Typology of generation Z in terms of the use of digital technologies

Dana Vokounová
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-9963-8658
dana.vokounova@euba.sk
University of Economics in Bratislava, Faculty of Commerce, Department of Marketing, Bratislava, Slovakia

DOI 10.18267/pr.2023.kre.2490.22

Abstract: Generation Z is the first generation that grew up in a digital environment and on social networks. However, it is natural that not all members of this generation have the same attitudes towards digital technologies. The paper presents the results of a survey which purpose was to find out the knowledge and use of digital technologies by Generation Z in Slovakia. This paper aims to create a typology based on online shopping habits of this generation. Of the 6 types of digital consumer, the Bargain shopper has the largest representation, for which the extensive use of comparison shopping tools is characteristic. These shoppers are just looking for the lowest price and they are not truly loyal.

Keywords: digital marketing interactive content, online shopper typology

JEL Classification codes: M30

INTRODUCTION

We live in the online age and we are witnessing how many activities are gradually moving from the real world to the digital one. The field of marketing is not exception, the traditional forms are supplemented or replaced by digital ones. In the current emerging technological decades, the behavior of the consumers is changing and shifting towards the online shopping. Therefore, it is important for the organizations to understand the behavior of target market before taking any marketing action (Waheed et al., 2017). How to seize consumers' behavior is always critical (Waheed & Yang, 2018). This also applies to retailers, as participants in the consumer's journey to the product. Examining a shopper journey enables retailers to target the right shopper, at the right point in the shopper journey with the right message (Villanova et al., 2021).

Generation Z, who are global, social, visual, and technologically active people affected by digital technologies, have become an important market segment with a potential high purchasing power (Jílková & Králová, 2020). This generation refers to the most application-friendly and website-savvy generation engaging with the internet for most of its daily activities (Risca, 2019). Gen-Z is the first to have been described as digital natives. They have been online since childhood, using the internet, mobile phones, social networks, and even shopping from young age. They rely on smart phones for accessing information (Yeole & Agrawal, 2022). While shopping online, Gen Z derives enjoyment, learning, exploration and has a deal-hunting behavior, and significantly values reviews and ratings (Agrawal, 2022).

This paper aims to find out the attitudes of Gen Z towards digital trends and modern communication tools, as well as to create a profile of six types of online shoppers.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The growth of digital marketing has been rapid in the past years. Today, no decision can be made before referring to multiple websites and digital media. People are consuming digital content on a daily basis and marketing for most corporations is becoming increasingly interactive and "always on". Delivering an efficient for the customer and the company, relevant and engaging experience increasingly relies on a deep knowledge of the consumer. Modern interactive marketing demands deeper understanding of customers and their behavior and how they like to interact with the company and the ability to deliver personalized experiences which they find useful and engaging (Stone & Woodcock, 2013).

The concept of digital marketing has evolved along with innovations in the internet and technology. Digital marketing refers to any marketing methods conducted through electronic devices which utilize some form of a computer, including online marketing efforts conducted on the internet. In the process of conducting digital marketing, a business might leverage websites, search engines, blogs, social media, video, email and similar channels to reach customers (American Marketing Association). Digital marketing is a core part of the electronic business including policies and activities to be closer to customers and the better understanding of their needs to add value to products and/or services, expanding distribution channels, and increasing sales through campaigns using media channels, such as search engine marketing, online advertising, email blogs, the use of web pages facilitating sales and post-sales service management (Lozano-Ramirez et al., 2021). The adoption of innovative devices and techniques in digital marketing has provided more convenience, a wider reach, cost-effectiveness, and the ability to cross boundaries of distance and time (Krishen et al., 2021).There are six distinct characteristics, which make digital environment particularly attractive for young consumers, especially: ubiquitous connectivity, personalization, peer-to-peer networking, engagement, immersion and content creation (Monteiro et al., 2019).

