

Exploring Generation Z Marketing Preferences on Instagram and TikTok in Finland

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore how Generation Z in Finland interacts with and responds to marketing on Instagram and TikTok, with a focus on their preferences for content, the influence of cultural factors, and the dynamics of each platform.

The study integrates both secondary and primary data. Secondary data was sourced from peer-reviewed journals and existing studies on Generation Z, social media behavior, and marketing strategies, providing a solid theoretical framework. Primary data was collected through a structured survey featuring 24 Likert-scale questions, targeting Finnish Generation Z users of Instagram and TikTok. The survey, conducted with 85 randomly selected participants from university campuses in Helsinki, ensured a representative sample of the broader population. The data were analyzed using a quantitative method to uncover key relationships and engagement drivers.

The results indicate that visually engaging content and alignment with Finnish cultural norms, including the use of local language, significantly enhance engagement, while user-generated content showed no statistically significant effect. Platform-specific features, such as algorithmic customization and interactive tools, were also critical in driving user interactions. These findings underscore the value of adapting strategies to align with Finnish Generation Z's unique preferences.

The study provides actionable insights for marketers aiming to resonate with Finnish Generation Z, underscoring the need for culturally appropriate, visually engaging, and platform-optimized marketing strategies to maximize engagement.

Language: English

Keywords: generation z characteristics, social media platforms, content engagement drivers, algorithmic engagement, cultural and regional influence

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1 Introduction

In the current digitally interconnected landscape, it is not only advantageous but also necessary for businesses to comprehend the marketing preferences of Generation Z on social media platforms to effectively engage with this demographic (Salam & Pratiwi, 2024). Generation Z, a cohort that was born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, has been raised in a technological and social media-driven environment, which has significantly influenced their consumption habits and preferences (Smith, 2020). The objective of this research is to examine the distinctive preferences and behaviors of Generation Z residents in Finland with respect to their engagement with online content on TikTok and Instagram.

1.1 Background and Justification of the Study

Background

Early digital technology immersion of Generation Z has greatly changed their perspective and interaction with companies (Smith, 2020). Unlike other generations who could have entered the digital world, Generation Z was born into it. Social media is not just a tool for communication for them; it also is a fundamental component of their social fabric and identity (Salam & Pratiwi, 2024). From Instagram stories to TikTok challenges, Generation Z's digital life is defined by an ongoing flow of material and interactions. Examining Generation Z's tastes on Instagram and TikTok helps one to understand the kinds of content they want to interact with, investigate the elements driving their choice to interact with marketing content, and offer suggestions for marketers on how best to target this group using their social media strategies (Smith, 2020).

According to recent research, Generation Z has a strong preference for visual and video content over text-heavy content, and platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are well-suited to meet these preferences (Koutelida & Odina, 2020). Additionally, the interaction of Generation Z with social media is significantly influenced by cultural trends and peer influence, rendering these platforms an ideal medium for brands to engage and connect with this demographic (Bray, 2024).

Justification of the Study

The study's goal is to better understand Generation Z's marketing preferences, particularly in Finland, given their growing digital presence. Generation Z, as native digital users, has certain expectations when connecting with businesses via social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. According to studies, this generation wants marketing messages that are honest, truthful, and consistent with their beliefs. Marketers who ignore these expectations risk alienating a critical demographic that drives big market trends (Smith, 2020). Given the rapid growth of social media platforms and shifting content trends, understanding Generation Z preferences in a country like Finland is crucial for firms trying to change methods and remain relevant in their digital marketing efforts.

1.2 Research gap, question and objectives

Research Gap

Although there has been extensive research on Generation Z's preferences globally, there is limited literature focusing specifically on how these preferences manifest in Finland, particularly on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Existing studies have explored general characteristics of Generation Z, such as their preference for video and visual content (Koutelida & Odina, 2020), but there is a need to explore the regional and cultural aspects that influence the marketing engagement of Finnish Generation Z. Moreover, there is a gap in understanding the platform-specific nuances of content engagement in Finland, where cultural trends and local context might differ from global patterns (Haenlein et al., 2020). Addressing this gap will provide marketers with deeper insights into creating tailored strategies that resonate with Finnish Generation Z.

Table 1. Research Gap Analysis

Key Area	Existing Research	Identified Gaps	What This Research Will Do to Fill the Gap
Generation Z Characteristics	Generation Z is a digital-native generation that values diversity, authenticity, and social responsibility. Their consumer behavior is shaped by their digital experiences and preference for brands that align with their values.	There is limited research on how Generation Z's unique digital habits, consumer behavior, and values-driven approach influence their interactions with brands on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Gaps also exist in understanding how their social and environmental concerns impact brand loyalty and engagement.	This research will examine Generation Z's consumer behavior on social media, and how their values shape interactions with brands and influencers. It will explore how Generation Z's emphasis on social and environmental issues drives their engagement with brands on Instagram and TikTok, and how this affects their purchasing decisions.
Content Engagement Drivers	Generation Z prefers visual, interactive, and short-form content such as Instagram Stories, TikTok videos, and user-generated content. They value authenticity and relatability.	Insufficient insight into the specific content types that resonate with Finnish Generation Z and how local culture influences these preferences	The study will identify which types of content (stories, short videos, user-generated content) resonate most with Finnish Generation Z, analyzing how local culture shapes their preferences and engagement on these platforms. The study will also examine the role of peer influence, exploring how Finnish Generation Z's engagement is shaped by content shared by their peers, which drives both content consumption and creation patterns.
Cultural and Regional Influences	Finnish Generation Z is influenced by their local culture, preferring content that reflects their cultural identity and social responsibility	Limited research on how Finnish culture and education shape Generation Z's social media behavior and their engagement with influencers and brands	This study will examine how Finnish culture and education influence Generation Z's social media behavior, focusing on how local values impact engagement with both local and global influencers and brands.
Social Media platforms	Studies show that Generation Z engages more with platforms like Instagram and TikTok due to their visual and interactive nature.	Limited understanding exists about how Generation Z interacts with specific features such as Instagram's Stories, Reels, and TikTok's algorithm-driven video recommendations. There's a gap in analyzing which platform features enhance engagement and participation.	This research will focus on identifying which Instagram and TikTok features (e.g., Stories, Reels, challenges) are most appealing to Generation Z. It will investigate how algorithmic curation, viral challenges, and real-time content impact their engagement and platform preferences. Data on interaction frequency and feature preferences will help explain what drives their usage on these platforms.
Algorithmic Influence	Algorithms on platforms like Instagram and TikTok shape user engagement by curating personalized content based on user behavior.	Lack of research on how Finnish Generation Z perceives algorithm-driven content, particularly in terms of transparency, personalization, and engagement with influencers and brands	This study will examine how Instagram and TikTok's algorithms influence Finnish Generation Z's engagement, with a focus on their perceptions of algorithmic fairness, transparency, and content personalization, and how this impacts trust and engagement with influencers.

Research Question

What types of content and factors most influence Generation Z's engagement with marketing on Instagram and TikTok in Finland?

Objectives

Identification of Preferred Content

The objective is to determine the sorts of material that drive Generation Z's engagement on Instagram and TikTok. By exploring these preferences, the study will provide recommendations for marketers on creating compelling, relevant content tailored to Generation Z's digital behaviors.

Impact of Cultural and Regional Values on Engagement

This objective examines how Finnish cultural values affect Generation Z's preferences and interactions with brands on social media. Marketers will get recommendations on how to align their tactics with these cultural values in order to develop stronger ties and brand loyalty among Finnish Generation Z.

Understanding Platform-Specific Influences on User Engagement

This objective focuses on understanding how features unique to Instagram and TikTok shape Generation Z's engagement, brand interactions, and trust. Insights from this analysis will inform recommendations for marketers on leveraging platform-specific dynamics to enhance user engagement and visibility.

1.3 Definitions and Delimitations (Scope) of the Study

Generation Z Characteristics

Generation Z, defined as those born between the second half of the 1990s and the beginning of the decade 2010, is frequently considered the inaugural "digital native" generation, having been reared in an environment where the Internet, social media, and cellphones are essential to everyday existence (Dimock, 2019). Their early exposure to digital technology has influenced both their communication practices and their preferences for online material and interaction. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, emphasizing visual and interactive content, align exceptionally well with Generation Z's consumption habits (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Generation Z, owing to their continual engagement with digital content, has cultivated a tendency for rapid information processing; nonetheless, they are recognized for possessing shorter attention spans relative to preceding generations. This renders visually appealing, succinct material formats like short films and posts very successful in grabbing and sustaining their interest (Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017). Marketers must use these preferences to create content that appeals to this demographic.

