audience Segments On TikTok and Instagram

Demographics	TikTok	Instagram
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 25% between 10 and 19 years old.• 22.4% between 20 and 29 years old.• 21.7 Between 30 and 39 years old.• 20.3% are between 40 and 49 years old.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 31.7% between 25 and 34 years old.• 30.2% between 18 and 24 years old.• 15.8% between 35 and 44 years old.• 8.9% between 13 and 17 years old.
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 57 % women• 43% men	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 49.3% women• 50.7% men

Source: <https://socialbee.com/blog/tiktok-vs-instagram/> (consulted 09/04/2025 at 07:41 PM).

2. User Behavior:

¹ <https://socialbee.com/blog/tiktok-vs-instagram/> (09/04/2025 at 08:31 PM) .

TikTok functions primarily as an entertainment-focused social media platform, where users engage with a variety of content, including entertaining videos, brief tutorials, storytelling videos, and educational content, while Instagram is predominantly used for maintaining social connections, allowing users to follow updates from family and friends, influencers, and brands. User interaction on TikTok is characterized by active engagement in platform-specific features such as duets, trends, and viral challenges, which foster collaborative content creation, while Instagram has become a safe space for self-expression and self image, where users share aspects of their daily lives through feed posts and stories. While content creation on TikTok is primarily driven by well-known creators, many users remain passive consumers, possibly due to differing levels of comfort with content production compared to Instagram.

3. Types of content:

TikTok was launched at first as a lip-syncing application but quickly evolved into a dynamic short-form video platform where users share their opinions, produce educational content, and showcase creativity through dance, music, comedy, and performance. On the other hand, Instagram has consistently positioned itself as the go-to platform for visually driven storytelling, empowering users to highlight their lifestyles in an engaging and aesthetic format.

The content on TikTok is often characterized by:

- Videos are often filmed in informal, everyday settings.
- Most content involves some level of editing, including the addition of captions, voiceovers, filters, sounds, and clip adjustments like trimming and transitions.
- Users frequently engage in the creation of or participation in trends, challenges, and duet formats.

Instagram content, on the other hand, is often characterized by:

- Lifestyle-oriented posts shared with friends and followers in a social context.
- Heavily edited visuals that emphasize aesthetic appeal.
- Carefully curated images designed with a specific visual style or theme in mind.

4. Instagram Reels and TikTok Videos:

Instagram Reels and TikTok videos are significantly similar, both are engaging short-form video formats that offer almost identical user experiences, such as looping playback, vertical swipe navigation, and strategically positioned engagement buttons. Each platform provides tools including filters, visual effects, audio tracks, and various editing capabilities for both photos and videos.

Instagram launched Reels in response to TikTok's growing success with short-form video content. Despite this effort, users generally continue to favor TikTok as the primary platform for this content style.

TikTok users tend to create videos directly within the platform, while Instagram creators often repurpose and upload existing content. This is evident in the way popular challenges and audio clips from TikTok frequently appear later on Instagram. TikTok videos are typically more spontaneous and interactive. The platform encourages user collaboration through features like duets, which are commonly used to engage in discussions, respond to others' content, or increase visibility for fellow creators. TikTok culture largely revolves around viral challenges and trends that users actively replicate. On the other hand, Instagram lacks features like duets, and the content shared is generally more individualistic. User interaction between creators is limited, and many of the trends seen on Instagram are initially popularized on TikTok. Both platforms support short-form video content. However, Instagram Reels currently allow for a maximum video length of one minute, while TikTok supports videos up to ten minutes long.

5. Instagram Stories and TikTok Stories:

TikTok Stories and Instagram Stories are functionally similar, both representing temporary content formats that disappear after 24 hours. These features allow users to share short updates that reflect daily activities. When an account is public, stories can be viewed by any TikTok or Instagram user, but switching to a private account restricts story visibility to approved followers only. Stories serve as effective tools for engagement and encouraging quality interactions. In many cases, content ideas that are not substantial enough to be a full post can be posted through stories, offering a more efficient alternative for content delivery. Additionally, stories provide a valuable opportunity to collect user feedback directly. Features

such as polls, question boxes, and opinion prompts support interactive communication and data collection.

On TikTok, stories are integrated into the For You page and displayed similarly to regular posts, while Instagram stories are accessible by tapping profile pictures located at the top of the feed or on individual user profiles. TikTok offers a feature called “templates” that enables the transformation of photos into animated videos, which is not available on Instagram.

6. Instagram lives and TikTok lives:

Live streaming continues to grow in popularity due to its direct and immediate format for audience engagement.

On Instagram, live sessions are primarily used by public figures, influencers, and brands to demonstrate routines, promote partnerships or sponsored content, host real-time Q&A sessions, share personal highlights and initiate discussions on various topics. TikTok Live includes specific eligibility requirements. Users must be at least 16 years old to begin streaming. To send and receive gifts (including monetary ones), users must be at least 18 years old.

In summary, live video features on both TikTok and Instagram present valuable opportunities for community building, improved audience interaction, brand promotion, and cross-platform engagement. These tools contribute to achieving broader communication and marketing objectives across digital channels.

2.3 Impact on Digital Marketing : Contemporary Trends on Social Media

Online marketing started in 1978 with Gary Thuerk's advertising emails and has since evolved significantly due to technological advancements. The rise of internet, and particularly social media platforms has transformed marketing into a key tool for brand communication. Social media's rapid development and widespread, especially among younger users, have made it a magnet for engaging consumers. Today, it has a crucial role in marketing, offering

advertisers analytics in real time, targeted messaging and emails, and interactive communication to better understand and manage consumer behavior.¹

With the growth of social media, companies started seeing the importance of building brand awareness, enhancing image, and establishing a relationship with customers. These platforms support content sharing, engagement, and relationship-building, which are the key components for reaching Generation Z consumers, as they prefer platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Spotify for communication, entertainment, and even shopping. Generation Z's lifestyle, characterized by sharing their activities, opinions, and values online, shapes how brands should generate targeted and creative content to maintain attention and loyalty. Social media marketing enables precise targeting, lower costs, and measurable effectiveness, making it a preferred approach over traditional methods.²

Influencer marketing has also gained recognition as an effective strategy, especially with Generation Z consumers, who often perceive promotional content from influencers as authentic and relatable because of their urge to ask for opinions and validation (Social Proof Concept). As a result, many companies are increasingly allocating more resources to social media strategies, adapting to its fast-changing dynamics to maintain competitiveness and relevance in the digital world.³

2.3.1 Marketing strategy⁴

The term "marketing strategy" refers to the strategic plan established by a company or a business organization to promote their products or services, build brand awareness, and achieve predetermined marketing goals. This practice includes different strategies and methodologies employed to influence the consumer behavior, maximize profits, and expand the organization's market presence. Establishing a marketing strategy requires an evaluation of the market, an understanding of the intended audience, and the establishment of clear goals.

¹ Lucia SUJANSA, Margareta NADANYIOVA, (2022), Online marketing communication as a key tool to capture the attention of Generation Z, *Ekonomicko-manazerske spektrum*, Vol.16, No.2, P.82-85.

² Idem.

³ Idem.

⁴ Wayan Sri MAITRI, Suherlan SUHERLAN, Riyan Dwi Yulian PRAKOSOS, Agus Dedi SUBAGJA, Abu Muna Almaududi AUSAT, (2023), Recent Trends in Social Media Marketing Strategy, *Jurnal Minfo Polgan*, Indonesia, Vol.12, No.2, P.842,843.

When setting a marketing plan, organizations must take into account various factors, including but not limited to market trends, competitors, product benefits, and consumer preferences. Several crucial elements of a marketing strategy include:

1. **Market Segments:** Identify groups of consumers who have the same needs, tendencies, and characteristics. By understanding market segments, companies can personalize marketing messages and tactics to reach target audiences more effectively.
2. **Brand Positioning:** Identify distinct ways to differentiate the company's products or services from competitors in the market. A strong brand position helps foster positive perceptions among consumers and builds customer loyalty.
3. **Goal Setting:** Set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals to be achieved through the marketing strategy. These goals can range from increasing sales, market share growth, to increasing brand awareness.
4. **Marketing Tactics:** Set the concrete actions that will be taken to achieve the marketing objectives. These include choosing distribution channels, using traditional or digital advertising, pricing strategies, sales promotions, and direct marketing activities.
5. **Evaluation and Measurement:** Regular evaluation of the results of the marketing strategy to measure its success. This involves collecting relevant data and information, including sales, brand awareness, customer satisfaction levels, and the influence of the marketing strategy on the company's business results.

A good marketing approach helps organizations be competitive, establish strong customer relationships, and attain business objectives. Consistent monitoring and adaptation of marketing strategies in order to develop market trends and consumer demands is crucial for companies.

2.3.2 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) has been defined in various ways by different authors. Some researchers define this concept as a tool of connectivity and interactions with existing and prospective customers, while other authors establish the root of SMM in meeting business goals, as they relate to consumer equity, loyalty, satisfaction and purchase intention. As it can be observed in Table N°04, there are different conceptualizations that focus on different perspectives. Social media marketing (SMM) has provided opportunities for consumers and

organizations to connect and share opinions about products or services, contribute and collaborate on creating them, as well as empowering customers to become advocates and influencers of particular marketing offerings for a wide audience. Based on SMM's ability to create value on these online platforms, as well as communicate it and deliver it to main targeted audiences, this concept can be traced to both relationship marketing and digital marketing.¹

Table 4: Definitions of Social Media Marketing

Authors	Definition	Key Aspects
Pham and Gammoh (2015, p. 325)	"Company's process of creating and promoting online marketing-related activities on social media platforms that offer values to its stakeholders"	- engagement - business goals
Dwivedi et al. (2015, p.291)	"a dialogue often triggered by consumers/audiences, or a business/product/services that circulate amongst the stated parties to set in motion a revealing communication on some promotional information so that it allows learning from one another's use and experiences, eventually benefitting all of the involved parties"	- interaction - eWOM (Word of Mouth)
Choi et al. (2016)	"Engaging with customers through SNSs is commonly known as social media marketing and brings several benefits to companies, such as creating word-of mouth, positively affecting customer equity, enhancing customer loyalty to the company, and increasing purchase intention of the company's products or services"	- eWOM - business objectives
Tuten and Solomon (2016,	"Is the utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software to create,	- interaction

¹ Simona VINEREAN, (2017), Importance of Strategic Social Media Marketing, Expert Journal of Marketing, Vol.5, No.1, P.30.

p.21)	communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for an organization's stakeholders"	- co-creation - business objectives
Felix et al. (2017)	"Is an interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses social media (often in combination with other communications channels) to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stakeholders"	- interaction - eWOM - business objectives
Yadav and Rahman (2017)	"a process by which companies create, communicate, and deliver online marketing offerings via social media platforms to build and maintain stakeholder relationships that enhance stakeholders' value by facilitating interaction, information sharing, offering personalized purchase recommendations, and word of mouth creation among stakeholders about existing and trending products and services. "	- interaction - eWOM - business objectives

Source: Simona VINEREAN, (2017), *Importance of Strategic Social Media Marketing*, Expert Journal of Marketing, Vol.5, No.1, P.30.