Interactive marketing has the ability to address the customer, remember what the customer says and address the customer again in a way that illustrates that company remember what the customer has told (Dhillon, 2013). One of the fundamental changes in interactive marketing is that customers have acquired substantially more power and are co-creating the offering and influencing marketing actions in more ways than before (Shankar & Malthouse, 2009). Personalization is a key trend and an increasing amount of content is personalized using data from social media, or data submitted by users (Infogr8, 2017). Interactive content is browser-based digital content experiences designed for visitor participation. Interactive content usually includes a feedback loop in which the outcome of the experience is directly impacted by the interaction of the visitor. These experiences go beyond passive reading or watching, as the user might be calculating, configuring, answering a quiz, participating in a contest or clicking around on stats and facts within an infographic (IonInteractive). Users may have one or more many different goals in mind when interacting with a content, from the basic (select, sort), to the open-ended (learn or explore). They may want to purchase, or to share (Infogr8, 2017).

Modern information and communication technologies provide an opportunity to utilize innovative online shopping patterns as well. The concept of e-commerce has evolved to include not only the acts of buying and selling products via the internet but also making products easier to discover and purchase. Online shopping has become popular as the simple clicks on the screen can help people purchase the products in all-day open online stores (Zheng & Ma, 2021). Compared to offline shopping, online shopping has many advantages including saving transportation cost, easily comparing prices across different online stores and receiving more product information. It is noted that many savvy shoppers often search for deal information before they make online purchases. Searching for deals has become one of the most popular internet activities among today's consumers (Zhang et al., 2019).

There are three types of values provided by a shopping website to its consumers—hedonic, utilitarian and social. The importance of social values is evident from the increasing use of live chat on shopping website (Kakar, A. & Kakar, A. K., 2018).This service allows customers to seek service related information from an organisation via online-based synchronous media and a human service representative who provides answers through such media (Mclean & Osei-Frimpong, 2017). Live chat is viewed as a cost-effective way to reduce purchasing risk through increasing social interaction. It has also been regarded as a good method to respond to consumer questions, and to personalize the shopping experience (Elmorshidy et al., 2015).

Interactive marketing technology has increased online shoppers' expectations for highly engaging, time-sensitive, and personalized shopping. Websites can use various visual presentations, such as image zooming, product rotation, 3D product presentation, or virtual fitting rooms to increase consumers' positive responses such as positive product attitudes and purchase intentions (Jai et al., 2021).

Voice assistant represents a novel form of interaction with consumers. As the adoption of voice assistants grows, it is strategic for brands to develop a strong voice presence that fulfils the needs of sophisticated consumers as well as those with disabilities. Voice assistants already possess the technical capabilities to lead interactions with consumers, from activating passive users to automating product purchases (Mari & Algesheimer, 2022). Voice search is perceived most useful during situations in which the user's hands were unavailable, for example, when driving or cooking. Consumer adoption of voice assistants may be impeded because they often record conversations and therefore may pose privacy threats, and because they store data and connect with the cloud making them a potential target of criminals or hackers (Zarbock & Loonam, 2020).

With the increasing demands of e-commerce, the need for better and faster customer services is also an essential thing for companies to succeed. In recent years, companies have developed a new category of solutions to transform customer behaviors even further by using artificial intelligence – from human to algorithm (Srinivasan, 2020). Chatbots are considered as one of the latest and trendy learning technologies with artificial intelligence. A chatbot is programmed with text messages or speeches to simulate human conversation in a scripted way. The advantages of using chatbots include low cost, less time in obtaining answers, better interaction and ability to operate as a 24/7 support service (Vanichvasin, 2021). Designed to convincingly simulate the way a human would behave as a conversational partner. A chatbot allows a user to simply ask questions in the same manner that they would address a human (Ansari et al., 2021).

2 METHODOLOGY

Identifying and knowing the needs and types of customers is the key to a successful and efficient business. That's why the aim of this paper is to create a profile of selected types of online shoppers in terms of knowledge and use of modern communication tools. Based on this goal, we set the following research question:

RQ: Is there a type of Gen Z online shopper that is dominant?