One distinguishing feature of Generation Z is their need for authenticity in the products and influencers they support. Unlike earlier generations, Generation Z sees traditional advertising as less trustworthy and instead values openness and relevant, peer-generated material. Consequently, influencers on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have a considerable impact on consumers' purchase decisions (Munsch, 2021).

Content Engagement Drivers

Content engagement drivers denote the principal elements that affect user interaction with content on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Key factors encompass visual allure, engagement, and authenticity, which have particular importance in the rapid, visually stimulating settings favored by Generation Z. Platforms prosper by delivering short-form content that swiftly attracts attention and offers instant pleasure, maintaining user engagement with low time commitment (Dolot, 2018). The concentration on photographs, videos, and ephemeral information enables these platforms to adapt to Generation Z's consumption patterns, which require compelling but quickly consumable content (Vaterlaus et al., 2020).

User-generated content is a main driver of content engagement because it encourages authenticity and fosters a sense of social connection. User-generated content enables more intimate connections between users and brands, increasing the reliability of shared content and encouraging greater engagement (Liu, 2023). Furthermore, interactive aspects such as live streaming, polls, and quizzes improve engagement by allowing for real-time involvement and enhancing the relationship between users and content providers (Fairistha et al., 2023). These factors guarantee that social media platforms sustain elevated levels of user engagement by offering experiences that are perceived as authentic, personal, and participatory.

Cultural and Regional Influences

Cultural and regional influences denote the impact of local traditions, values, and societal norms on individual behavior and preferences. Finnish Generation Z's social media engagement reflects significant influences, particularly values of social responsibility and sustainability (Kymäläinen, Seisto, & Malila, 2021). The Finnish education system, recognized for fostering critical thinking and digital literacy, influences this generation's engagement with influencers and brands, frequently emphasizing authenticity and content that resonates with their cultural identity (Wilska, Holkkola, & Tuominen, 2023). These regional factors distinctly integrate local cultural heritage with global digital trends, influencing both consumption and engagement on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok (Hernelahti & Pitkänen, 2023).

Social Media Platforms

Users are able to create, share, and interact with material on social media platforms, which function as virtual spaces between users. Instagram and TikTok, two platforms that have a significant impact on the digital consumption habits of Generation Z, are subjected to the scrutiny of this research.

According to Wally and Koshy (2014), Instagram plays a pivotal role in influencing consumers' purchase decisions because it was initially developed as a photo-sharing program in 2010. However, it has subsequently expanded its functionality to incorporate video content, stories, and shopping capabilities. According to Argyris et al. (2020), the visual aspect of Instagram makes it possible for companies and influencers to create content that is visually pleasing. This composition plays a significant impact in determining how Generation Z perceives brands and products.

TikTok, launched in 2016, is designed for short-form video content. Generation Z is particularly interested in it because of its capacity to provide highly tailored material through the "For You" page. (Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020) The platform is well-known for its immersive design, which has contributed to its rapid growth, particularly among younger audiences. This design encourages involvement through the creation of content and participation in viral challenges.

Both platforms are not only centers of entertainment but also potent instruments that may be used to influence consumers' perceptions of brands and their decisions to make purchases. Therefore, Instagram and TikTok are vital for understanding the consumer

behavior of Generation Z (Omar & Dequan, 2020). This is because the combination of visually attractive content and sophisticated algorithms enables marketers to effectively target Generation Z.

Algorithmic Engagement

Algorithmic engagement refers to how social media platforms, like Instagram and TikTok, use algorithms to adapt information for users based on their behaviors, preferences, and interactions (Montag et al., 2021). These algorithms track interactions like as likes, comments, and shares to determine the most relevant posts or videos for each user, resulting in a personalized feed that boosts user engagement (Kaye et al., 2020). Algorithms have a huge impact on Generation Z's social media content consumption since platforms constantly change the information offered to sustain interest and engagement (Cotter, 2019). The continuous feedback loop of engagement and algorithmic content distribution effects user experience, making platforms like TikTok and Instagram essential to Generation Z's everyday online activities (Zulli & Zulli, 2020).

While these algorithms are designed to enhance user engagement, they also raise ethical concerns regarding algorithmic decision-making and data privacy. The extensive data collection required by these platforms, which is powered by algorithms, frequently attracts criticism, particularly from younger users (Neubaum, 2020). The transparency of these algorithms is frequently called into question, as consumers are generally oblivious of the impact of their interactions on their content consumption (Darmaningrat, Astuti, & Alfi, 2020). Notwithstanding these apprehensions, algorithmic engagement remains crucial in influencing user interactions with social media, fostering a customized and immersive digital experience for Generation Z (Montag et al., 2021). Content engagement drivers refer to the key factors influencing user interaction with content on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Visual attractiveness, engagement, and authenticity are key qualities that are especially relevant in Generation Z's fast-paced, visually exciting environments. Platforms thrive by providing concise material that quickly captures attention and gives immediate gratification, allowing users to stay engaged with minimal time investment (Dolot, 2018).

Study Focus and Scope

Target Population and Locale

This study focuses on the behaviors and preferences of Finland's Generation Z, between the second half of the 1990s and the beginning of the decade 2010. The study looks at how this population uses social media, specifically Instagram and TikTok, while balancing global digital trends with local cultural impacts. A focus is placed on how Finnish Generation Z incorporates sustainability, authenticity, and social responsibility into their digital relationships.

Platform-Specific Analysis

The analysis is centered on Instagram and TikTok due to their prominence among Generation Z users, offering insights into how these platforms cater to short-form, highly visual, and interactive content consumption. The focus remains on Instagram's visual storytelling and TikTok's viral short video formats, which resonate most with Finnish youth.

Content and Media Formats

This research explores the most engaging content formats for Generation Z on Instagram and TikTok, such as short videos, interactive stories, and live broadcasts. The emphasis is on visually driven, immediate content that aligns with this generation's preferences for fast, interactive media.

Time Frame and Trend Focus

The study documents the most recent trends in Generation Z's social media use, with an emphasis on the present and near future. The study uses current data to predict how Generation Z's use of platforms such as Instagram and TikTok will evolve, particularly considering Finnish cultural values and global digital trends. The study uses the most recent changes in engagement behaviors to forecast future trends.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into five main chapters. Each chapter contributes to the overall study by building upon the previous one and addressing the key research objectives.



Figure 1. Research structure and steps

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction sets the tone for this study by emphasizing the importance of understanding Generation Z's interactions with social media, particularly on Instagram and TikTok. It identifies the present gaps in the literature, introduces the research topic, and describes the study's aims. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the topic of the research and defines key concepts, providing readers with a clear framework for what the study intends to investigate and accomplish.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter surveys existing research on Generation Z's social media habits, with a focus on Instagram and TikTok. It covers their unique content preferences, engagement drivers, and the impact of platform algorithms and cultural influences, especially within the Finnish context. By drawing from current literature, this review provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how Generation Z interacts with digital media, helping to shape the study's approach.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The methodology chapter describes the research design and procedures that will be employed. It describes the data collecting and analysis methodologies, such as survey procedures and sample tactics, as well as the criteria for selecting participants. This chapter also discusses the dependability and validity of the chosen methodologies, providing a solid foundation for the study.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter offers the conclusions from the obtained data, which are structured to answer each study aim in a methodical manner. It provides a descriptive analysis of the study's core topics, demonstrating trends in Generation Z's social media participation and how they relate to their content choices, cultural values, and interactions with platform-specific features.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, the results are discussed in connection to the literature examined in Chapter 2. It investigates the ramifications of the findings, focusing on how they contribute to a better understanding of Generation Z's social media activity. Key results are reviewed, with an emphasis on how they fit with or vary from past research, as well as possible explanations for any surprising trends.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The final chapter synthesizes the study's main findings and reflects on the research question and objectives. Practical insights for marketers targeting Generation Z are briefly discussed, although the study's shortcomings are noted. This chapter also makes suggestions for future study, pointing to areas that might improve our knowledge of Generation Z's digital participation.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to Generation Z

Consumer Behavior and Marketing Relevance

As a generation that was born post-internet, Generation Z has different consumer behaviors than those older, which means brands need to approach selling to them in very specific ways. Several studies highlight that this generation is very much shaped by digital communication and prefers brands that represent their values, especially those for which they have something in common visually or authentic (Williams & Page, 2011). However, businesses are also facing greater lifestyle changes because of their economic power, forcing them to redesign their marketing strategies in order to meet the preferences for interactive content and vibrant images that the new generation consumes (Chakraborty & Jain, 2022).