Contemporary social media marketing strategies include the employment of dynamic and progressive social media platforms to advertise a brand and expand its presence. Social media has emerged as a highly effective and extensively employed marketing tool globally in contemporary times. Considering that there are over 3.8 billion active social media users in the world, it has become crucial for companies to employ effective marketing strategies on these platforms to achieve their marketing objectives.¹

The use of video content is a significant trend observed in modern social media marketing strategies. Using videos as a means of content promotion has gained widespread popularity

¹ Ibid, P.845,846.

across various social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. It is also capable of captivating the interest of users, enabling brands to effectively communicate narratives, promote products or services, and directly interact with their target audience. The utilization of live streaming is increasingly gaining recognition, helping prospects to engage with audiences in real time, explore specific events or locations, and upload captivating or enlightening material.¹

Moreover, the use of social influencers or Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) has become a prominent trend in social media marketing strategies. Influencers are individuals with significant influence on social media platforms, capable of shaping the behaviors and opinions of their followers. Many brands partner with influencers to expand their reach, increase brand awareness, and build trust. This approach involves collaborating with influencers relevant to a specific industry or niche to share brand stories, promote products, or co-create content, which is when two parties innovate together a new product. Taking Nike as an example, in addition to its different lines of sneakers, Nike released limited editions of sneakers online for customers to design the coloring of their own shoes. Co-creation not only boosts consumer engagement with the brand and product, but also allows them to have the sense of ownership in the product they co-created. Additionally, as co-creation helps the company listen to the consumers' voice more and understand the preferences of their target audience, the product features designed is often more targeted.²

Also, the use of "Stories" has emerged as a notable trend in social media marketing. The temporary nature of the Stories feature allows brands to share short-lived content that disappears after 24 hours. This format provides a more spontaneous, authentic, and engaging way to connect with consumers. Businesses can use Stories to give exclusive insights into their operations, show new products, or launch limited-time promotional campaigns.³

Additionally, the incorporation of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies continues to be a growing element in social media marketing strategies. These technologies offer users captivating and interactive experiences that brands can employ to boost engagement and interactions. Many companies are applying AR filters on social media

¹ Idem.

² Idem.

³ Idem.

to let consumers virtually try products before purchasing, like L'Oréal who use these filters on platforms like Instagram and Snapchat to let their consumers virtually try on their makeup before making a purchase. Through their ModiFace technology, customers can see if products suit them, enhancing the online shopping experience.¹

Another strategy is user-generated content (UGC), which refers to the employment of consumers in producing content associated with a particular brand or product. This strategy results in increased user engagement and helps build brand trust and credibility. Companies can encourage individuals to share their experiences with products, develop creative brand-related content, or launch challenges that inspire users to generate content specific to the brand. Consumer engagement with products has been categorized into three levels:²

- High: sustained or situational, consumers actively produce and share original content.
- Medium: consumers may refer to product reviews before making a purchase, but do not actively generate or share original content.
- Low: consumers make purchasing decisions without referring to KOLs' (Key Opinion Leaders) reviews.

Compared to product reviews from KOLs, consumers often perceive recommendations from fellow consumers as more reliable and genuine, especially in low-involvement purchases. This is because they believe that other consumers share similar backgrounds and are not influenced by brand sponsorship. For products that generate high consumer involvement, individuals are more likely to engage through detailed research before purchasing. Often, they turn to KOL reviews, viewing them as experts with broad experience across multiple brands. Therefore, brands can capitalize on the trust consumers place in KOLs recommendations by reaching out to these influencers to promote their products. This word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing effect tends to be more impactful when it comes to high-involvement purchases.³

WOM is defined as “any positive or negative opinion made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is heard by a group of people and institutions on Internet”. Nielsen's Global Trust in Advertising report shows that 83% out of the 30k

¹ Idem.

² Jessie BOXIN MOU, (2020), Study on Social Media Marketing Campaign Strategy – TikTok and Instagram, Degree of Master of Science in Management Studies, Sloan School of Management, P.12.

³ Idem.

respondents trust recommendation from people they know, 70% survey participants trust brand messages published on brand websites. In the context of traditional media, WOM remained local and had limited potential to spread. With the widespread of social media today, it is very easy for people to interact with each other, whether they know each other or not, the reliance on WOM in people's purchasing decisions has increased. Moreover, WOM has evolved from words to various forms today such as photos, videos, and GIFs, making it easier to become viral.¹

WOM marketing represents consumers attitudes toward a company's products or services through their routine interpersonal communications. It is the bidirectional exchange of information, where individuals verbally exchange opinions concerning brand attributes, this communicative behavior often happens without financial gain. In this context, the promotion of products by key opinion leaders through live broadcasts forms a contemporary manifestation of WOM marketing, involving both the sender and the receiver in the communication process. When the receiver perceives the communicator as honest, the message is more likely to be regarded as authentic, which increases the likelihood of message acceptance and behavioral influence. The essential three elements of word of mouth marketing are KOL, platform and content.²

Returning to the concept of live streaming commerce (LSC), it is known as a rising segment of social media marketing that builds real-time connection between consumers and streamers on live platforms. Many users are interested in LSC because of the detailed and high-quality product information it offers, alongside the entertainment and sense of community that come from live, real time communication. Within this segment, Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) play an essential role in boosting product sales by offering reviews grounded in personal experience and product expertise. This often builds consumer trust, as recommendations from KOLs are seen as more credible. For example, top live streamers have significantly contributed to major online sales events, demonstrating the real impact of LSC on consumer purchase decisions. Through live interactions, consumers can see the product in detail and listen to real-time feedback regarding its features such as texture, appearance, or

¹ Idem.

² Yuze WU, (2022), Key Opinion Leader Marketing Used by Chinese Makeup Brands Influence on College Students, Journalism and Communication School, Jilin University, P.1784.

scent. This adds a sense of credibility, visual engagement, and interactivity to the online shopping experience, which increases the intention of making a purchase.¹

The core strength of LSC lies in its ability to simulate a “face-to-face” interaction between the viewer and the live streamer. Because of this, consumers are more likely to focus on the personal traits of the KOL rather than their online community. A KOL is typically someone with significant influence in a certain field and may also function as a live streamer or a celebrity, well-known personalities with large online followings often act as KOLs, driving sales and purchase interest through their trusted recommendations. A great example is LeBron James, who served as a brand endorser for Nike. His influence in the sports world helped Nike generate hundreds of millions in revenue. KOLs are generally defined by three characteristics: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Expertise refers to their knowledge and familiarity with the product, which they show during live sessions. Trustworthiness involves their perceived honesty and integrity. Attractiveness includes physical appearance, presentation, and even vocal tone. According to social influence theory, individuals are influenced by others in their decision-making, and this is especially true in the case of real-time interactions. In LSC, KOLs serve as credible sources of information, and when consumers perceive this credibility, they are more likely to associate the positive qualities of the KOL with the product, strengthening brand trust and recognition.²

In addition to these evolving strategies, virtual influencers have recently emerged as a growing trend in digital marketing. Virtual influencers are AI generated and 3D animation personas with a unique physical appearance and roles that can perform tasks similar to those undertaken by human influencers, often managed by people or algorithms, they are gaining popularity by starring in advertising campaigns, collaborating with major brands and generating content that attracts millions of followers. A well-known example is Lil Miquela, a virtual performer, fashion model, and musician with millions of followers on Instagram who has partnered with luxury brands and real celebrities. Despite their growing presence in brand campaigns, there's still limited understanding of how virtual influencers influence engagement and consumer behavior. Current studies mainly explore how their human-like qualities affect

¹ Wei HE, Chenyuan JIN, (2022), A study on the influence of the characteristics of key opinion leaders on consumers' purchase intention in live streaming commerce: based on dual-systems theory, School of Business Administration, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, China, P.1236,1237.

² Idem.

perceptions of credibility, authenticity, and interaction. However, key aspects such as what drives users to follow them, how their characteristics influence information processing, and how they impact purchasing decisions remain underexplored. Concerning their physical appearance, they can be categorized into human-like (humans and anime) and non-human-like (toys and animals) influencers. Concerning their roles, just like humans, virtual agents can have different relationships with commercial brands. For example, some virtual influencers (@nobodysausage) can be led by digital creators, who hide their human identity behind avatars and publish mainly entertaining content not related to commercial brands. Others (@lilmiquela, @knox frost) can be designed and managed by developers for commercial goals and collaborations with multiple brands. Such influencers typically have a highly anthropomorphic appearance, resemble human opinion leaders in the way they endorse brands, and advertise product and services by demonstrating their use in daily life. A third type is a brand mascot (@magazineluiza, @Yoox), a humanized identity designed to represent and promote a commercial brand and its services. Figure N°07 illustrates the three types of virtual influencer: a non-human-like influencer known for entertaining content, a humanlike influencer actively collaborating with commercial brands, and a human-like brand mascot. The growing popularity of virtual influencers has caught academic attention, leading to a continuous research exploring how people perceive and respond to these digital key opinion leaders. Followers often appreciate their aesthetics, creativity, and entertainment value. However, virtual influencers struggle to establish authenticity, credibility, and genuineness, which limits their engagement potential. Many users have a feeling of unease regarding their robotic nature, as reflected in online comments under their posts on social media. Although, can attract attention and interaction, but their low credibility prevents their ability to improve engagement. While they can stimulate a strong WOM, they are less effective at generating purchase intentions due to their inability to experience physical sensations or foster deep para-social connections. However, impulsive buying may be stimulated if virtual influencers align closely with follower preferences. Engagement also improves when these personas are seen as highly anthropomorphic or highly intelligent. Differences in human-like features have driven studies comparing reactions to various degrees of anthropomorphism. Often, more human-like virtual influencers are preferred due to perceptions of higher credibility, warmth, and their ability to simulate interpersonal bonds.

These traits help create stronger emotional responses and engagement, especially in promoting high-involvement products.¹

Figure 8: Virtual influencers: Nobody Sausage (@nobodysausage), Miquela (@lilmiquela), Lu of Magalu (@magazineluiza)



Source: Dinara DAVLEMBAEVA, Simos CHARI, Savvas PAPAGIANNIDIS, (2025), *Virtual Influencers in Consumer Behaviour: A Social Influence Theory Perspective*, British Journal of Management, Vol. 36, P.204.

¹ Dinara DAVLEMBAEVA, Simos CHARI, Savvas PAPAGIANNIDIS, (2025), Virtual Influencers in Consumer Behaviour: A Social Influence Theory Perspective, British Journal of Management, Vol. 36, P.204,205.

Table 5: Virtual Influencers Profile details

Virtual Influencer ID	Number of followers on Instagram	Appearance	Control	History and evolution	Collaborations
Nobody sausage (@nobodysausage)	7,7M	Cartoon	Kael Cabral	Born VI	Hugo Boss, Netflix, Adidas, Bershka
Lil Miquela (@lilmiquela)	2,4M	Human	Bru d Agency	Born VI	Prada, Calvin Klein, Samsung
Imma (@imma.gram)	391K	Human	Aww Inc.	Born VI	Dior, Ikea, Nike, Amazon, Lenovo
Barbie	3,5M	Human	Mattel	Evolved from Barbiedoll	None

Source: Bernadett KOLES, Alice AUDREZET, Julie GUIDRY MOULARD, Nisreen AMEEN, Brad MCKENNA, (2024), The authentic virtual influencer: Authenticity manifestations in the metaverse, Journal of Business Research, P.4

Section 03: Psychological Mechanisms Influencing Consumer Behavior on Social Media

As recent social media trends offer new approaches in digital marketing for brands to connect with consumers, it is crucial to understand the underlying psychological mechanisms that shape these interactions, like the social influence theory that represents a valuable lens to explore how individuals adjust their behaviors, beliefs, and preferences in response to others. This section explores the key psychological mechanisms that shape how Generation Z responds to marketing on social media.

3.1 Social Influence Theory : Peer Influence, and Influencer Imitation

The social influence theory, first proposed by Kelman in 1958, implies that individuals establish a noticeable relationship with others in the group to form a sense of identity within the group, they then change their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviors as through interactions with other individuals. Types of classic social influence theory are very common. The first type explores peer influence among members of a group, dividing social influence into informational and normative branches. Informational social influence is defined as an influence to accept information coming from another as evidence about reality. While, normative social influence involves adapting the influence to the positive expectations of another. These two branches of social influence are conceptually distinct. Informational influence is associated with embracing certain knowledge and evidence, whereas normative influence is related to self-maintenance and approval.¹

Moreover, the social influence theory highlights the important role of peer influence in understanding the consumer behavior of young people.