In the first step, we selected the types of online shoppers to be investigated. There are several typologies of online shoppers, which characterize shoppers according to their behavior, needs or motives. For our purpose, we selected 6 types that appeared most frequently in the literature (Lahunou, 2022; Predoiu, 2022; Yadav, 2017): the New to the

Net, Reluctant, Bargain, Surgical, Enthusiast and the Power shopper. We wanted to find out to what extent these types are represented in Slovak Gen Z and how they can be characterized in terms of variables such as experience with newer technologies used to communicate with online shoppers or attitude towards influencers.

In the second step we designed the survey questionnaire which consisted of three parts. The first part contained questions about knowledge and use of digital communication tools and social networks, and about attitudes towards influencers. The second part contained scales, which were used to determine whether an individual belonged to a given type of online shopper. To assign the respondent to the given type, we used statements (two statements for each type) with the answer options on the scale "It characterizes me", "It characterizes me partially", "It rather does not characterize me" and "It does not characterize me at all". The third part of the questionnaire included demographic information about respondent.

To collect data we used on-line survey – CAWI and ensured with a filter question that only respondents born between 1997 and 2012, that is members of Gen Z (Dagostino, 2021), could fill out the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed through social networks in February and March 2022. The sample was not drawn randomly, so the results cannot be generalize to any specific population. Our final sample consisted of 176 respondents, of whom 55.5% were men, 31.8% with a university degree and 54.0% with a high school diploma.

In order to be able to determine what type of online shopper the respondent is, we needed to numerically code the answers in the scales with statements. We calculated the average score of the two statements for each online shopper type and for each respondent. Subsequently, based on the average score, we decided whether or not the respondent is the given type. Then we characterized each online shopper type according to the questions from the first and third part of the questionnaire We also used the Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test to compare the proportion of demographic variables (gender and education) in each of six types of online shoppers. For example, whether the same proportion from men and from women belong to the given type.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

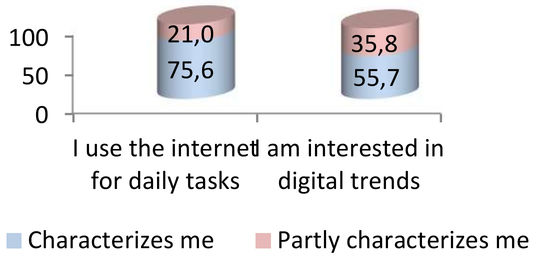
First, we will present our findings regarding the use of digital tools and influencer tracking for all Gen Z respondents, and in the second part, we will focus on the typology of online shoppers.

1.1 Digital technologies and Generation Z

As already mentioned, Generation Z grew up in a digital environment and on social networks. That's why we found out which newer communication tools they have experience with and we also focused on influencers as a source of information.

Almost all respondents (Fig.1) use the internet for daily tasks (96.6%) and are at least partially interested in digital trends (91.5%).

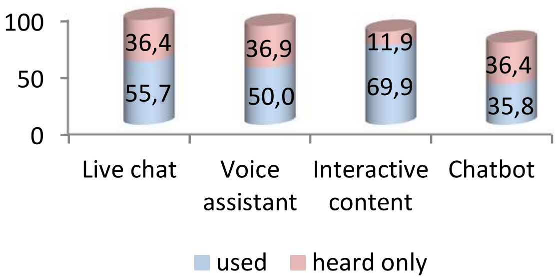
Fig. 1 Internet and digital trends



Source: own calculations

The most popular modern technology is live chat on a website, which 92.1% of young people have at least heard of (Fig. 2). They are followed by voice assistant, interactive content and chatbot. The most used of these tools is interactive content, which has already been used by 69.9%, for example for calculations (BMI, for loans), movement on the map, evaluation, surveys or games. More than a third of Generation Z members have the least experience with chatbots. Young people could imagine its use in banking or financial consulting (88.9%), in e-shops (81.5%) or telecommunications (50.0%), or in public administration (35.2%). in the health field (33.3%) or gastronomy (22.2%). According to Retail magazin.sk, 38% of Generation Z are willing to try a voice assistant when ordering, 25% of them say they can't wait to use it, and 10% said they are already using it.