Generation Z is more likely to reject a brand that appears insincere or overly polished, unlike millennials who are more inclined to give it another chance. Research finds that creativity, with both brand and media-related variables included in the analysis, had a significantly moderated effect on Generation Z consumers (Anderson & Jiang, 2018), which makes an authentic approach to marketing imperative in targeting that demographic. In that same vein, Generation Z demands brands provide personalized experiences tailored to their interests. Companies that do not become compliant with these requests eventually could lose their relevance in a market shaped by digital natives (Çora, 2019).

Adidas is a well-known brand that has successfully aligned with the values of Generation Z. Adidas' "Parley for the Oceans" collaboration resulted in eco-friendly sneakers made from ocean plastic, which aligned strongly with Generation Z's emphasis on sustainability and ethical consumption. The brand's dedication to addressing environmental issues while offering aesthetically pleasing and functional products has helped it strengthen ties with this generation (Pasqualicchio, 2021). This alignment with Generation Z's sustainability concerns has increased brand loyalty and Adidas' market share among younger consumers.

Social and Environmental Values

Beyond their all-digital behaviors, Generation Z is highly associated with activism, sustainability and conscious consumers. With raised awareness of social and environmental concerns, this is one generation that will be more focused on supporting brands that share their values (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). There is sufficient evidence to show that Generation Z customers are looking for firms that engage in meaningful debates about sustainability and social responsibility, as well as goods themselves.

According to a recent research, Generation Z buyers, for example, are more inclined to participate in "boycotting," which is choosing to purchase products from firms whose ethical and environmental beliefs align with their own (Seyfi et al., 2023). Furthermore, studies show that firms that emphasize sustainable practices, such as Patagonia, have successfully created loyalty within this demographic, emphasizing the importance of ethical business tactics on a global scale (Agu et al., 2024). According to studies, Generation Z is more inclined to connect with firms that match their values, thus all organizations' marketing strategies must include transparency and ethical concerns (Munsch 2021). Additionally, influencers who promote these values are very genuine with Generation Z and it makes a validation in the brand message (Fromm & Read, 2018).

2.2 Content Preferences and Engagement Drivers

Preferred Content Formats

Turning to the entertainment space, there is one thing that is unsurprisingly clear: Generation Z loves visual and interactive content, particularly short-form videos. TikTok and Instagram Reels are two platforms that have capitalized on this trend by offering short, often under 60-second videos with catchy graphics and stories to entice viewers (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). According to Leaver et al. (2020), short-form videos are particularly appealing to Generation Z because they correspond with a digital-centric, fast-paced lifestyle that allows for instant pleasure without demanding a significant time investment.

Long-form material, such as extensive documentaries, is effective in capturing specialized niche audiences by delivering full insights and allowing for more meaningful engagement. This is especially true in the technology and fitness industries, where short-form films

continue to dominate (Balouch & Tahir, 2024). According to Balouch and Tahir (2024), long-form videos allow influencers to go deeper into complex themes and build more meaningful connections with their audience. This is accomplished by providing users with educational material that has the potential to increase brand loyalty and engagement over time.

Ephemeral content, such as Instagram Stories, is also a favorite among Generation Z. These posts that automatically go away after 24 hours create a sense of urgency and help cultivate ongoing engagement (Vaterlaus et al., 2018). Rather than projecting premeditated and contrived media, brands are promoting stories as temporary content, catering to Generation Z's preference for spontaneous, responsive real-time updates of creative experiences (Lim, 2021). This means brands that use these formats can make their presence seem urgent and timely, like their brand or product is as capricious and real-time as the new world with which Generation Z engages.

Generation Z also enjoys interacting with content through polls, quizzes, and live streaming because it engages users in real-time communication, allowing them to communicate immediately through social media, which has become a unique way for consumers to associate themselves with brands (Fairistha et al., 2023). Researchers have found that live streaming specifically strengthens brand loyalty by facilitating real-time and bidirectional interaction between brands and consumers (Hua et al., 2024). This kind of content allows brands to get more relatable and interactive with their audience, which is important if they want to retain Generation Z's trust and attention.

Authenticity and Credibility

Generation Z's engagement with content and brands is significantly influenced by authenticity. This generation prioritizes transparency and authentic communication, favoring brands that are transparent about their values and practices (Smith & Anderson, 2018). They are adept at identifying inauthentic messages and are less inclined to interact with brands that they perceive as dishonest. Recent research indicates that Generation Z is more inclined to trust influencers and peers than traditional advertising, particularly when influencers share personal stories or relatable experiences (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). This confidence is founded on the belief that influencers offer authentic and unfiltered content, which renders them more credible than brand-generated messaging.

However, trust in social media platforms has begun to diminish as a result of the increasing prevalence of blurred-boundary advertisements and the commercialization of these platforms. Consumers are currently incapable of distinguishing between genuine influencer endorsements and paid promotions, which poses a threat to the credibility of influencers (Zhang, Liu, & Bi, 2022). In this context, numerous consumers encounter "influencer fatigue," which results in their skepticism regarding the authenticity of influencers who frequently publish sponsored content (Ki, Chow, & Li, 2022).

Generation Z's engagement is significantly influenced by credibility, in addition to authenticity. Influencers that openly reveal their sponsorships are considered more trustworthy, hence strengthening their relationship with their audience (Närvänen et al., 2020). The idea of parasocial interactions, in which influencers form deep personal ties with their followers, is critical to understanding how Generation Z builds trust with online figures (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Generation Z's trust and loyalty are more likely to be acquired by businesses that partner with trustworthy influencers who are open about their relationships.

Peer Influence and Social Proof

Peer influence is a significant driver of Generation Z's social media activity. When making digital choices, this generation is heavily influenced by their peers' beliefs and habits. This generation is more likely to believe and follow the viewpoints of friends or classmates that they deem trustworthy, as opposed to those who are popular but untrustworthy (Raza et al., 2022). According to Slagter et al. (2023), this is particularly evident when individuals face difficult decisions, since the perspectives of reliable peers significantly influence their choices. Ghaly (2023) asserts that user-generated content in the form of testimonials and reviews is more credible than direct commercial communication. This makes user-generated content an effective tool for influencing Generation Z's purchase decisions. UGC initiatives have been effective in enhancing brand engagement by allowing Generation Z customers to share their own experiences, fostering trust and establishing a feeling of authenticity. Peer influence is amplified by platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, where users frequently share images and reviews, resulting in more substantial engagement with brands (Raza et al., 2022). According to Zivkovic (2021), micro-

influencers, and peer endorsements tend to be more popular with this generation because they are seen as more genuine and easier to relate to than large influencers.

Generation Z values social proof in the form of likes, comments and shares as an important influencer of brand perception. The ability to see other users participate in the same brand or product can authorize this image and tell others that it is safe (Närvänen et al., 2020). Crucially, brands that harness UGC and partner with micro-influencers are more likely to enhance authenticity and extend the reach of their campaigns thereby driving an uptick in overall engagement (Dunas & Vartanov, 2020). The value of social proof further emphasizes the need for Generation Z to find content communal, peer driven and less brand generated.

2.3 Regional and Cultural Influences on Generation Z in Finland

Digital Engagement and Social Media Use in Finland

Generation Z in Finland shows a high level of digital literacy and engages in social media using platforms not just for amusement but also as efficient tools for consumer research and communication. Finnish Generation Z exhibits a strong preference for platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, which is indicative of global trends and also demonstrates distinctive regional behaviors. Heinonen (2021) posits that Finnish Generation Z considers social media to be essential for the purpose of engaging with brands, discovering new products, and partaking in influencer communities.

Current worldwide figures indicate that 62.6% of the global population engages with social media, averaging 2 hours and 20 minutes of daily use (Chaffey, 2024). In the Nordic area, Finland has a very high social media penetration rate of 80.2%, closely mirroring Norway's 81.7% and Sweden's 80.1%, so underscoring the significance of digital platforms in influencing the consumer behaviors of Finnish Generation Z (Dixon, 2024). Their cultural background, together with the proven advantages of digital engagement, shapes their strategy to emphasize openness and authenticity in brand interactions. Amid global cynicism towards conventional advertising, consumers choose firms that transparently communicate their principles and practices (Riedler, 2020).