3.1.1 Peer influence

A peer group refers to a close group within the same age engaging in the same activities. Peer groups are networks of people who spend a lot of time together, even young people with high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence can be influenced by peer pressure, which is referred to as peer influence, it is the ability of peers to shape the attitudes, preferences, and behaviors of the group member. Peer influence can either lead to a positive motivation of the consumers, or to negative motivation, for example, if less confident consumers benefit more from being around stronger peers, while the stronger ones aren't really affected by being with others. Eder classified four different types of peer relationships; dyadic friendships, romantic relationships, peer group interaction, and peer culture exert influence. These types enable the peer to influence consumers' behaviors. Peer influence can happen through peer networks or large groups of peers with whom they associate. Young consumers in networks tend to share a lot of similarities and traits, which increase the chances of influence by modeling. Networks are often used as another channel that helps define consumers' opportunities for interactions

¹ Xi HU, Xiayu CHEN, Robert DAVIDSON, (2019), Social Support, Source Credibility, Social Influence, and Impulsive Purchase Behavior in Social Commerce, International Journal of Electronic Commerce, Vol. 23, No. 3, P.302.

and observations of others, as well as the activities they do. Overtime, continual interactions among network members lead to the adoption of similar values. Conversations between friends influence peer choices on activities and their way of thinking; this explains why friends often make the same choices and the same decisions.¹

In order to leverage peer influence on social media companies should develop strategies that genuinely engage communities, encourage authentic interactions, and offer value that encourages engagement and discussion. They should also prioritize monitoring and analyzing social media trends and interactions to better understand consumer preferences and behaviors, allowing them for more targeted and effective engagement strategies.²

3.1.2 Influencer imitation

Social comparison and materialism are key steps between the imitation of social media influencers and products consumption. Exposure to influencers often leads consumers to compare themselves to others or analyze themselves in relation to others' information. According to Festinger's social comparison theory, which differentiates between upward and downward comparisons, consumers engage in the former when comparing themselves to influencers, because influencers have characteristics that their followers lack but wish to have. Social media platforms serve as a perfect space for individuals to compare themselves with others, motivating users to compare their lives to the content on social media. The admiration of influencers is a widespread phenomenon. Consumers often perceive them as trustworthy sources of information and tend to follow their recommendations. As a result, when individuals follow an influencer recommendations, they typically compare themselves to others regarding aspects of material possessions. In consumer behavior context, materialism is defined as the importance of personal possessions. They assume that possessions are the center of their lives, and material value is the source of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Celebrities and influencers are often perceived as symbols of wealth, success, and happiness, making them an inspiration for many individuals. Therefore, people tend to idealize these

¹ Soad Abdullah ALMESHAL, May Murdhi ALMASWASH, (2023), Peer And Parent Influence On Consumer Behavior Buying Decision Making: An Empirical Study Among Saudi Female Consumers, British Journal of Management and Marketing Studies, Vol.6, No.1, P.3,4.

² Yoesoep Edhie RACHMAD, (2023), Digital Peer Influence Theory, Tehran Azadi Ketab Nashriyat, P.2.

public figures and aspire to imitate their lifestyles, and the more individuals imitate their favorite public figure, the more they value products and material possessions. Various sources, including peers, and social media influencers, are the key to shaping consumer behavior.¹

For example, lifestyle is an important influencing factor, if a consumer's lifestyle is well studied and understood, marketers can develop appropriate communication strategies and use influencers to reach a specific target audience. Therefore, conformity between products, strategies and consumer knowledge allows marketers to influence consumer behaviors and attitudes by directing individuals' interest towards their brands.²

3.2 Emotional Content on Social Media : The Impact of Emotionally Driven Content on Purchasing Intentions³

Emotional content refers to the emotional cues included in brand posts. These cues can hold both positive and negative emotions depending on the content. Emotions have an important role in advertising, because they affect how well ads perform and therefore affect behaviors toward the brand, purchase intentions, sales, and sharing. Studies have explored how emotions like happiness, sadness, and fear influence sharing behavior. However, these studies didn't specifically analyze which emotions within content most significantly affect consumer engagement.

Emotional content influences consumer engagement on social media through several psychological mechanisms. The Affect Infusion Model (AIM) suggests that our current emotions can shape how we form information and make decisions. For example, when individuals are in a positive mood, they may perceive brand messages more positively, enhancing memory and persuasiveness. This means that emotionally driven content can make brand messages more memorable and convincing. Additionally, Emotional Contagion Theory explains how people tend to mimic the emotions they observe in others, even in online spaces.

¹ Thi Cam, Tu DINH, Yoonjae LEE, (2021), "I want to be as trendy as influencers" – how "fear of missing out" leads to buying intention for products endorsed by social media influencers, Department of Business Administration, Yeungnam University, Republic of Korea, P.348,349.

² Isobel O'REILLY, Aiden CARTHY, Charles ALVES DE CASTRO, (2021), Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in Context: A Literature Review, Technological University Dublin, Ireland, P.65.

³ Hedieh Aghazadeh TABRIZI, Narmina IBRAHIMLI, (2024), The Role of Emotional Content on Consumer Engagement, Master's Degree Project in Business Administration, Jönköping University, Sweden, P.7-10.

On social media, exposure to content expressing strong emotions like excitement or anger can lead users to experience and share the same feelings, helping the content reach more people and perform better, because such content tends to generate higher levels of interaction compared to neutral or mildly emotional content. The study of emotion in social media sharing behavior explores how the emotional tone and intensity or arousal of content influence the likelihood of sharing, it tends to be nuanced and dependent on factors like topic specificity and methodological considerations.

Emotional intensity, or arousal, has also been implicated in influencing sharing behavior. Studies show that higher arousal emotions, such as awe, anger, and anxiety, are more likely to make content viral compared to lower arousal emotions like sadness. Distinct emotions, such as anger and joy, also play a significant role in shaping sharing behavior. The effectiveness of emotional content in social media marketing depends on its alignment with the brand's identity and its relevance to the target audience. When content reflects a brand's established emotional tone and message, it tends to resonate more deeply with consumers, leading to increased engagement, in addition, individual factors such as personality traits and current mood states can influence how users respond to emotional content, affecting their likelihood to interact with or share the content. There are different factors influencing the emotional impact of social media content, including the format of the content, such as images, videos, or text, and the specific platform where it's shared. Each platform has unique features and user demographics that can affect how emotions are expressed and perceived. Other factors like the tone of the material, the use of emotive language or visual cues, and the relevance of the content to users' interests or experiences play significant roles in shaping the emotional resonance of social media content.

The platform-specific characteristics are very significant in engaging consumers. Instagram's focus on visual storytelling and hash tags provides a better representation of emotions comparing to text-focused platforms like X. Similarly, the option of reaction buttons on Facebook allows users to display different types of emotions, which in turn can impact the way consumers interact with the platform. Understanding each platform's unique features is important to effectively optimize emotional content with the goal of driving consumer engagement.

Researchers investigated the potential differences in the impact of entertaining and emotionally driven content on engagement between business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) Meta pages. For example, a study revealed that emotional content on B2C Company Facebook pages creates a higher number of likes compared to B2B firm pages. Additionally, emotional content on service pages generates more engagement in the form of likes compared to product pages. This shows the importance of considering factors like context when trying to better understand how different types of content relate to user engagement. Emotional facial images in social media posts can significantly influence how consumers perceive the authenticity of the content. The way emotional information is presented, such as the arrangement of images, choice of colors, and other visual elements also plays a role in affecting users' emotional engagement and their assessments of reliability on social media platforms.

Emotional advertising messages trigger specific emotions in consumers, such as joy, excitement, nostalgia, or empathy. For example, consumers may feel warm and connected after watching a heartwarming advertisement that showcases a family's journey. This can increase their interest in the brand and its products. A good-looking product promotion that clearly gives a sense of luxury or uniqueness can create desires or goals in consumers, making them more interested in the product and the brand. Brand storytelling is a powerful way to build an emotional bond with consumers. A brand that shares stories about overcoming challenges or making a positive difference in society can inspire respect and loyalty in consumers, leading to more interest in the products.

In addition to applying emotionally driven content to influence consumers, Robert Cialdini identified six key principles of persuasion: reciprocity, social proof, commitment and consistency, liking, authority, and scarcity.¹

3.3 Cognitive Biases and Behavioral Theories : Scarcity, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)

This sub section explores the psychological concepts of scarcity and FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), which significantly influence consumer behavior. These behavioral theories

¹ Martin EISEND, Albrecht SOLLNER, (2015), The Effects of Product Scarcity on Consumer Behavior: A Meta-Analysis, Ph.D. in Economics and Social Sciences, Viadrina University, Germany, P.18.

provide valuable insights into how marketers leverage psychological triggers to shape consumer actions, particularly in the context of digital environments.

3.3.1 Scarcity¹

Product scarcity is constraining the opportunity to own a product, in order to make it more desirable by creating a perception of limited freedom to own it. Scarcity can be categorized in two types; environmentally-induced (exogenously) scarcity, which happens naturally, such as the limited availability of gold due to its rarity in nature, and human-induced (endogenously) scarcity, which happens intentionally by companies to influence consumers' purchasing decisions. Brands have been applying human-induced scarcity in marketing for a long time. For example, when Sony launched the PlayStation 2 in 2000, its limited availability led to its high demand. The same strategy is adopted in fast fashion retailers like Zara, H&M, and Forever 21. However, despite the success and growth of these brands, academic research has not explained consumers' psychological and behavioral responses to these conditions of human-induced scarcities. Scarcity can be communicated in two different ways; by limiting the time of the availability of the product, known as limited-time scarcity, or by limiting the quantity of the product, known as limited-quantity scarcity. Under limited-time scarcity (LTS), the product is available for a specific period of time, after which it becomes unavailable, which increases the degree of scarcity with the course of time. In limited-quantity scarcity (LQS), the promotional product is available in a specific quantity and the degree of scarcity increases with each unit sold.

In consumer behavior studies, scarcity is perceived as a feature that makes people believe that a product is more expensive or unique. Marketing research has consistently shown that limited availability of an item makes consumers want it more, promotional messages that highlight scarcity usually make consumers think more positively about the product, this further leads to competitive behaviors like urgency to buy, in-store hiding and in-store hoarding. Urgency to buy is defined as a consumer's urge or desire to buy the product right away, limiting freedom to delay buying decisions, it is a desire that stimulates impulse buying behavior. In-store hiding is the consumer's intentional act of removing the desired product

¹ Shipra GUPTA, (2013), The Psychological Effects of Perceived Scarcity on Consumers' Buying Behavior, Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Nebraska University, United States, P.11-14.

from other consumers' sight, it's a functional way to increase the consumer's chances of buying the product later. In-store hoarding as consumers' is defined as the desire to own a product and to keep it for themselves while shopping, even if they are not sure whether they want to buy it or not. This urge to keep a product can occur suddenly, especially when there are signs it might sell out or others are interested, like scarcity, uncertainty about product availability, or competition among consumers. In-store hoarding can be triggered by promotional factors (sales or special offers) or appealing product factors (color, quality, or design). These situational or promotional factors are likely to increase consumers' concerns about product availability, which triggers a fear of losing the product. Therefore, this behavior is different from regular buying behavior because it creates stronger emotional or psychological reactions, leading to consumers possessing the product without a clear intention of buying and keeping it to themselves until they reach a final buying decision.