Fig. 2 Knowledge and use of communication tools

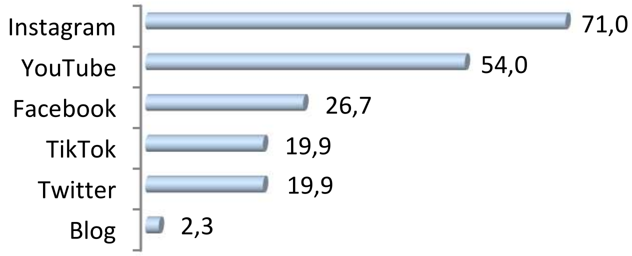


Source: own calculations

Those who have experience with a chatbot mainly appreciate the immediate response (88.9%) and easy communication (44.4%). As for the negative side, half said they preferred communicating with real people (50.8%), more than a third were not properly understood (38.1%), less than a third said they received unclear answers (30.2%) or that their problem was not solved (28.6%). Of those who used live chat on the website, they throw out its advantages compared to the chatbot in that it has a greater ability to solve problems (59.2%), it is more personal (49.0%), more interactive (46.9%), more customizable (38.8%) and provides more information (37.8%). They see the long wait for an answer (31.6%), unavailability (25.5%) and failure to solve problems (14.3%) as disadvantages of live chat. The greatest advantage of the voice assistant is considered by those who used it to be that there is no need for hands (65.9%), saving time (58.0%), the possibility of using it even while driving (54.5%) or greater comfort (52, 3%). They see as disadvantages that they do not always understand everything (79.5%), communication in a foreign language (54.5%), and not everyone can master it (25.0%).

We were also interested in Gen Z´s attitude towards influencers. Three quarters of respondents follow influencers on social networks, with Instagram and YouTube being the most used and blogs the least (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 Following influencers on social networks

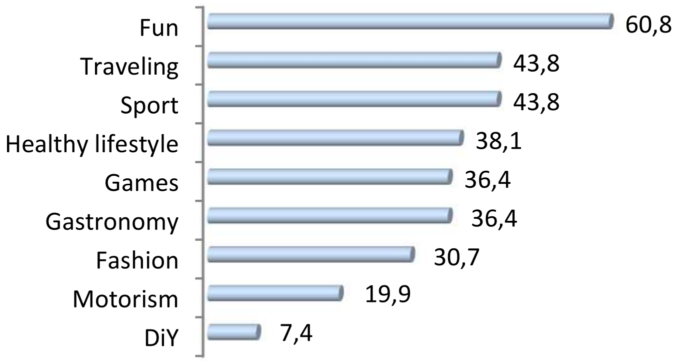


Source: own calculations

More than half (56.1%) of the respondents follow influencers daily and almost a third more than once a week (29.6%), especially in the field of fun, traveling or sport (Fig. 4). Most young people trust influencers. However, more than a third (37.1%) do not trust influencers mainly because they are paid to promote a product or use unverified information. Young people follow influencers for inspiration (51.1%), relaxation (47.2%), information (38.6%) and discount codes (18.2%).

According to the Glami survey (TouchIT, 2023), Generation Z looks for inspiration and news. 41% of women visit fashion websites or apps on their mobile phone to see news and trends. 70% then consider Instagram and TikTok to be an endless source of ideas. 74% of Gen Z men can be found on YouTube. Twice as many members of Generation Z than Generation Y visit the website after mentioning an influencer, and 15% buy directly there.

Fig. 4 Areas in which influencers are followed



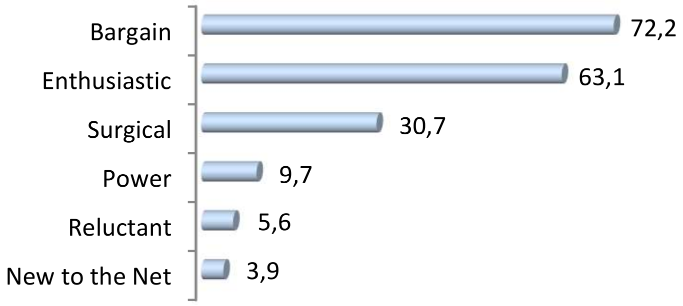
Source: own calculations

1.2 Typology of Generation Z

We created the typology of members of Generation Z by using statements to find out what type of online shopper the respondent is and then to compare it with the other types using the variables presented in section 1.1. Since several respondents identified with statements characterizing several types, one respondent could be assigned to more than one type of online shoppers.