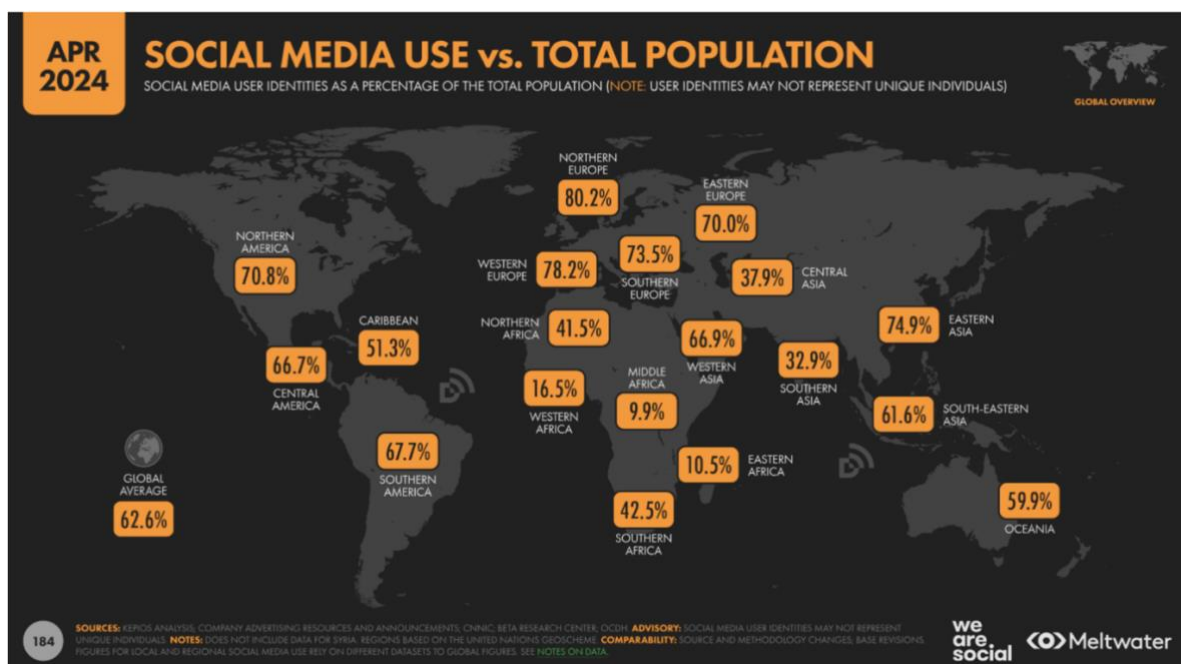


Figure 2. Overview of social media use

Finnish Generation Z also balances their global digital presence with a strong connection to local culture. Although they engage with international patterns, they show a preference for content that reflects their local identity, making the integration of Finnish cultural elements in marketing strategies crucial (Zenad, 2021). This dual engagement sets them apart within Generation Z, necessitating marketing strategies that address both their Finnish identity and their connection to global digital culture.

Finnish Generation Z is particularly fond of interactive content, including live-streaming, TikTok challenges, and Instagram Stories, which is consistent with the preferences of their global peers. User-generated content describes that they are not natural consumers of content only instead they take part in the curation process and overall product by contributing to the brand narratives (Sonninen, 2023). They enable Finnish young people to be creative and trendy but at the same time they must perform themselves with the new societal demands of openness, publicity, and accountability associated with being part of a culture where these standards are much more normal.

Authenticity and Value-Driven Consumption in Finland

In the case of Finnish Generation Z, authenticity is a central value that guides their interactions with brands. They have very little faith in every traditional advertising form and are more likely to support brands that show real devotion to ethics and sustainability

(Hendl, 2024). Authenticity and transparency are important cultural pillars here since they mirror broader society ideals in Finland. Authenticity should be at the heart of all communications for any brand seeking to connect with Finnish Generation Z, since their discerning nature will see through falsehoods.

Sustainability is another critical factor shaping the consumption habits of Finnish Generation Z. According to Imudia (2023), this demographic is particularly concerned with a brand's environmental impact and is more likely to support companies that prioritize eco-friendly practices. Conscious consumerism is on the rise in Finland, and Generation Z's purchasing decisions are heavily influenced by the degree to which brands align with their values on environmental and social issues. This has resulted in a consumer landscape in which brands are expected to participate in meaningful social conversations in addition to marketing their products.

The global sustainability trends, particularly the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, intersect with Finland's unique environmental policies. Finland's commitment to achieving a carbon-neutral society and its strong focus on resource-wise consumption aligns with Generation Z's values regarding sustainability (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2020). Finland's progressive environmental policies, which prioritize carbon neutrality and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, make it a key player in the Nordic sustainability movement (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2020). Finnish Generation Z's demand for transparency and eco-friendly practices further reflects this alignment, underscoring the importance of brands maintaining genuine and consistent environmental commitments in their marketing efforts.

Additionally, it shows in the socially conscious consumption of Finnish Generation Z supporting brands with a focus on racism, racial equality, gender rights, and mental health awareness. This new age of mindful shoppers is more accepting of brands that integrate these values within their campaigns, as such brands are anticipated to be able to have better long-term loyalty with this demographic segment (Koivula, 2024). To give an example, marketing strategies focusing on sustainability, taking responsibility, and corporate social responsibility play a significant role in generation Z among them because generation Z has been used to connect their social media sharing with their environmental values.

The Influence of Finnish Culture and Education

The cultural and educational context of Finland highly affects the attitudes and behaviors of Generation Z, and specifically values such as equality, sustainability, or social responsibility that are intrinsic to Finnish culture as a society are very present in how Generation Z consumes modern content in Finland. Years of being instilled with anti-biases from Finland's strenuous educational system, which centers around critical thinking, social responsibility, and global-socially aware citizens, have informed a population on par in relation to new ways forward (Koivula 2024). This has created a hyper-specific, socially aware consumer demographic among Finnish Generation Z that is more open to engaging with content and brands that reflect these values.

Finland's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) curriculum reflects national values deeply rooted in cultural heritage and social responsibility, emphasizing that children should develop an understanding of both their own cultural backgrounds and the diverse worldviews they will encounter in society (Kuusisto et al., 2021). This educational foundation extends into adulthood, influencing Generation Z's strong preference for brands that reflect similar values, particularly those related to sustainability and social justice.

Country-level cultural identity like the Finnish one has an impact on shaping marketing preferences too. Even though Finnish Generation Z is not as provincial, they have national pride and prefer brands using the Finnish language or some specific symbols or values in their ad campaigns. This tends to be a demographic that appreciates more marketing strategies that successfully combine global appeal with local relevance. Koivula (2024) claimed that Finnish Generation Z consumers expect brands to show respect for the local culture, or solidarity with global social movements, so those who truly want deep engagement from young Finns should prepare themselves.

Finnish adolescents are reconciling their cultural heritage with a growing awareness of international ideals in a globalized society. This dichotomy influences their value systems, especially in their engagement with social and civic matters like diversity and social responsibility. Finnish educational systems provide individuals with the means to cultivate value awareness, enabling them to critically evaluate their roles in both local and global settings (Lindh & Korhonen, 2020).

The Role of Local and International Language in Marketing Strategies

Consumer engagement and brand perception are substantially influenced by the decision to employ local or international languages in marketing. The use of local languages in marketing materials can improve the cultural relevance and relatability of the content, thereby nurturing a stronger connection with the target audience. According to research, customers are more likely to interact with and trust content delivered in their original language since it evokes personal experiences and cultural identification. For example, Kabadayi and Lerman (2011) discovered that commercials in a consumer's native language elicited more favorable views and higher buy intentions than those in a foreign language. In the same vein, Luna and Peracchio (2001) demonstrated that bilingual consumers comprehended advertisements more effectively when presented in their native language, resulting in enhanced brand recall and persuasion. This effect is particularly pronounced in regions with a strong sense of local identity, where language is a critical component of cultural expression.