Research indicates that including scarcity in advertising messages highly influences consumer behavior, when advertisements suggest that a product is scarce, consumers are more likely to engage subconsciously with the message, which leads to more thoughtful decisions, scarcity does not only increase the appeal of a product but also increase consumers' willingness to pay for it. For example, time-limited promotions can create a sense of urgency and anticipated regret, leading to quicker purchasing decisions. However, having a limited-time offer can make consumers question if the offer is truly good, possibly reducing their desire to purchase. The effectiveness of scarcity appeals can also be influenced by consumers' perceptions of how such messages affect others. If individuals believe that others are more influenced by scarcity messages, they may perceive the product as more valuable and be more influenced to purchase it themselves. This phenomenon, often referred to as the "third-person effect," highlights the role of social perception in consumer decision-making. Furthermore, scarcity messages can affect individuals differently depending on their culture. In cultures where direct communication is common, messages including limited-time offers tend to be more effective. In contrast, in cultures that rely more on indirect communication, messages about limited-quantity offers may have a stronger impact. Factors like how familiar people are with a product, their cultural norms, and personal preferences also influence how they respond to scarcity messages. These cultural differences can shape how consumers perceive and react to marketing strategies that emphasize scarcity.

3.3.2 Fear of Missing Out

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a growing phenomenon in the context of social media marketing. It represents the anxiety and the feeling of being left out that consumers feel when they feel that others have desirable experiences that they do not have. Social media platforms intensify this feeling by allowing users to constantly compare their lives to others', leading to increased feelings of this phenomenon. FOMO is linked to basic psychological needs such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness, when these needs aren't met, individuals may experience discomfort and emptiness and turn to social media to fulfill their needs. This behavior is also connected to the psychological threat of self-concept, which refers to the individual's thoughts and emotions considering himself an object, it can be threatened when individuals miss out on experiences, leading them to take actions to align with their desired identity. Research explores how FOMO leads to different negative outcomes, including dissatisfaction with life, excessive use of social media and smartphones, and the spread of misinformation.¹

The consumer behavior driven by FOMO tends to have a positive impact on brands, so marketers need to start using it as an effective marketing tool. For example, they can create strategies that trigger upward social comparisons to help them generate information on consumers, such as taking advantage of the presence of peers when posting something on social media that can trigger upward social comparisons. On the long term, FOMO can affect the process of buying starting from pre-purchase, during purchase, during consumption, and post-purchase.²

FOMO significantly impacts impulsive buying decisions as well, feelings of curiosity and fear of missing out trigger emotional impulses that drive consumers to engage in unplanned purchasing actions. Consumers under the fear of missing out feel compelled to immediately purchase products or services associated with ongoing experiences or trends. They believe that by purchasing the product that is trending, they can feel important, connected with others, and avoid feelings of being left out and alone. The impact of FOMO is reinforced by the element of urgency. Curiosity and the emotional urge to avoid missing out are coming from

¹ Yue XI, Jiale HUO, Xinran ZHAO, Yushi JIANG, Qiang YANG, (2022), The effects of fear of missing out on social media posting preferences, *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 56, No. 12, P.3455,3456.

² Alfina, Sri HARTINI, Dien MARDHIYAH, (2023), FOMO related consumer behavior in marketing context: A systematic literature review, *Cogent Business & Management*, P.18.

the understanding that specific opportunities or products have limited time or availability. These feelings put the individuals under pressure to act immediately, leading them to take impulsive buying decisions without thinking about the consequences. Feelings of curiosity and fear of missing out, generate emotional impulses that influence the perceived value and importance of a product or service as a consumer.¹

¹ Arizal HAMIZAR, Fitria KARNUDU, Dety A. RELUBUN, Salma SAIMIMA, (2024), Consumer impulse buying behavior based on FOMO psychology in the digital era, International Conference of Multidisciplinary Cel: Proceeding, P.6.

Chapter 02:

Empirical Analysis of Generation Z's Consumer Behavior on Social Media

Introduction

This chapter represents the practical framework of the study, which tests the theoretical ideas with real data to understand the extent to which members of Generation Z are driven and affected by the psychological factors triggered by social media in shaping their consumer behavior.

It begins with an introduction to the host organization, the Higher School of Management and Digital Economy, to provide the institutional context for the study. It then presents qualitative findings from student interviews conducted at the school over a period of three months, along with quantitative data collected through a structured survey designed based on insights from those interviews.

By combining both types of data, this chapter offers a deeper and more detailed understanding of how young consumers engage with social media, what drives their decisions, and how psychological factors influence their behavior. The results are analyzed and interpreted through both univariate and bivariate analysis.

Section 01: Presentation of the host institution The Higher School of Management and Digital Economy (HSMDE)¹

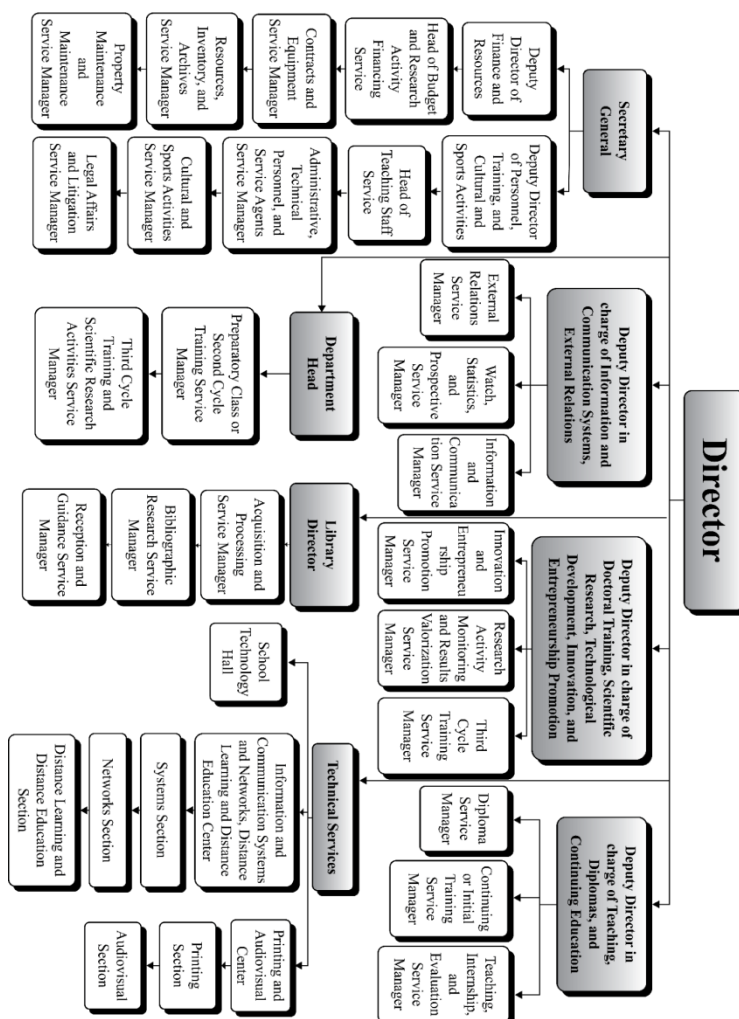
Algeria's higher education system in commerce and management includes different schools dedicated to preparing students for the evolving business world. Among these schools, The Higher School of Management and Digital Economy (HSMDE), created in 2019, and stands out for its focus on integrating digital technologies with traditional management education. This section provides an overview of HSMDE, the host institution for this thesis, highlighting its missions and objectives.

1.1 History and Organizational Chart

The Higher School of Management and Digital Economy is a public higher education institution in Algeria, established with a scientific, cultural, and professional focus. It was created by Executive Decree No. 19-198 dated 10 July 2019 (7 Dhou El Kaada 1440), which transformed the former Preparatory School in Economic Sciences, Commercial Sciences, and Management Sciences (E.P.S.E.C.G) into HSMDE, which is the first institution in Algeria dedicated to higher education and preparing qualified professionals to contribute to the development of management and digital economy.

The school has 148 employees including contractual staff, administrative and technical services (ATS) and teaching staff.

¹ <https://www.esgen.edu.dz/> (consulted: 09/05/2025 at 11:28 PM).

Figure 9: Organizational Chart

Source : Khalil BOUAISS, (2024), Digital marketing as a tool to promote

company's visibility, Master's Thesis, Higher School of Management and Digital Economy, Algeria, P.47.

1.2 Missions and Objectives

This sub sections presents the school's missions and objectives.

▪ Missions

The School's primary mission includes higher education, scientific research, and technological advancement in management and the digital economy.

In terms of higher education:

- Ensuring the preparatory education of students for access to graduate classes.
- Ensuring the training of highly qualified professionals in all the school's fields
- Introducing students to research methods.
- Ensuring the continuous, advanced and retraining of the staff in the economic and social sectors.
- Introducing students to innovation and entrepreneurship.

In terms of scientific research and technological development:

- Contributing to the technological development in the field of management and digital economy.
- Supporting the advancement of both basic and applied research in national public and private enterprises by fostering innovation.
- Hosting scientific and technical conferences, seminars, and events that reflect its core objectives.
- Implementing national and international cooperation actions for training and research in management and digital economy.
- Publishing books and periodicals relating to the specialties and the studies carried out by the school.

▪ Objectives

- Positioning itself as a key contributor to the development of a skilled elite in management and the digital economy, while facilitating Algeria's transition from a traditional to a digital economy. This initiative aims to address the country's developmental gap in an international landscape marked by rapid growth in information and communication technologies (ICT) and innovation.
- Advancing scientific research in areas related to knowledge production, expertise, and digital technologies.

- Specializing in research on digital technologies and their managerial, commercial, and economic implications, with the goal of becoming a leading Algerian institution recognized for excellence and expertise in this field.

1.3 Education path and Educational Resources and Capacities

HSMDE's academic pathway starts with a two-year preparatory cycle, providing students with a solid foundation in economic and managerial principles. After finishing the two-year preparatory classes, students move on to a specialized three-year program that leads to a Master's degree. The school offers two primary tracks: one focuses on digital economy disciplines such as E-Business, Digital Finance and Banking Management, and Information Systems Security Governance, and another centered on management sciences, including Audit and Control and Digital Management. This structured approach ensures that graduates are well-equipped to make meaningful contributions in the fast-changing digital economy.

The infrastructure of HSMDE includes:

- 1008 teaching places.
- Four lecture halls.
- An auditorium.
- 19 classrooms with a capacity of 50 seats each.
- 2 language laboratories.
- Internet access spaces.
- A videoconferencing room.
- A research laboratory.
- A library with a collection of 11,000 books covering various specialties and languages.
- A reading room with a capacity of 200 seats.
- A faculty room.
- A sports field.
- Medical and dental facilities.
- A student lounge.

Section 02: Univariate Analysis

This section presents the methodology used in the research process. This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore students' behaviors across various social media platforms. Initially, qualitative data were gathered through interviews with 25 students, five from each academic year, over a period of three months by the researcher, to gain deep insights into their online interactions. The findings from these interviews were analyzed individually which lead to the development of a subsequent quantitative survey, designed to quantify the observed behaviors and patterns. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods, this approach provides a comprehensive understanding of young students' engagement online and the psychological patterns shaping their consumer behavior.

2.1 Methodology of Study

The methodology used in this research combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research. The qualitative aspect focuses on exploring personal experiences and perceptions, while the quantitative part is based on survey data collected from a sample of students. The data is first analyzed using univariate methods to describe and summarize the key variables relevant to the study.

Qualitative study is a type of research used to explore and better understand complex real-world issues. Rather than focusing on numbers or controlled experiments like quantitative research does, it takes into consideration people's experiences, thoughts, and behaviors to uncover the "how" and "why" behind certain actions or beliefs. It's especially useful for gaining insights into feelings, motivations, and social dynamics. Qualitative research can stand alone or be part of a larger mixed-methods study that also includes quantitative data.

A quantitative study is a structured research approach that involves the collection of numerical data through surveys, experiments, or statistical records. It aims to quantify behaviors, opinions, or variables and analyze them using mathematical, statistical, or computational techniques to test hypotheses and support or refute theoretical frameworks.