The answers show that young people as online shoppers can be characterized as bargain and enthusiastic (Fig. 5). This is confirmed by the increasing popularity for promotions and sale products (Mergado, 2022).

Fig. 5 Online shopper types



Source: own calculations

The characteristics and comparison of the individual types are as follows:

The Bargain shopper

This type makes extensive use of comparison tools and its goal is to get the lowest possible price. Compared to other types, they use interactive content to a greater extent, follow influencers on Instagram and Twitter in order to find information and inspiration in the field of entertainment and sports. To the greatest extent, they use the internet every day to solve work tasks. In terms of demographics, they represent a medium representation of men and university graduates.

The Enthusiastic shopper

They shop often and consider shopping a form of entertainment. Compared to other types, they stand out in that they use the voice assistant to the greatest extent, follow influencers the most, and the largest share of them clearly consider influencers to be a reliable source of information. The most of them follow influencers in the fields of entertainment, healthy lifestyle, fashion, travel and food, and the least among all types in the field of sports and DIY. This type is also most interested in digital trends. In terms of demographics, they represent a smaller representation of men and those with a secondary university education.

The Surgical shopper

These shoppers know what they want in advance and usually buy only what they intended. They know in advance the criteria on which they will make decisions. They search the internet for information that matches these criteria and buy only when they are sufficiently confident that they have found the right product. Compared to others, they use interactive content to the greatest extent, follow influencers in the field of games or sports. These areas stand out for them, perhaps because they trust influencers the least of all, and therefore if they follow them, it is mainly for entertainment. They are interested in digital trends and use the internet every day to solve work tasks. From the point of view of demographics, this segment has the largest representation of men and a smaller share of university graduates.

The Power shopper

They see shopping as a necessity rather than a form of entertainment. They want to find what they want quickly and don't want to waste time looking around. Compared to others, they use live chat the least. They follow influencers more on YouTube and blogs, but less on Facebook and Twitter. They follow gaming influencers to the least extent, and to a small extent compared to others, it is also the area of sports and fashion. They use the Internet to the smallest extent on a daily basis to solve work tasks or are interested in digital trends. In terms of demographics, they represent a medium representation of men and university graduates.

The Reluctant shoppper

This type is concerned about their safety and privacy online. Perhaps that is why they use chatbot and Live chat to the greatest extent of all. But on the other hand, a large proportion of them trust influencers and most of all follow them in order to obtain discount codes. Also, it is characteristic for them that they follow influencers with the least frequency and the smallest proportion of them (compared to other types) follow them in the field of sports and motorism and for the purpose of obtaining information or inspiration. Compared to others, they follow DoItYouself influencers to the greatest extent and use mainly Instagram for this, and least of all TikTok and blogs. To a lesser extent, they use the internet daily to solve work tasks or are interested in digital trends. In terms of demographics, this type has the smallest share of men and the largest share of university graduates.

The New to the net

They are shoppers who are less "internet" literate. Of all types, they have the least experience with chatbot, live chat, voice assistant and interactive content. They are also the least likely to follow influencers for relaxation and in areas such as entertainment, healthy lifestyle, fashion or food. On the other hand, the largest share of them (compared to others) follows influencers from the field of motoring. They follow influencers on social networks in the same way as others, but it is characteristic for them that they tend to prefer Instagram, YouTube and Facebook. In this way, they represent a middle ground compared to other types in the following characteristics: considering influencers as a reliable source of information, daily frequency of following influencers, and following them for inspiration and discount codes. To a lesser extent, they use the Internet daily to solve work tasks, but they are interested in digital trends. In terms of demographics, there were more men in this segment than in the other segments (except Surgical), and the smallest share of university graduates.