Conversely, the utilization of international languages, particularly English, enables brands to access a more diverse and expansive audience, thereby enabling the implementation of cross-cultural marketing strategies. English frequently serves as a global lingua franca, facilitating communication among various linguistic communities. Nevertheless, English-language marketing has the potential to increase its audience, but it may not possess the emotive resonance and cultural specificity that local languages offer. The study conducted by Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008) revealed that bilingual consumers responded more favorably to advertisements in their native language when the product was culturally associated, while English was more effective for products associated with a global identity. Kuppens (2010) also discovered that the use of English in advertising in non-English-speaking countries could result in misunderstandings or reduced effectiveness if it is not meticulously adapted to the local context. Consequently, a marketing strategy that is effective may require a balanced approach that incorporates both local and international languages to appeal to local cultural values and engage a broader, global audience.

2.4 Social Media Usage and Platform Dynamics

Platform Preferences

be immersed in the Instagram world, and this fast, image-oriented context is why Instagram has proven to be the social media platform of choice for Generation Z. It is also the use of formats that allow quick consumption, which is essential for positioning attention in a generation with less memory (Viştelar, 2019). According to Zote (2024), Instagram has more than 2 billion monthly active users, with the age group of 18-24 years old representing 30.8% of the total. The average amount of time that these users spend on the platform each day is 33.1 minutes. The steady growth in the number of users demonstrates the influence that Instagram has had on Generation Z and millennials.

On the other hand, TikTok is taking off because it has a different way of creating videos and it has been super user-friendly to use. On-site recommendation algorithms deliver tailored content depending on use behavior thereby incentivizing Generation Z audiences to continue consuming appropriate material (Omar & Dequan, 2020). TikTok's growth is mostly driven by Generation Z, with 78% of US Generation Z utilizing the platform by 2023. The typical user spends 53.8 minutes per day on the app, which is much greater than Instagram (Zote, 2024). TikTok is a platform that demands innovative and authentic material, which strongly resonates with the current generation. Consequently, despite being one of the latest to emerge, TikTok is now the fastest-growing social media platform among younger customers (Montag et al., 2021). It fosters community and empowerment through challenges and trends, motivating users to create original content while enhancing engagement (Liu et al., 2018).

Instagram-Specific Insights

While Instagram is a hugely influential platform for Generation Z, it owes this primarily to its emphasis on visual storytelling and top-of-the-line content creation tools. The platform features Stories and Reels, both of which dovetail with how Generation Z users prefer their content to be short, accessible, and visually appealing (Pittman & Reich, 2016). A unique feature of Instagram: a blend of the temporary and the permanent, which allows users to post their everyday ephemeral moments and still provide them with crafted permanent images (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

Stories, which are ephemeral and disappear after 24 hours, have been a boon with Generation Z, who seek spontaneity and authenticity. The immediacy of Stories resonates with the digital generation, whose lives are characterized by rapidity and a lack of waiting time for conversations, whether among peers or brands (Antipova, 2020). Instagram's shoppable posts, currently integrated with e-commerce platforms, are what make it a favorite platform for Generation Z, aligning with their habit of making instant purchases (Alwan et al., 2020). Brands that make effective use of these characteristics may provide seamless experiences combining social connection with buying, which appeals especially to a generation that values both authenticity and efficiency.

However, as Instagram continues to introduce more business features, concerns over the platform's excessive commercialization have surfaced. Users of Instagram might experience feelings of alienation as an outcome of the platform's increased emphasis on commercialization rather than true engagement. This is analogous to the way that sports fans respond negatively to excessive marketing: they may feel as though they are being excluded from the community. Due to the fact that Instagram's e-commerce capabilities capture a substantial quantity of personal information, users may be dissuaded from engaging with these commercial components in their totality (Darmaningrat, Astuti, & Alfi, 2020). This issue raises privacy issues and may deter users from using Instagram for commercial purposes.

TikTok-Specific Insights

TikTok has swiftly become the preferred medium for Generation Z due to its unique content creation approach that encourages authenticity and creativity. Generation Z, which is steadily increasing demand for brief, snackable material that is easy to consume and share, finds the platform's relatively short video forms appealing (Omar & Dequan 2020). TikTok is different from other social media platforms because of its democratized method of content creation. What makes TikTok so popular among Generation Z is its ability to provide the illusion of instant virality, even for those with a relatively small following, as long as their content resonates with the audience. (Nyberg, 2024).

TikTok's interactive culture is another factor contributing to its popularity among young people. Viral challenges, usually connected with a hashtag, inspire people to make videos about popular themes, increasing community participation and involvement (Ahlse et al.,

2020). This two-way method of combining channels not only encourages more engagement, but also encourages user-generated content as a crucial part of the TikTok ecosystem. Finally, TikTok is also becoming a tool to foster social activism, inviting Generation Z users to focus on key social topics and organize themselves behind specific causes (Boulianne, 2020). That mix of entertainment, activism, and people-powered content is part of what has made TikTok the most exciting place on the internet for younger audiences today.

Nevertheless, TikTok has a number of issues to deal with. As a result of the fact that users frequently share material that is devoid of scientific support, the website has been criticized for encouraging the accidental dissemination of misinformation, which can have potentially negative implications for viewers (O'Sullivan et al., 2022). Content fatigue has also been shown to result from algorithmic content production. Users who are overwhelmed with videos, especially before bedtime, become exhausted, which lowers their energy levels throughout the day (Wang & Scherr, 2022). This generation likes TikTok because it blends advocacy, community, and entertainment.

2.5 Algorithmic Influences on Engagement

Instagram's Algorithmic Dynamics

Instagram's algorithm, which prioritizes posts based on user interactions like likes, comments, and shares, is crucial in identifying the content that Generation Z interacts with. Instagram's algorithm uses machine learning to make sure that the most relevant posts show up at the top of a user's feed, resulting in a customized experience based on personal preferences (Cotter, 2019). The feed now features information Instagram thinks users will find most engaging, promoting longer interaction. This is the outcome of the algorithm's change from chronological to interest-based priority (O'Meara, 2019).

On Instagram, you must make quality or interesting content that captures attention quickly. This has largely impacted content creators and brands, because the algorithm favors highly engaging posts in its early hours, influencers and brands typically test eye-catching imagery, to-the-point copy, and hashtags that optimize visibility (Haenlein et al., 2020). Instagram also gives travel brands the option to target a post on the Explore page, where content is chosen to align with what people tend to view because of previous behaviors — making it

easier for travelers seeking vacation inspiration (Taylor & Choi, 2022). The customized strategy increases content engagement and allows for connection with Generation Z by providing targeted, relevant posts.

Influencers must develop creative ways to counter these algorithmic changes with a practice like engagement pods, groups of users who agree to like and comment on each other's posts to artificially inflate engagement metrics. Called engagement bait, this plays off the complicated algorithms that decide what does and does not show up because on each feed Instagram wants to keep you scrolling (O'Meara, 2019). Nevertheless, even after your best efforts, Instagram's algorithm is set up to prioritize real engagement, reward content that gets significant user interaction, and eschew inflated metrics.

The Instagram algorithm generally prioritizes the content of larger influencers with substantial user bases over that of smaller producers. Consequently, smaller content producers frequently encounter challenges in establishing visibility on the platform, which can significantly limit their brand's engagement and reach (Nistor et al., 2024). Larger influencers frequently transition from genuine recommendations to a more commercial strategy as their followings grow, utilizing their fan base to promote a broader range of products. This change and the algorithm's preference for content with higher engagement frequently result in the marginalization of smaller, more genuine voices, which in turn restricts their visibility and hinders their development (Nistor et al., 2024). This trend toward larger influencers presents challenges for marketers who are interested in collaborating with smaller, more specialized producers who may have a more authentic relationship with their audience. As a result, fewer creators are unable to reach a broader audience, which restricts their opportunities and diminishes their potential influence on brand reach.

TikTok's Algorithmic Power

The heart of TikTok is the "For You" page, which recommends videos based on user interactions like liking, sharing, and viewing time. Such a customized feed permits people to be continuously provided with new and relevant content based on their interests, fostering an individualized way for the users to experience the Internet and keeping Generation Z active on it over time (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). The TikTok algorithm is especially effective since it prioritizes content over followers, allowing producers with less social capital to gain attention if their work resonates with others.

However, TikTok's data collection practices have sparked ethical concerns, particularly given the platform's youthful user base. ByteDance, the main company of TikTok, has raised concerns about the privacy and security of personal information shared on the network after it was accused of collecting sensitive data from users, particularly children (Neubaum, 2020). ByteDance has faced criticism for their data collection tactics, including the risk that third parties may obtain user data, including sensitive information that could be utilized for business espionage and user profiling (Neubaum, 2020).