2.2 Data Analysis

2.2.1 Qualitative Study

This study involves conducting semi-structured interviews with twenty five students of both genders, five from each academic year, conducted at the library of The Higher School of Management and Digital Economy by the researcher over the period of three months, one week was dedicated to every two students, with one meeting held at the beginning of the week and the other at the end. The days in between were used to carefully reflect on each conversation, analyze what was said, to analyze the participants' responses and extract relevant insights, each conversation was recorded using a mobile device with detailed notes written in hand in order to ensure that nothing was missed or misinterpreted, and every conversation was taken into consideration and analyzed thoughtfully. This process made it possible to gather accurate and honest insights from each participant, without rushing or overlooking anything which made it possible to design a well-targeted questionnaire whose questions reflected all the key themes and insights discussed during the interviews.

The interviews explored the students' habits, preferences, and decision-making processes regarding social media content and product engagement across various social platforms. The dynamic between the researcher and the participants played a key role in the quality of the data collected. The casual interactions, and the comfortable student-to-student atmosphere, created a space of trust, mutual understanding, and openness. This environment helped participants feel more comfortable and willing to open up. As members of the same generation, the researcher and the participants shared similar cultural references, communication styles, and personal experiences which made it easier for participants to engage in honest conversations, especially around sensitive psychological triggers such as social pressure, and impulsive behaviors. As a result, the interviews often evolved into deep and reflective exchanges, some of which lasted more than two hours, showing not only the participants' willingness to share but also their interest in the subject. These rich interactions added considerable value to the research process.

These semi-structured interviews revealed a generally high level of self-awareness and marketing literacy among the students. Many respondents showed an understanding of the

persuasive strategies employed on social media, such as the use of trends and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), recognizing them as pure marketing techniques. Several students also expressed financial awareness, saying that their susceptibility to online influence was conditioned to their needs and budget. Some of the participants acknowledged their habitual engagement with social media, describing it as deeply ingrained in their routines. Some took proactive measures by deleting social media applications to minimize distractions and prioritize other responsibilities. While a minority of students lacked this level of awareness, the majority showed a critical understanding of their digital consumption behaviors.

The following questions and answers present a synthesized summary of the most relevant findings, structured around key themes:

Q1: What social media do you use the most?

Year1: Instagram, Telegram, YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp, Facebook.

Year2: TikTok, Instagram.

Year3: Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram.

Year4: Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat.

Year5: Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, Snapchat.

Q2: What type of content do you find most engaging, and why? (Cognitive and emotional engagement patterns)

Year1: Lifestyle, Learning English, Billionaires' success stories, Self-development, Web programming, News, Fun content like GRWM and story times.

Year2: Baking and cooking, K-pop, Investors' emissions, Music, Algerian influencers, Football, Anime, Self-development, Humour, Makeup and skincare, Travelling, Lifestyle.

Year3: Healthy recipes, Makeup and skincare products, Music, Food, Humour, Influencers, Lifestyle.

Year4: Educational content, Humour, Sports, News, Entertainment, Lifestyle, Music, Influencers.

Year5: Learning languages, Sports, Educational content, Skincare products, varied content, Dancing videos, Food.

Q3: How does seeing your friends or influencers use a product on social media influence your interest in buying it? (Social validation and peer imitation)

Year1: Rely on friends' opinions, skeptical towards influencers unless genuine or have a strong community.

Year2: Influenced by friends and trusted influencers, trust based on shared interests and influencer's community size.

Year3: Decisions depend on personal experiences and trust, influenced more by friends than unknown influencers.

Year4: Trust in friends over influencers, decisions based on personal connections and experiences.

Year5: Trust varies; some influenced by known influencers, others rely solely on friends or personal interest in the product.

Q4: How important is it for you to follow trends or challenges on social media, even if they involve buying new products? (FOMO)

Year1: Mixed responses; some find it important, others do not engage in trends.

Year2: Curiosity, importance varies based on individual needs.

Year3: Generally indifferent; low engagement with trends.

Year4: Varies from indifference to finding it important; curiosity present in some.

Year5: Responses range from curiosity to indifference; importance depends on personal interest.

Q5: Have you ever made a purchase because you saw it promoted on social media? If so, could you describe the experience? (Purchasing behavior)

Year1: All students made purchases with positive experiences.

Year2: Majority made purchases with good experiences; one student had not yet made a purchase.

Year3: All students made purchases with positive experiences.

Year4: All students made purchases with positive experiences.

Year5: All students made purchases; one reported disappointment because the product didn't match their expectations.

Q6: What types of ads or content make you more likely to buy a product? (Content preferences and trust factors)

Year1: Videos demonstrating product usage.

Year2: GRWM, Unboxing, People who use it, Sponsored advertisings.

Year3: Constant feedback, Authentic UGC, GRWM.

Year4: Entertaining content, Sponsored ads, GRWM.

Year5: Promotions, GRWM, Unboxing, Sponsored advertisings.

Q7: How often do you research a product you saw on social media before buying it? (Purchasing decision-making process)

Year1: Always research before buying.

Year2: Always research before buying.

Year3: Always research before buying.

Year4: Always research before buying.

Year5: Always research before buying.

Q8: How do you feel when you come across limited-time offers or “only a few left” messages on social media ads? (Cognitive biases such as scarcity effect)

Year1: Mixed feelings; some feel pressure, others recognize it as marketing tactics.

Year2: Responses range from indifference to feeling pressured or sad if unable to purchase.

Year3: Awareness of marketing strategies; some feel pressure, others indifferent.

Year4: Recognize marketing tactics; responses vary from indifference to feeling pressured.

Year5: Reactions depend on price and need; some feel excited or pressured.

Q9: Do emotional stories or content make you more likely to buy a product? Why or why not? (Emotional content's impact on decision-making)

Year1: Generally skeptical; prefer genuine communication over emotional stories.

Year2: Mixed responses; some influenced by personal experiences, others indifferent.

Year3: Varied reactions; some appreciate personal stories, others unaffected.

Year4: Trust influenced by follower count; some find emotional stories genuine, others see them as marketing.

Year5: Responses range from finding stories genuine to viewing them as promotional tactics.

Q10: How do you perceive likes and comments on product-related social media posts? Do they affect your trust in the product? (Social proof dynamics)

Year1: Majority consider them as indicators of product trustworthiness; only one student indifferent.

Year2: Majority consider them as indicators of product trustworthiness.

Year3: Majority consider them as indicators of product trustworthiness.

Year4: Majority consider them as indicators of product trustworthiness.

Year5: Majority consider them as indicators of product trustworthiness.

Q11: How does repeatedly seeing the same product on social media impact your desire to purchase it?

Year1: Repeated exposure increases interest and likelihood of purchase.

Year2: Repeated exposure increases interest and likelihood of purchase.

Year3: Repeated exposure increases interest and likelihood of purchase.

Year4: Repeated exposure increases interest and likelihood of purchase.

Year5: Repeated exposure increases interest and likelihood of purchase.

2.2.2 Quantitative Study

Following the qualitative phase of the study, a quantitative approach was adopted to further analyze and validate the insights previously gathered through interviews. A structured questionnaire was developed based on the most relevant themes and patterns identified during the qualitative analysis, which lead to the quantification of behavioral trends and preferences related to social media usage among students. The survey was distributed to a target population of 1,242 students, from which 352 valid responses were collected. This sample size corresponds to a margin of error of 4% and a confidence level of 96%, ensuring the

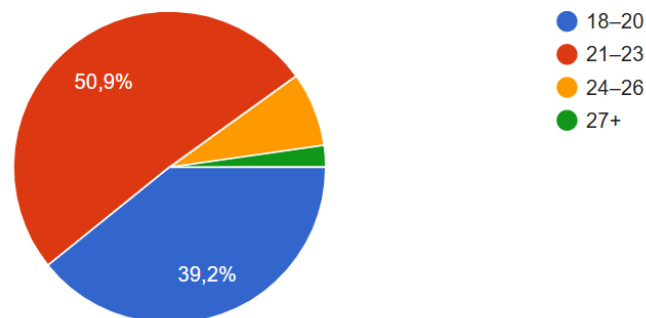
reliability of the results. Given the size and the diversity of the respondents, the sample is considered representative of the target population and statistically significant.

To analyze the quantitative data collected through the survey, both univariate and bivariate analysis methods were used. Univariate analysis was first used to examine individual variables and summarize the distribution of participants' responses to key survey questions. This gave a clear understanding of general trends related to Generation Z's behaviors, preferences, and exposure to psychological mechanisms on social media. Then, bivariate analysis was applied to explore the relationships between specific psychological mechanisms and consumer behavior outcomes.

The survey was created using Google Forms to get a deeper understanding of the students' consumer behavior online, 352 responses were collected during the study.

- **Age group**

Figure 10 : Age group



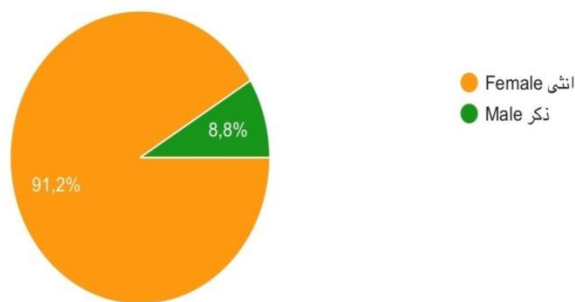
Source: Google Forms .

Most participants are between 21–23 years old (50.9%), followed by those aged 18–20 (39.2%). A smaller group falls within the 24–26 age range (7.2%), while only 2.7% are aged 27 or older. This shows that individuals born before 1998 are less engaged with social media and less involved with trends than those born in 2000-2007, which aligns with Table N°1 (Generation Z's age range) where most authors disagree on the exact start and end dates that define Generation Z, however, there is a common idea that it includes individuals born between

2000 and 2007, and people born in this age range are the first group of Generation Z members who were born in the same timeline of the emergence of social media, as they have never witnessed a world before social media, which creates a strong bond between them and social media.

- **Gender**

Figure 11: Gender

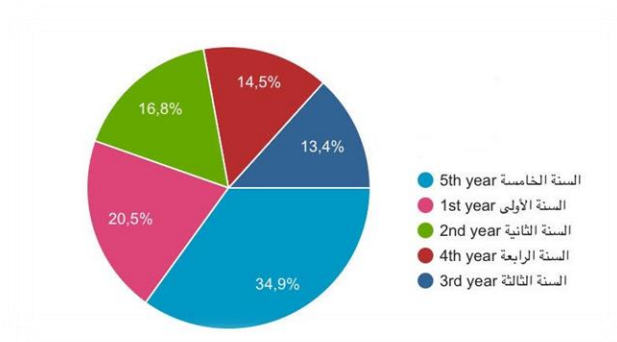


Source: Google Forms.

The gender distribution of the 352 respondents shows that 91.2% are female and only 8.8% are male. This indicates a strong participation from female students.

- **Year of study**

Figure 12: Year of study

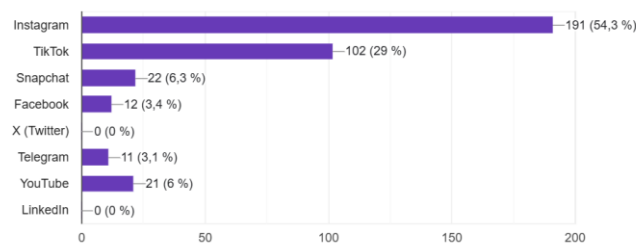


Source: Google Forms.

Out of 1242 students in the school, 352 responded to the survey (28.34%). Although 1st-year students make up the largest group in the school (486 students), they had the lowest response rate at 14.81%. In contrast, 3rd-year students, with them representing only 188, showed the highest participation rate at 65.43%, indicating stronger engagement with the topic.

- **Most used social media platform**

Figure 13: Most used social media platform.

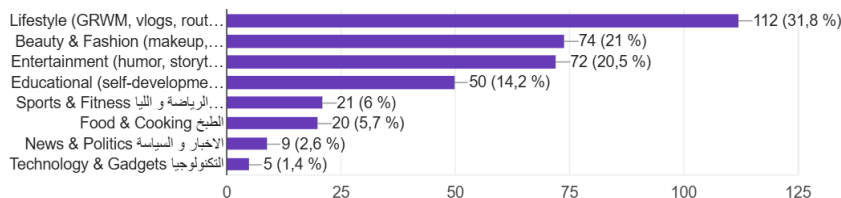


Source: Google Forms.