We also focused on comparing the distribution of the share of men and women and the share of people with no education and with a high school diploma in individual types. We identified statistically significant differences by gender in Surgical shopper ($p=0.00$) and Enthusiastic ($p=0.05$). 73% of men and 44.3% of women were classified as Surgical shoppers, and 57.8% of men and 80.3% of women were classified as Enthusiastic shoppers. Even when comparing by gender, we identified statistically significant differences in two types, namely Surgical shopper ($p=0.05$) and New to the net ($p=0.03$). 80% of people without high school diploma and 60.3% with higher education were classified as Surgical shopper. 40% of people without a high school diploma and 20.5% with a high school diploma or university education were classified as New to the net.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, we can conclude that Generation Z can be described as digital fans who are interested in digital trends, like to use new digital tools and use online platforms and the internet for everyday tasks. They have the least experience with chatbots, and since Gen Z could most imagine using chatbots on the websites of financial institutions, e-shops and telecommunications operators, we recommend companies from these areas to incorporate chatbots on their websites. The biggest barrier to using chatbots is that half of the respondents would prefer communication with people, i.e. live chat. The latter is more popular than chatbot and its biggest advantage is a better ability to solve a problem, but the experience of young people is that they have to wait a long time for a connection or an answer. Live chat represents higher personnel costs for companies, but its positive side is a more flexible solution to customer problems.

The strength of the voice assistant is the ease of use in the form of a voice without the assistance of hands, but the weakness is that it does not always understand everything, and communication is in a foreign language. There is room for software companies to develop and improve existing systems. The most popular is interactive content, which is more used, but still offers enough space for new solutions that can attract or keep Gen Z on websites longer.

Influencers represent a reliable source of information for the majority of Gen Z and they follow them mainly in the field of entertainment and for inspiration and relaxation. A correctly chosen method of communication can help an influencer attract and gain followers not only in the field of entertainment, but also in more serious topics.

We formulated research question:

RQ: Is there a type of Gen Z online shopper that is dominant?

We found that the selected types have the following representation in Gen Z: Bargain shopper 72%, Enthusiastic shopper 63%, Surgical shopper 30,7%, Power shopper 9,7%, Reluctant shopper 5,6% and New to the Net 3,9%. We can conclude that 2 types, Bargain and Enthusiastic shopper, are dominant among Gen Z.

Therefore, the efforts of marketers should be focused on these two types. It is necessary to understand their needs and requirements and then set processes and marketing activities in accordance with these requirements.

Bargain shoppers represent almost three-quarters of Gen Z. These shoppers are just looking for the lowest price and they are not truly loyal and easily switch from one online store to another. Online retailers should convince these shoppers that they are getting the best price and do not need to continue searching for a better deal. Sale-priced items listed on the site could be very attractive to these shoppers together with appropriately designed Interactive content, which this type of online shopper likes to use. As an online shop cannot live on discounts only and Bargain shoppers are primarily focused on the money they save, there is an opportunity to create, for example, a loyalty program that will offer attractive benefits that will attract this type of customer.

Enthusiastic shoppers, for whom shopping is fun, also have a significant presence. Voice assistants and influencers in the fields of entertainment, healthy lifestyle, fashion, travel and gastronomy are attractive to this type. Online retailers can attract them with simple navigation and instant access to information so that they don't waste time. Shopping should be easy and fun.

A limitation of this study is that samples have been obtained by non-probability method, namely by convenience CAWI sampling. As opposed to a random sample, the results may not be used to make an inference about the whole population of Generation Z. However, thanks to the growth of internet use among young people, we believe that our study may provide insight into the use of digital technologies and online shopping patterns of Gen Z.

Future research could go in two ways. Choose an a priori approach, when the types of online shoppers are known in advance. It is possible to add other types and create statements in the questionnaire to identify these types. Or choose an a posteriori approach, when a set of questions/statements is created and through methods of statistical analysis, e.g. Cluster analysis, segments of online shoppers will be created and the task of the researcher will be to characterize them and name them aptly. Since online shopping is also widespread in other age groups, future research could also be focused on other generations or target groups.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The scientific contribution is an output of the VEGA project No.1/0505/22 " Implementation of innovative research methods and techniques in the consumer behavior research in the conditions of the Slovak market of research suppliers and research buyers".

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