While Instagram is centered around social connections, and these connections drastically impact who sees your content, TikTok serves as a perfect way for creators to enter the conversation about popular challenges and trends, they have equal opportunity with any other creator to get their video noticed by some people (Taylor & Choi, 2022). This aspect of TikTok speaks directly to the wants and needs of Generation Z authenticity. TikTok is characterized by an algorithm that returns spontaneous, emotional, or socially relevant content the fastest to users (Ahlse et al., 2020). Nevertheless, concerns have also been raised about how TikTok's algorithm promotes emotionally charged and sensational content, which can amplify the spread of polarized or misleading information. This leads to social dynamics that prioritize participation above quality, increasing worries about the platform's role in spreading contentious information (Metzler & Garcia, 2024).

TikTok's user engagement is driven mostly by viral trends and challenges, in addition to tailored content streams. Challenges, many associated with specific hashtags, encourage users to create and put out their own renditions of well-known content, which fosters a sense of community involvement (Boulianne, 2020). It is no surprise that Tik Tok puts such a heavy emphasis on UGC, fostering a participatory culture of users as active participants rather than passive viewers.

Comparative Impact on Content Creation

The differences found in the algorithms of Instagram and TikTok result in unique content creation strategies when it comes to targeting Generation Z as an audience. Because on Instagram the algorithm prefers posts with high early engagement, brands must create more polished, aesthetically designed posts that can encourage immediate interaction (Cotter 2019). This requires a more sophisticated approach to content creation, in which

visual aesthetics, engagement-driven captions, and hashtag strategies are essential for increasing the visibility of posts.

On the other hand, the TikTok algorithm favors speed and authenticity, rewarding content creators with quick engagement by creating short, highly shareable videos that connect to viewers on an emotional or social level (Haenlein et al., 2020). TikTok wants its creators to hop on topical trends and challenges, which means the content that follows a trending topic stands a much higher chance of being pushed out by the TikTok algorithm. The spontaneous nature and emotional drivers of this platform provide a greater degree for creators to experiment with unscripted, raw content, making it more accessible for smaller up-and-coming influencers to garner visibility and engagement (Taylor & Choi, 2022).

The complexity of Instagram and TikTok's algorithms presents a considerable challenge for brands, necessitating the customization of content for visibility and alignment with the platforms' distinct engagement metrics that influence the effectiveness of in-feed advertising (Hunnego, 2024). For example, brands like Proya had to tailor their campaigns on both platforms differently, ensuring that their polished Instagram visuals met the aesthetic demands of Instagram's algorithm while using more spontaneous, trend-driven content to engage audiences on TikTok (Mou, 2020).

The differences in algorithmic priorities between TikTok and Instagram, with TikTok prioritizing rapid engagement and Instagram emphasizing polished visuals, necessitate that brands implement distinct content strategies, complicating simultaneous catering to both platforms (Hunnego, 2024). Brands must balance their strategies by taking into account the varied behaviors of their audiences and the distinct algorithmic pressures inherent to each platform.

The algorithm has different priorities on each platform because the way people use and expect to use each one is slightly unique. Instagram, with its focus on perfect visuals and editing, is a place for highly polished content, while TikTok is a platform that empowers creativity through democratization of content (O'Meara, 2019). Therefore, we must tailor our content creation strategies to each platform, ensuring that they align with the preferences of Generation Z users.

2.6 Summary of Theoretical Framework

This study's conceptual framework integrates three critical components—content preferences, cultural and regional influences, and platform dynamics—to understand Generation Z's engagement with social media in Finland, particularly on Instagram and TikTok. These components form the basis for the themes explored in the research, each encompassing two specific hypotheses that will be empirically tested.

Theme 1: Content Preferences

Firstly, regarding content preferences, prior literature emphasizes that Generation Z highly values high-quality visual content and user-generated content (Leaver et al., 2020; Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Visually engaging formats are key to capturing and maintaining the attention of this demographic, aligning with their fast-paced digital behavior and preference for authentic, relatable content (Omar & Dequan, 2020; Vițelar, 2019). This leads to the formulation of Hypothesis 1-1, which proposes that there is a positive relationship between the quality of visual content and the engagement level of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok. Additionally, the role of user-generated content (UGC) in building trust and engagement among Generation Z is highlighted (Fromm & Read, 2018; Ki et al., 2022). Thus, Hypothesis 1-2 suggests a positive relationship between user-generated content and engagement levels.

Theme 2: Cultural and Regional Influences

Secondly, cultural and regional influences are crucial in determining Generation Z's brand loyalty and involvement (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Munsch, 2021). In Finland, values such as sustainability, authenticity, and social responsibility profoundly resonate with Generation Z consumers (Koivula, 2024; Lindh & Korhonen, 2020). The alignment of marketing content with these cultural values can enhance engagement, leading to Hypothesis 2-1, which proposes a positive relationship between the alignment of cultural values in content and the engagement level of Generation Z users. Furthermore, the use of local languages in marketing content can strengthen cultural authenticity and relatability, potentially increasing engagement levels (Zenad, 2021; Kabadayi & Lerman, 2011). This forms Hypothesis 2-2, suggesting a positive relationship between the use of local languages and user engagement.

Theme 3: Platform Dynamics

Thirdly, platform dynamics are central to how content is delivered and consumed. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram leverage algorithms to create immersive user interactions through personalized experiences, viral potential, and visual storytelling (Zulli & Zulli, 2020; Haenlein et al., 2020). The performance of these content display algorithms influences user engagement by curating content that aligns with user preferences (Cotter, 2019), forming the basis for Hypothesis 3-1, which proposes a positive relationship between the performance of content display algorithms and user engagement. Additionally, the technical features and editing capabilities of these platforms enable users to create and interact with content creatively, potentially enhancing engagement (Antipova, 2020; Taylor & Choi, 2022). This leads to Hypothesis 3-2, suggesting a positive relationship between technical features and editing capabilities and the engagement level of Generation Z users.

In this study, we will empirically test these six hypotheses to explore the factors influencing Generation Z's engagement on Instagram and TikTok in Finland. By examining the relationships between content quality, user-generated content, cultural alignment, language use, algorithm performance, and technical features with user engagement, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the drivers of social media engagement among Finnish Generation Z users.

This framework remains adaptable, offering a clear roadmap for investigating how content preferences, cultural values, and platform dynamics come together to shape Generation Z's online behavior in Finland.