54.3% of respondents selected Instagram, followed by TikTok with 29%. Other platforms were significantly less popular, including Snapchat at 6.3%, YouTube at 6%, Facebook at 3.4%, and Telegram at 3.1%. Twitter (X) and LinkedIn were not selected at all. This proves that Instagram and TikTok are the dominant platforms among Generation Z students, it may go back to the visual and aesthetic nature of content on those two platforms.

- **Type of content**

Figure 14: Type of content

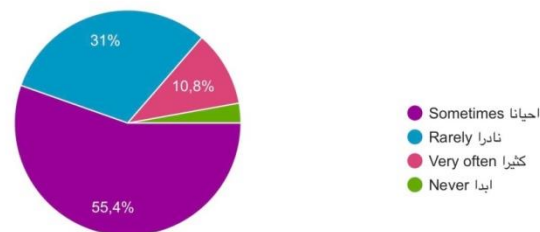


Source: Google Forms.

Among the different types of content, "Lifestyle" videos (GRWM, vlogs, routines) were the most engaging, chosen by 31.8% of respondents (112 out of 352). In contrast, "Technology & Gadgets" content received the least interest, with only 1.4% (5 respondents). This contrast suggests that Generation Z students are more drawn to personal, relatable, and routine-based content over technical or product-focused videos, reinforcing the emotional and identity-driven nature of their social media usage.

- **Frequency of product purchases after social media discovery**

Figure 15: Frequency of product purchases after social media discovery

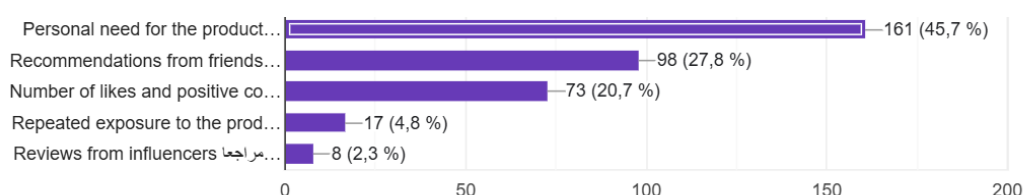


Source: Google Forms.

The highest response rate was “Sometimes” (55.4%), indicating that most students occasionally purchase products after discovering them on social media. The lowest was “Never” (2.8%), showing that almost all students are influenced to some extent. This confirms that social media has a notable impact on Generation Z's purchasing behavior.

- **Primary factors influencing social media purchase decisions**

Figure 16: Primary factors influencing social media purchase decisions

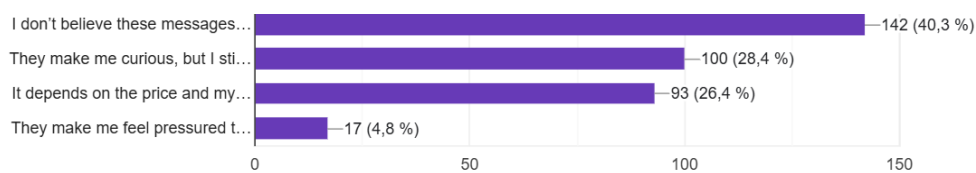


Source: Google Forms.

The option with the highest rate was “Personal need for the product”, selected by 161 respondents, which represents 45.7% of the total. This shows that nearly half of the students base their purchasing decisions mainly on their own needs rather than external factors. On the other hand, the lowest rate was recorded for “Reviews from influencers”, with only 8 responses, representing only 2.3%. This demonstrates that internal motivation, specifically the personal need for a product, is the most powerful influence on Generation Z's purchasing decisions on social media. In contrast, influencer reviews, often assumed to be impactful, show very limited influence. This indicates that when consumers need a product, they carefully consider their decision and plan it based on internal motivation.

- **Impact of scarcity messages in social media advertising**

Figure 17: Impact of scarcity messages in social media advertising

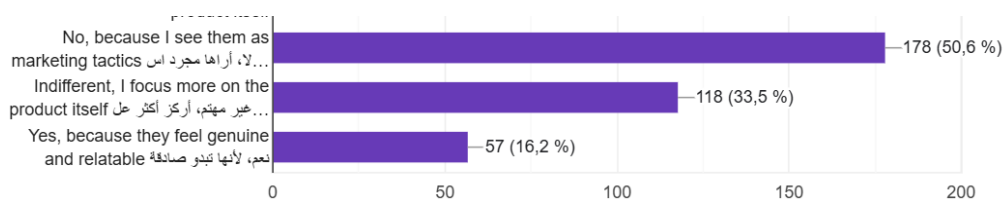


Source: Google Forms.

A significant group of students (40.3%) expresses skepticism towards scarcity messages they are exposed to. In contrast, only a small fraction (4.8%) feels direct pressure to make purchases due to these messages and this proves their awareness of marketing techniques.

- **Effect of emotional content in social media advertising on purchase intent**

Figure 18 : Effect of emotional content in social media advertising on purchase intent

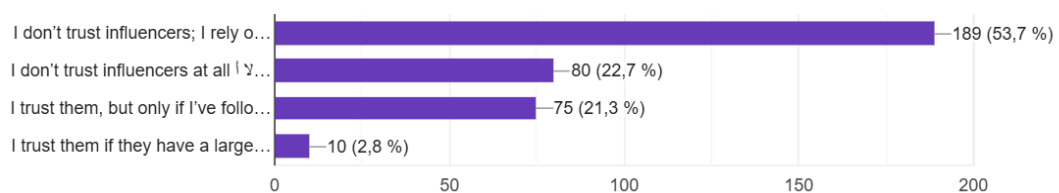


Source: Google Forms.

Over half of the students responded, "No, because I see them as marketing tactics." This suggests that when the students watch emotionally charged content in social media advertisings, their primary reaction is to recognize it as a persuasive technique. They don't necessarily connect with the emotion in the way the advertiser might hope. The smallest number of students agreed with "Yes, because they feel genuine and relatable." This means that only a minority of Generation Z students actually connects with the emotions presented in social media and find them to be authentic and personally relevant. For most, the emotional appeal doesn't feel real or doesn't resonate with their own experiences.

- **Level of trust in influencers' product promotions**

Figure 19: Level of trust in influencers' product promotions

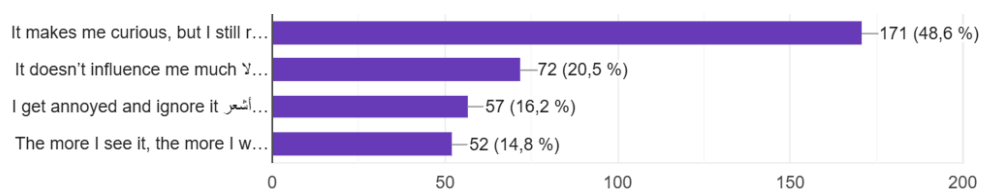


Source: Google Forms.

The majority of students (189 students, 53.7%) responded, "I don't trust influencers; I rely on reviews from regular users/customers." This is a strong statement indicating a lack of faith in recommendations coming directly from influencers. Very few students (10 students, 2.8%) said, "I trust them if they have a large number of followers." This implies that follower count alone is not a significant factor in building trust for this demographic.

- **Effect of repeated product exposure on purchase interest via social media**

Figure 20: Effect of repeated product exposure on purchase interest via social media

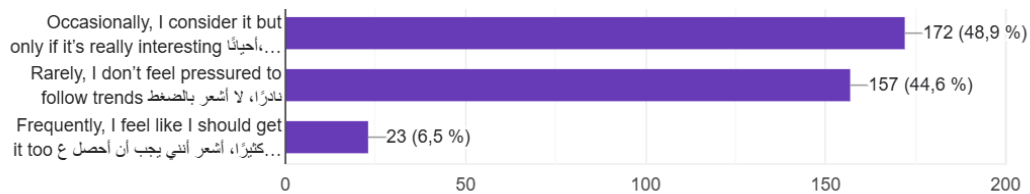


Source: Google Forms.

The highest response, with 171 students (48.6%), was "It makes me curious, but I still research before buying." This indicates that repeated exposure can make them interested, but not enough to make an irrational purchase, Generation Z students still seek more information. The lowest response, at 52 students (14.8%), was "The more I see it, the more I want to buy it." While seeing a product multiple times on social media can generate initial curiosity among the population, it rarely translates directly into a stronger urge to buy without further research. Simple repetition is not a very effective driver of purchase interest for this demographic.

- **Frequency of FOMO triggered by social media product discussions**

Figure 21: Frequency of FOMO triggered by social media product discussions

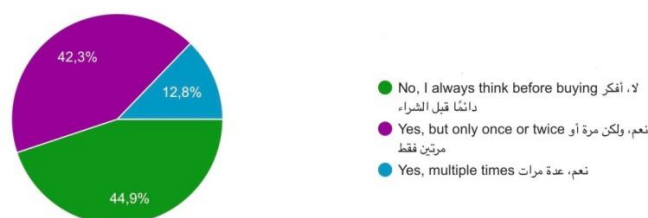


Source: Google Forms.

The highest rate, with 172 students (48.9%) suggests that while FOMO isn't a constant pressure, it can be triggered for almost half of the students when a product discussion genuinely captures their attention. The lowest rate, at 23 students (6.5%) shows that only a small fraction of Generation Z students regularly experiences FOMO related to product discussions on social media.

- **Impulsive purchases due to social media videos**

Figure 22: Impulsive purchases due to social media videos



Source: Google Forms.

The largest segment, representing 44.9%, answered "No, I always think before buying." This indicates that for the majority, social media videos do not lead to unplanned purchases; they maintain a considered approach. A significant group, 42.3%, reported "Yes, but only once or twice," suggesting that while impulsive buying due to social media videos happen, it isn't constant for this group. The smallest segment, at 12.8%, admitted "Yes, multiple times," showing that only a small group of respondents is regularly influenced by social media videos to make impulsive purchases.

2.3 Results Discussion

The demographic analysis of the 352 survey respondents reveals important insights into the distribution and engagement levels of students at the Higher School of Management and Digital Economy. While first-year students represented the largest group at the school, they had the lowest response rate (14.81%), whereas third-year students, despite being a smaller group, showed the highest participation rate (65.43%). This suggests a correlation between academic maturity and engagement with digital consumption topics.

During the analysis of platform choices, Instagram was the top choice for users (54.3%), followed by TikTok (29%), confirming the dominance of visual and algorithm-driven platforms among Generation Z, while platforms like Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook, and Telegram had significantly lower engagement, and professional or text-heavy platforms like X and LinkedIn were not used at all by the students, demonstrating the generational preference for quick, visual, and entertaining content.

When evaluating content type, lifestyle content such as vlogs and daily routines was the most watched by students (31.8%), while technology-focused content was shown as the least interesting (1.4%). This pattern corresponds with the emotional and identity-oriented media consumption habits of Generation Z.

In terms of consumer behavior, 55.4% of respondents indicated that they occasionally buy products they come across on social media, while only 2.8% stated that they never do. This highlights the significant role social media plays in shaping purchasing decisions. However, these purchases are driven more by personal motivation than by outside influence, as 45.7%

mentioned their own needs as the main reason for buying. In contrast, influencer reviews had very little effect (2.3%), pointing to an increasing sense of skepticism toward influencer marketing within this age group.

Messages showing scarcity tend to be received with a degree of caution, as 40.3% of students expressed doubt about this strategy, and only 4.8% reported feeling pressure to buy because of them. Similarly, emotionally driven advertisements had limited effectiveness; while some students connected with them, the majority (over 50%) perceived them as marketing tools and did not find them authentic or relatable. Trust in influencers was notably low as 53.7% of respondents said that they rely more on peer reviews than influencer recommendations. Only 2.8% reported trusting influencers based on their follower count, highlighting Generation Z's demand for authenticity and credibility over perceived popularity.

48.6% of respondents were curious because of repeated exposure to products on social media, but most of them still chose to research before purchasing. This supports the notion that Generation Z is information-driven and resistant to impulsive purchasing based only on repetition. FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) was a moderate trigger, with 48.9% reporting occasional feelings of FOMO when they were interested in product discussions. However, only a small category (6.5%) felt this pressure regularly, suggesting that while FOMO exists, it is not a dominant psychological driver.

Finally, impulsive purchases caused by social media videos were relatively rare. While 42.3% admitted to impulsive buying once or twice, the majority (44.9%) reported that they always think before making a purchase. Only 12.8% said they frequently make impulsive purchases due to social media content, highlighting a growing tendency for more thoughtful decision-making.

Overall, the findings reflect that Generation Z is socially connected, digitally immersed, yet increasingly critical and selective when it comes to their interactions with digital marketing content. Their purchasing decisions are influenced more by intrinsic needs and peer validation than by influencer recommendations or emotionally driven content.

Section 03: Bivariate Analysis

In this section, a bivariate study analyzes the interrelationships between key psychological variables and consumer behaviors among Generation Z social media users. The analysis tests the statistical significance of the core hypothesis derived from theoretical frameworks and previous research findings. First, it investigates whether content that shows real-life product use has a stronger influence on purchasing behavior (H1). Secondly, it explores whether psychological mechanisms such as the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and emotional storytelling increase the likelihood of impulsive purchases (H2). Lastly, it explores the strongest factors influencing Generation Z's decision to buy (H3).

In order to test these hypotheses, chi-square tests were performed to identify statistically significant relationships between independent and dependent variables.

3.1 Cross-analysis of type of content that influences buying with the frequency of buying a product after discovering it on social media

One of the main traits of Generation Z's interaction with social media is their preference for authenticity in online content. Unlike traditional advertising ways, content that shows real-life product usage offers both functional value and emotional connection. To study this dynamic, a bivariate analysis was conducted by crossing the type of content that influences purchasing decisions with how often individuals purchase a product after discovering it on social media.

Table 6: Type of content that influences buying with how often do you purchase a product after discovering it on social media.

Which type of content is most likely to influence your decision to buy a product?	How often do you purchase a product after discovering it on social media?				
	Never	Rarely	sometimes	Very often	Total
Discounts and promotions	4	28	21		53
Reviews and personal experiences from influencers	2	23	54	13	92
Sponsored ads from brands		1	9	1	11
Unboxing videos		5	16	2	23
Videos showing real-life use of the product	4	52	95	22	173
Total	10	108	193	37	352

Source: Developed by the researcher using XLSTAT.

The results from the table indicate that the majority of respondents (95 respondents) reported that sometimes they purchase products after discovering them through content that demonstrates real-life use. In addition, a significant group of participants (54 respondents) said that sometimes they buy products on social media after viewing influencer reviews. This suggests certain content types, like real-life tutorial videos, may be more effective at driving purchases than others.

3 Chi-Square Test

Hypotheses:

- H0 (Null hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between the type of content influencing purchase decisions and the frequency of purchase after discovering the product on social media.

- H1 (Alternative hypothesis): There is a significant relationship between the type of content influencing purchase decisions and the frequency of purchase after discovering the product on social media.

Table 7 : Chi-Square Test Results (H1)

Chi-square statistic (χ^2)	34.27
p-value	0.0001
Significance Level (α)	0.05 (5%)

Source: Developed by the researcher using XLSTAT.

Since the p-value is less than the significance level of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. The chi-square test reveals that there is a statistically significant relationship between the type of content that influences purchase decisions and the frequency of purchasing products after discovering them on social media. The test results with the findings from the previous table show that real life usage of product that demonstrates credibility and authenticity is the strongest motive for making a purchase because Generation Z demonstrates a strong demand for authenticity and credibility, which is clearly reflected in both their consumer behavior and their brand–customer relationships. As highlighted in the first chapter, this generation exhibits less brand loyalty than previous ones, prioritizing transparent values and authenticity over long-term attachment to specific brands. They actively hold companies accountable, often calling out misleading marketing or unethical practices through social media platforms and, in many cases, participating in organized boycotts. A particularly relevant and recent example is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, where many members of Generation Z chose to boycott brands perceived as supporting Israel or connected to companies operating in Israeli settlements. This movement illustrates how credibility and alignment with personal values are crucial to Generation Z, and how quickly they are willing to **abandon brands** that fail to meet their ethical expectations.

3.2 Cross-Analysis of the frequency of FOMO experienced and impulsive purchases

Generation Z's heightened sensitivity to social comparison and engaging content can make them susceptible to impulsive purchases. To explore this phenomenon, a double bivariate analysis was conducted. First, the experience of FOMO was crossed with impulsive purchasing behavior, and second, susceptibility to emotional storytelling was crossed with the same dependent variable. These two test the second hypothesis (H2): Psychological mechanisms like FOMO and emotional storytelling significantly increase the likelihood of impulsive purchases among Generation Z social media users.

Table 8: How often do you experience FOMO with have you ever made an impulsive purchase

	Have you ever made an impulsive purchase because of video on social media?			
How often do you experience "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) when you see others buying or talking about a product on social media?	No, I always think before buying	Yes, but only once or twice	Yes, multiple times	Total
Frequently, I feel like I should get it too	2	8	13	23
Occasionally, I consider it but only if it's really interesting	56	94	22	172
Rarely, I don't feel pressured to follow trends	100	47	10	157
Total	158	149	45	352

Source: Developed by the researcher using XLSTAT.

According to the table results, a lot of respondents are not vulnerable to the fear of missing out, instead they think before making a purchase, while there is a considerable group of

respondents that consider unplanned buying while experiencing fear of missing out when the trend interests them. Some of them always engage in impulsive buying because of FOMO, which makes it a strong trigger to unplanned buying.

4 Chi-Square Test

Hypotheses:

- H0 (Null hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between the frequency of FOMO experienced and impulsive purchases.
- H1 (Alternative hypothesis): There is a significant relationship between the frequency of FOMO experienced and impulsive purchases.

Table 9: Chi-Square Test Results (H2)

Chi-square statistic (χ^2)	16.20
p-value	0.048
Significance Level (α)	0.05 (5%)

Source: Developed by the researcher using XLSTAT.

Since the p-value is less than the significance level of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. The chi-square test demonstrates a statistically significant relationship between the frequency of FOMO experienced and impulsive purchases.

This indicates that individuals who frequently experience FOMO are more likely to engage in impulsive buying behavior when exposed to social media content. Although most participants might find difficulty recognizing that they are vulnerable to following trends, this might be due to the lack of self-awareness as they might experience fear of missing out without realizing that they do, or they might realize it but don't recognize the consequences of it which are unplanned consumption.

Table 10 : Does emotional storytelling make you buy a product with have you ever made an impulsive purchase

Do emotional storytelling techniques on social media advertisings make you more likely to buy a product? Why?	Have you ever made an impulsive purchase because of video on social media?			
	No, I always think before buying	Yes, but only once or twice	Yes, multiple times	Total
Indifferent, I focus more on the product itself	59	46	13	118
No, because I see them as marketing tactics	80	76	21	117
Yes, because they feel genuine and relatable	19	27	11	57
Total	158	149	45	352

Source: Developed by the researcher using XLSTAT.

According to the table results, while impulsive purchases due to social media content seem to be relatively common, the respondents reported a mix of skepticism and rational decision-making.

5 Chi-Square Test

Hypotheses:

- H0 (Null hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between emotional storytelling in social media advertising and impulsive purchases.
- H1 (Alternative hypothesis): There is a significant relationship between emotional storytelling in social media advertising and impulsive purchases.

Table 11: Chi-Square Test Results (H2)

Chi-square statistic (χ^2)	14.80
p-value =	0.094
Significance Level (α)	0.1 (10%)

Source: Developed by the researcher using XLSTAT.

Because $p = 0.094 < 0.10$, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 10 % significance level. The chi-square test shows a statistically significant association between emotional storytelling in social media advertising and impulsive purchases, at the 10% significance level. This means that emotional content can affect how people feel and make them more likely to buy a product impulsively.

3.3 Cross-Analysis of trust in influencers, and social validation metrics and making a purchase

Generation Z tends to rely less on traditional advertising and more on digital word-of-mouth when evaluating products. To verify this hypothesis, this analysis crosses the factors that most strongly influence purchasing decisions with the frequency of purchases after discovering products on social media. This analysis seeks to understand the depth of influence that social proof and credibility hold in shaping purchasing decisions among Generation Z.

The data from Table 12 shows that 81 respondents make a purchase after discovering it on social media when they need it, 57 of them make a purchase due to friends' recommendations, and 47 respondents sometimes engage in purchasing products due to the positive comments and the number of likes.

Table 12 : What has the strongest influence on your decision with how often do you purchase after discovering on social media

	How often do you purchase a product after discovering it on social media?				
What has the strongest influence on your decision to purchase a product on social media?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Total
Number of likes and positive comments on the post	3	18	46	4	71
Personal need for the product	4	57	81	19	161
Recommendations from friends	3	27	57	8	95
Repeated exposure to the product in my feed		3	9	5	17
Reviews from influencers		4	2	2	8
Total	10	109	193	37	352

Source: Developed by the researcher using XLSTAT.

6 Chi-Square Test

Hypotheses:

- H0 (Null hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between trust in influencers, and social validation metrics and making a purchase.
- H1 (Alternative hypothesis): There is a significant relationship between trust in influencers, and social validation metrics and making a purchase.

Table 13: Chi-Square Test Results (H3)

Chi-square statistic (χ^2)	14.80
p-value	0.094
Significance Level (α)	0.1 (10%)

Source: Developed by the researcher using XLSTAT.

Given that the p-value (0.094) is below the 10% significance threshold, we reject the null hypothesis, which means that the factors related to trust in influencers and signals of social approval (such as likes, comments, and peer recommendations) are significantly linked to the likelihood of making a purchase after discovering a product on social media. Although, the previous survey data, before the chi-square tests were established, revealed a degree of skepticism toward influencers, the respondents still appear to be influenced by their reviews. This reinforces the relevance of The Social Influence Theory (Chapter 1, Section 3), despite the fact that many individuals are unaware that being an influencer is now a recognized profession with real societal impact, influencers have come to occupy a role similar to that of supermodels for previous generations, some people even say with a sense of humor, but with a degree of truth, that influencers are the philosophers in ancient Greece of this generation, where individuals unconsciously adopt the behaviors, preferences, and consumption patterns promoted by these online figures, this proves the relevance of the Influencer Imitation phenomenon.

3.4 Results Discussion

The bivariate analysis confirms the three core hypotheses of this study, offering strong evidence for the psychological and behavioral mechanisms influencing Generation Z's consumer behavior on social media.

First, it confirms that content showcasing real-life product use significantly influences purchasing frequency, highlighting Generation Z's preference for authentic and relatable content over traditional advertisements, and proving that this generation, unlike the previous

ones, is very demanding, it's not enough for them to watch a visually appealing content unless it expresses a sense of authenticity. On the other hand, their preference for tutorial videos shows that they are more engaged when there is a human face or identity associated with the product. This ties into para-social relationships and the psychological need for social connection because it makes it easier for viewers to project themselves into the experience, increasing purchase intent.

Secondly, psychological mechanisms such as the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and emotional storytelling are shown to significantly increase impulsive purchase behaviors, despite the fact that during the qualitative study, a lot of students didn't recognize that they are susceptible to engaging in impulsive buying, and this happens for two main reasons. First, the nature of impulsive buying itself is deeply emotional—it's driven by a sudden urge or desire that takes over in the moment. There's often no time for reflection or logic; the decision feels automatic, almost like it skips over conscious thought. That's why people may not even notice it as "impulsive" when it happens.