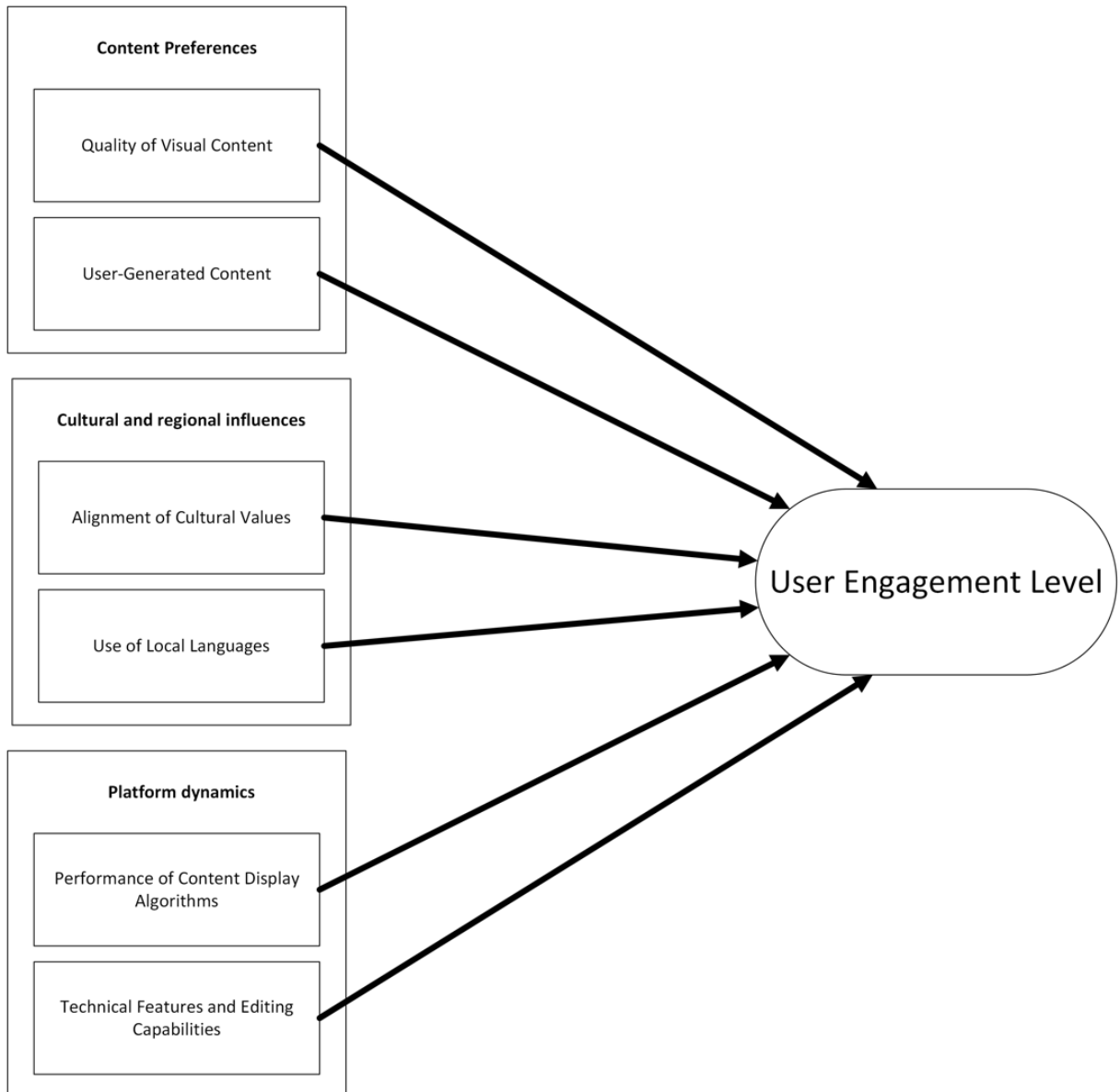


Figure 3. Conceptual Model of Theoretical Framework

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research method

Research Philosophy

This study adopts a positivist research philosophy, which is appropriate for the quantitative nature of this research. Positivism focuses on the collection of objective data that can be measured and analyzed statistically to test hypotheses and make generalizations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach emphasizes the use of structured surveys to gather measurable data on Generation Z's engagement with social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok.

Research Approach

The study follows a deductive approach, starting with the theoretical framework derived from existing literature and testing it through empirical data collection (Saunders et al., 2016). The theoretical framework includes three key themes: content preferences, platform dynamics, and cultural and regional influences. The survey questions are designed to test these themes quantitatively through Likert-scale questions. This deductive approach allows the researcher to verify hypotheses and identify correlations between Generation Z's preferences and their social media engagement.

Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design is used to get information from a big group of people at one point in time. This design works well for getting users' recent thoughts and actions (Bryman, 2012). A cross-sectional design is a useful way to gather and analyze data without having to follow people for a longer time, which can be hard to do when time, resources, and access are limited (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study, which examines how Generation Z engages with content on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, is especially well-suited for it.

3.2 Primary Data Collection

Sampling Strategy and Data Collection Process

The study focuses on an infinite population of Generation Z in Finland who actively utilize platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. According to Cochran's formula for an infinite population, the ideal sample size is 384 people, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% error margin. This sample size guarantees a statistically accurate representation of Generation Z in Finland, tolerating fluctuation and providing dependable outcomes.

However, due to practical constraints such as time and budget limitations, this study will recruit 85 participants from various university campuses in Helsinki. While 384 is the ideal sample size, the chosen sample size of 85 individuals is nonetheless legitimate and provides valuable insights about Generation Z engagement patterns in Finland. The diversity of students in these universities, who come from all throughout Finland, guarantees that the sample remains representative of Generation Z. Participants will be randomly selected to minimize bias, further enhancing the representativeness of the sample. This study lays a solid platform for future research, which might increase the sample size to improve the representativeness and statistical power of the findings, making the initial sample size an essential addition to understanding social media practices in this group.

Data will be collected over a 10-day period through an in-person survey that is administered using Google Forms on a tablet provided by the researcher. This digital method guarantees consistent data acquisition, minimizes errors, and establishes a standardized format for responses. The in-person administration guarantees high response rates and facilitates immediate clarification of inquiries (Groves et al., 2009).

Participants will complete a 27-question survey, consisting of 3 general questions and 24 Likert-scale questions. The Likert-scale questions provide structured data on participants' preferences. The questioner ⁽¹⁾ structure:

General Information: Three questions about gender, age, and platform usage frequency.

Content Preferences: Six Likert-scale questions were used to measure content preferences on Instagram and TikTok.

Cultural and Regional Influences: Six Likert-scale questions were used to investigate the effect of Finnish cultural values on social media practices.

Platform Dynamics: Six Likert-scale questions on the characteristics and functionalities of both platforms that affect engagement.

User Engagement: Six Likert-scale questions designed to assess the overall engagement level of users through interactions, participation in challenges, and connections with friends and brands on Instagram and TikTok.

Table 2. Likert Scale Structure

Likert Scale Scores	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	5	4	3	2	1

Ethical Considerations

Ethical rules will be scrupulously adhered to during the investigation. All participants will provide informed permission prior to participation, ensuring that they understand the study's goal and their rights. Participation will be entirely optional, and all obtained data will be kept private and confidential (Resnik, 2015). According to Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffery (2004), ethical research must emphasize gaining participants' unambiguous and informed permission, ensuring they are completely aware of their rights, the goal of the study, and any possible dangers or advantages of participation. This is crucial for ensuring the respect and autonomy of all research participants. Participants will also be notified of their ability to withdraw from the research at any time and without penalty.

3.3 Data Analysis Tool

Quantitative data will be analyzed using SmartPLS software, given its strength in structural equation modeling (SEM) for complex relationships between latent variables. The analysis will include both descriptive statistics (e.g., means, frequencies) and inferential statistics to test the hypotheses and determine the relationships between variables, such as the impact of content preferences on engagement levels (Field, 2018).

3.4 Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire

Reliability

Reliability assesses the consistency of the questionnaire in measuring the intended constructs. In this study, Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha were used to examine internal consistency. Composite Reliability is particularly suitable for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as it accounts for the weight of each item, providing a nuanced measure of reliability (Werts, Linn, & Jöreskog, 1974). A CR value above 0.70 is generally considered acceptable for internal consistency, indicating that the constructs are reliably measured (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Similarly, Cronbach's Alpha is used to gauge internal consistency by examining the correlation between items within a scale. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011), a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.7 suggests acceptable internal consistency, while values above 0.8 are regarded as good.

Table 3. Cronbach's alpha in reliability

Cronbach's alpha	Internal consistency
$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellent
$0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$	Good
$0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$	acceptable
$0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$	Under question
$0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$	weak
$0.5 > \alpha$	unacceptable

These benchmarks ensure that the survey items are consistently capturing the constructs under study, enhancing the stability and reliability of the results (Field, 2018).

The reliability of the data is strengthened by the appropriate sample size. To determine the sample size for this study, Cochran's formula was applied, ensuring that the sample was large enough to represent the population with sufficient accuracy. The formula is designed to calculate the sample size for an infinite population.

Cochran's formula for an infinite population is as follows:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times (1-p)}{e^2} \quad (1)$$

Where:

- $Z = 1.96$ (the Z-value for a 95% confidence level),
- $p = 0.5$ (estimated proportion for maximum variability),
- $e = 0.05$ (desired margin of error, or 5%).

Substituting these values into the formula:

$$\begin{aligned} n_0 &= \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times (1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2} \\ n_0 &= \frac{3.8416 \times 0.25}{0.0025} \\ n_0 &= 384.16 \end{aligned}$$

As a result, the needed sample size for an infinite population stays at 384 persons and provides enough statistical power with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

Validity

Validity ensures that the questionnaire accurately measures the constructs it intends to assess. This study evaluates both Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity to confirm the robustness of the survey design.

Convergent Validity: This aspect of validity assesses how well each construct correlates with its indicators. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is used as the metric for this, with a threshold of 0.5 considered adequate, meaning that the construct explains at least 50% of the variance in its indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). An AVE above this threshold signifies that the items are well-aligned with the construct they intend to measure, supporting the instrument's internal validity.

Discriminant Validity: To ensure that each construct is distinct from others, the Fornell-Larcker criterion is applied. This criterion checks that each construct has a higher correlation with its indicators than with other constructs. When the AVE for a construct is greater than the squared correlations with other constructs, discriminant validity is supported, indicating that the constructs are unique and independently measured (Hair et al., 2010).