The second reason is what comes after the purchase. Once the excitement fades, many consumers start to feel guilt or regret, especially if they've spent money they didn't plan to. To deal with this discomfort, they try to justify the purchase to themselves. This is a classic case of cognitive dissonance: they tell themselves they needed the item or that it was a smart choice, just to ease the emotional tension. This self-justification makes it even harder for them to recognize how often they fall into impulsive buying patterns. Admitting it would mean facing not only the emotional consequences, like guilt or a feeling of losing control, but also accepting that their decisions aren't always as rational as they'd like to believe.

Lastly, trust-related factors, such as influencer recommendations and social validation cues (likes and comments), also significantly affect purchasing intentions and decisions, confirming the impact of The Social Proof Theory, Influencer Imitation phenomenon and Peer Influence on young consumers.

Overall, the analysis reveals that Generation Z is not just passively influenced by content, they are active participants in a digital environment shaped by psychological factors, where authenticity, emotional content, and social validation have become key drivers of persuasion. These findings are not only relevant for marketers, but also raise deeper questions about

digital consumer autonomy, emotional manipulation, unconscious responses and the ethical boundaries of influencer-driven commerce.

Conclusion

This practical chapter provided a comprehensive analysis of the psychological mechanisms influencing Generation Z's consumer behavior on social media, based on both qualitative insights and quantitative data collected from a representative sample of students. Beginning with a univariate analysis to explore the distribution and basic characteristics of key variables. This initial step provided a foundational understanding of the respondents' social media usage patterns, psychological responses, and purchasing behaviors.

Subsequently, a bivariate analysis was conducted using chi-square tests to examine the relationships between psychological variables, such as Fear of Missing Out and emotional storytelling and consumer behavior including purchase frequency and impulsive buying. The chi-square tests verified the core hypotheses formulated from theoretical frameworks and confirmed them, opening new doors for marketers to study more profoundly the psychology of consumers both as individuals and as a generation, given that the human brain is highly complex and functions uniquely from one person to another. However, this individuality does not eliminate the fact that members of the same generation often share common traits, values, and behavioral patterns, sometimes more than they are consciously aware of.

Overall, using both univariate and bivariate analyses provided a comprehensive understanding of how psychological and social factors interact to shape Generation Z's consumer behavior on social media. These findings provide solid evidence supporting the theoretical framework of the study and provide useful, practical insights for marketers who want to connect effectively with this generation.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

This research began with the exploration of psychological theories and phenomena, focusing on their relevance to Generation Z, particularly through social media platforms. The study examined the evolution and characteristics of these platforms over recent years to better understand the digital environment in which marketers can apply these psychological theories. The theoretical insights were then translated into practical analysis, comparing them with real-world data to assess the presence and relevance of these findings. To investigate the core hypotheses, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach carried out at the Higher School of Management and Digital Economy (HSMDE). It began with qualitative interviews involving 25 students to understand their digital habits, followed by a quantitative survey distributed to a larger student population. The collected data were analyzed through univariate and bivariate methods to uncover patterns in usage and the impact of psychological mechanisms on consumer decisions. This comprehensive methodology ensured a deep understanding of the topic, as the sample size corresponds to a margin of error of 4% and a confidence level of 96%, ensuring the reliability of the results. Given the size and the diversity of the respondents, the sample is considered representative of the target population and statistically significant.

The results of this study confirmed the following hypotheses that answered the central research question: “How do psychological mechanisms triggered by social media influence Generation Z’s consumer behavior?”

The first hypothesis states that **“Content that shows real-life use of a product has a stronger impact on Generation Z’s purchase decisions”**, which was confirmed based on the data collected highlighting Generation Z’s demand for identity-based and authentic content.

The second hypothesis proposes that **“Psychological mechanisms like FOMO and emotional storytelling significantly increase the likelihood of impulsive purchases among Generation Z social media users”**. The Chi-square tests confirmed this hypothesis illustrating that FOMO and emotional content are strong motives for impulsive buying.

Finally, the findings of the analysis confirmed that **“Generation Z is more likely to purchase a product if it is recommended by a trusted influencer or receives high engagement on social media”**, which is the third hypothesis.

With the core hypotheses confirmed and the main psychological drivers identified, the following recommendations are proposed to guide marketers and specialists in connecting with Generation Z consumers:

- Given Generation Z's strong demand for authenticity, brands should prioritize humanized, identity-based, relatable content that reflects real-life product use, to create a long term customer-brand bond built on trust and credibility.
- Instead of giving all the information in a single post or video, brands should strategically leave gaps like posing open-ended questions, or “next drop” teasers that trigger the *Zeigarnik Effect* (our brain's discomfort with incomplete tasks). This creates an idea of anticipation in the brain, and it keeps consumers returning for updates, and encourages ongoing engagement, which can lead to impulsive purchases once the loop is completed.
- With the rise of Live Streaming Commerce (LSC), businesses targeting Generation Z should invest in interactive, real-time shopping experiences that combine entertainment and authenticity. These platforms offer opportunities to build deeper connections and immediate purchasing pathways, given this generation's need for para-social connections as they put a high value on forming connections online, often more than in real life. This is because they spend so much time in digital spaces that the boundaries between online and offline relationships have become blurred. In many cases, online interactions feel just as real, if not more meaningful, than face-to-face connections, so it's an opportunity for specialists to build brand-consumer relationships with them in real time through LSC.
- Emotional content can be a strong tool if used wisely, as it can quickly trigger spontaneous purchases, but it can also feel real and relatable to young consumers and make them feel more understood and engaged. It is important to balance this with clear and honest information to support rational and thoughtful consumption. This balance helps maintain trust and encourages loyalty, rather than relying only on emotional reactions.
- Brands should move beyond traditional influencer marketing by creating full para-social experiences, such as “day in the life” live streams, personalized product demonstrations, or co-created content with followers. These strategies strengthen the emotional connection Generation Z has with influencers and shift the relationship from

admiration to a level of trust that directly influences their purchasing decisions without having doubts.

- For Generation Z, the social validation cues such as the likes and comments serve as indicators of trust, popularity, and relevance. A high number of positive interactions on a post can reinforce the value of a product and influence buying decisions, as young consumers often look to others' reactions before making their own. Using these cues strategically can strengthen the perceived credibility and desirability of a brand.

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Appendices

Appendices

Appendix A – Interview guide

Subject: Invitation to Participate in a Master's Thesis Interview Study.

Good morning everyone,

I hope this message finds you well.

As part of my master's thesis, I am conducting a qualitative research study on "The Influence of Psychological Mechanisms on Generation Z's Consumer Behavior on Social Media." I am currently in the process of collecting data and would like to invite you to participate in an individual interview to share your insights and experiences.

The interview will last approximately 10 to 15 minutes and will take place at the university library at a time that suits your availability. I am seeking to interview five students from each academic year, so your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Your perspective as a member of Generation Z is extremely valuable and will contribute significantly to the relevance of this research.

If you are interested in participating, please reply with your full name and academic year, and I will follow up with the necessary details.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Questions :

Q1 : What social media do you use the most ?

Q2 : What type of content do you find most engaging, and why ? (Cognitive and emotional engagement patterns)

Q3 : How does seeing your friends or influencers use a product on social media influence your interest in buying it ? (Social validation and peer imitation)

Q4 : How important is it for you to follow trends or challenges on social media, even if they involve buying new products ? (FOMO)

Q5 : Have you ever made a purchase because you saw it promoted on social media ? If so, could you describe the experience ? (Purchasing behavior)

Q6 : What types of ads or content make you more likely to buy a product ? (Content preferences and trust factors)

Q7 : How often do you research a product you saw on social media before buying it ? (Purchasing decision-making process)

Q8 : How do you feel when you come across limited-time offers or “only a few left” messages on social media ads? (Cognitive biases such as scarcity effect)

Q9 : Do emotional stories or content make you more likely to buy a product ? Why or why not ? (Emotional content’s impact on decision-making)

Q10 : How do you perceive likes and comments on product-related social media posts ? Do they affect your trust in the product ? (Social proof dynamics)

Q11 : How does repeatedly seeing the same product on social media impact your desire to purchase it ?

Appendix B – Survey

The Influence of Social Media on Generation Z's Consumer Behavior 🐝

✨

Let's explore together the psychological factors influencing Generation Z's consumer behavior on social media and how digital platforms shape their purchasing decisions 🌸

bouharkatzahraa@gmail.com [Changer de compte](#)

✉ Non partagé

☁

Suivant

Effacer le formulaire

Ce formulaire a été créé dans Ecole Supérieure de Gestion et d'Economie Numérique.

Ce formulaire vous semble suspect ? [Signaler](#)

Google Forms

Section sans titre

What is your age group? *

☐ 18-20

☐ 21-23

☐ 24-26

☐ 27+

What is your gender? *

☒ Female

☐ Male

What is your current year of study? *

☐ 1st year

☐ 2nd year

☐ 3rd year

☐ 4th year

☐ 5th year

Which social media platform do you use the most? *

☐ Instagram

☐ TikTok

☐ Snapchat

☐ Facebook

☐ X (Twitter)

☐ Telegram

☐ YouTube

☐ LinkedIn

What type of content do you engage with the most on social media? *

☐ Lifestyle

☐ Educational

☐ Entertainment

☐ Beauty & Fashion

☐ Food & Cooking

☐ Sports & Fitness

☐ News & Politics

☐ Technology & Gadgets

How often do you purchase a product after discovering it on social media? *

- ☐ Very often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Before purchasing a product you saw on social media, do you usually research it? *

- ☐ Yes, I always research before buying
- ☐ Sometimes, if the product interests me
- ☐ No, I usually buy without researching

Which type of content is most likely to influence your decision to buy a product? *

- ☐ Videos showing real-life use of the product
- ☐ Unboxing videos
- ☐ Reviews and personal experiences from influencers
- ☐ Sponsored ads from brands
- ☐ Discounts and promotions

What has the strongest influence on your decision to purchase a product on social media? *

- ☐ Recommendations from friends
- ☐ Reviews from influencers
- ☐ Number of likes and positive comments on the post
- ☐ Personal need for the product
- ☐ Repeated exposure to the product in my feed

Which type of content is most likely to influence your decision to buy a product? *

- ☐ Videos showing real-life use of the product
- ☐ Unboxing videos
- ☐ Reviews and personal experiences from influencers
- ☐ Sponsored ads from brands
- ☐ Discounts and promotions

How do limited-time offers or "Only a few left" messages on social media ads affect you? *

- ☐ They make me feel pressured to buy immediately
- ☐ They make me curious, but I still take my time
- ☐ I don't believe these messages, so they don't influence me
- ☐ It depends on the price and my interest in the product

Do emotional storytelling techniques (e.g., personal experiences, dramatic narratives) in social media ads make you more likely to buy a product? Why? *

☐ Yes, because they feel genuine and relatable

☐ No, because I see them as marketing tactics

☐ Indifferent, I focus more on the product itself

Have you ever made an impulsive purchase because of video on social media? *

☐ Yes, multiple times

☐ Yes, but only once or twice

☐ No, I always think before buying

Retour

Envoyer

Effacer le formulaire

How often do you experience "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) when you see others buying or talking about a product on social media? *

☐ Frequently, I feel like I should get it too

☐ Occasionally, I consider it but only if it's really interesting

☐ Rarely, I don't feel pressured to follow trends

To what extent do you trust influencers when they promote a product? *

☐ I trust them if they have a large, engaged community

☐ I trust them, but only if I've followed them for a long time

☐ I don't trust influencers; I rely on real users' reviews

☐ I don't trust influencers at all

How does repeatedly seeing the same product on social media impact your interest in buying it? *

☐ The more I see it, the more I want to buy it

☐ It doesn't influence me much

☐ It makes me curious, but I still research before buying

☐ I get annoyed and ignore it

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