4 Data analysis and Result

Data analysis is considered a scientific phase and a fundamental pillar of any research project, through which all research activities are controlled and guided until the results are achieved. In this chapter, the research data collected through questionnaires from the sample population will be described and analyzed. Following this, each of the hypotheses will be addressed.

4.1 Description of the Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Members

In order to better understand the nature of the population studied in the research and gain more familiarity with the research variables, it is essential to describe the data before conducting statistical analysis. Additionally, the statistical description of the data serves as a step towards identifying the prevailing pattern and forms a basis for explaining the relationships between the variables used in the research. Based on the results from the first section of the questionnaire (demographic characteristics), the following information is briefly provided about the characteristics of the statistical sample under study.

Gender Composition of Sample Members

Based on the charts and frequency tables, 53% of the respondents were female, 44% were male, and 2% of the respondents identified as non-binary. The highest frequency is observed in the female category.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of the Sample Members' Gender

gender	Abundance	percentage	Cumulative frequency percentage
male	37	.44	.44
female	45	.53	.96
non-binary	2	.02	.99
Prefer not to stay	1	.01	1
total	85.00	1.00	

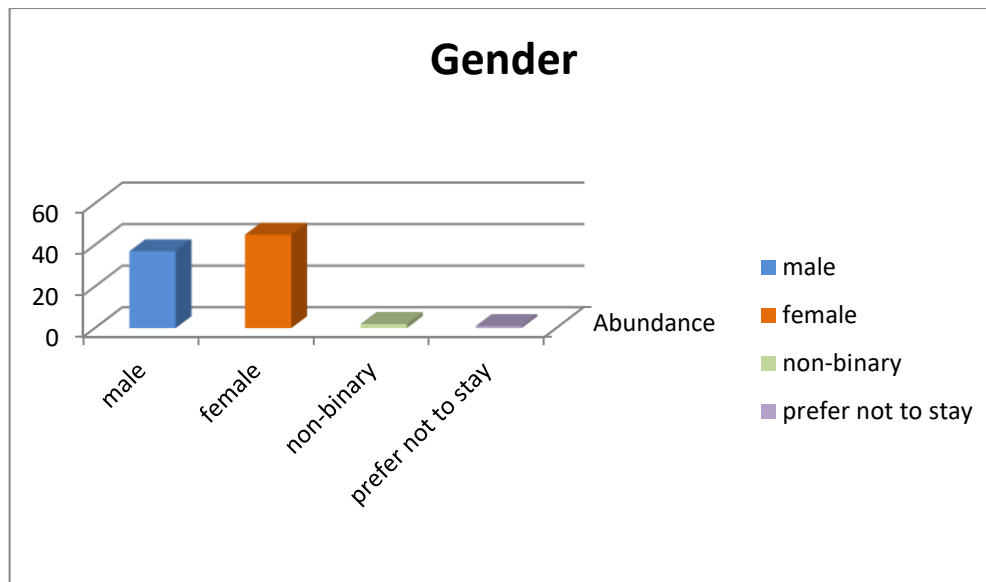


Figure 4. Gender Composition of Sample Members

Age Composition of Sample Members

According to the observed frequencies, 42% of respondents are between the ages of 18-22, and 58% are between the ages of 27-33.

Table 5. Age Distribution of Sample Members

age	Abundance	percentage	frequency percentage Cumulative
22-18	36	.42	.42
27-23	49	.58	1
total	85	100	

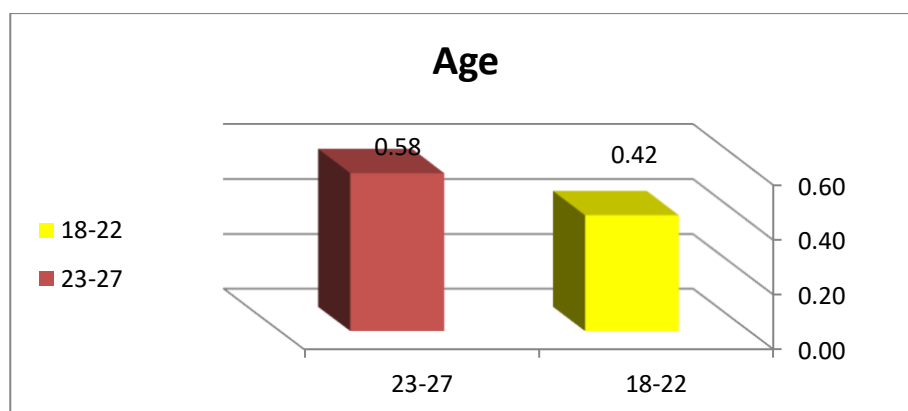


Figure 5. Age distribution of the sample members

Frequency of Instagram and TikTok Usage

According to the observed frequency, 88 percent use Instagram and TikTok daily. Table 6. Frequency distribution of Instagram and TikTok usage among sample members.

Table 6. use Instagram &TikTok Age Distribution of Sample Members

Usage of Instagram& Tik Tok	Abundance	percentage	Cumulative frequency percentage
Daily	75	.88	.88
Several times a week	5	.06	.94
Once a week	3	.04	.98
less than once a week	2	.02	1
Total	85	1	

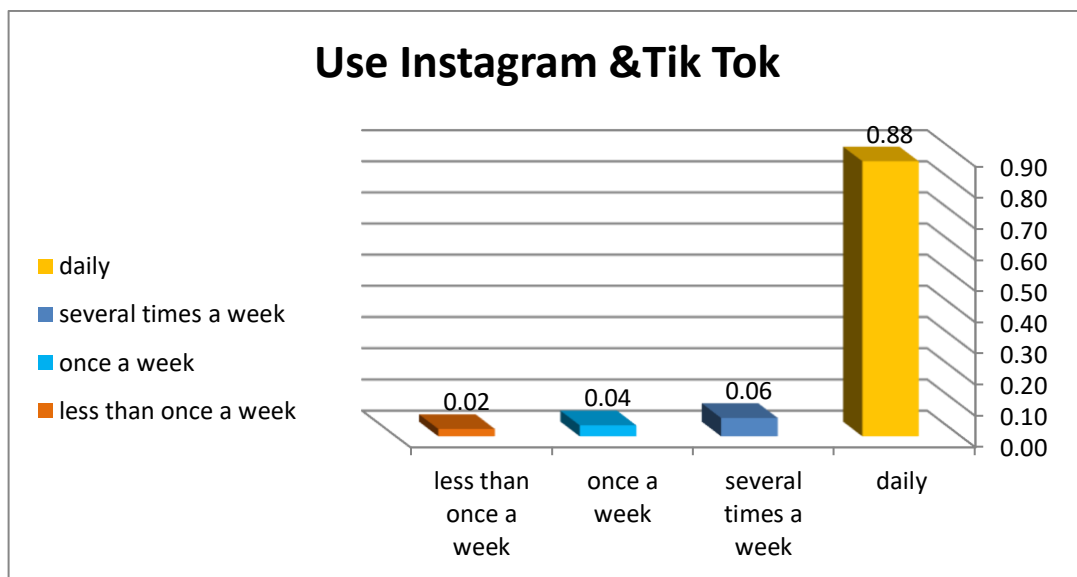


Figure 6. Frequency distribution of Instagram and TikTok usage among sample members

4.2 Inferential Data Analysis

In hypothesis testing or significance testing, the researcher either rejects or accepts the null hypothesis. If (H_0) (null hypothesis) is accepted, it is assumed that (H_1) (alternative hypothesis) is rejected, and if (H_0) is rejected, (H_1) is accepted. To

determine the statistical significance of a research study, the researcher must establish the probability level or significance level to test (H_0) . If the study results show a probability below this level, the researcher can reject the null hypothesis. If the outcome of the research demonstrates a high probability, the researcher should accept the null hypothesis. In practice, since the null hypothesis is generally not explicitly stated, acceptance or rejection is applied to the "research hypothesis" rather than the null hypothesis.

To formulate the research hypotheses, the researcher uses both deduction and induction. Thus, there are two potential sources for hypothesis development:

- a) Existing comprehensive and general theories; these hypotheses, through a series of specific deductions, lead to predictions that yield certain results under defined conditions.
- b) The findings of previous research studies; the aim of these hypotheses is to induce the relationship between two or more variables in the present.

4.3 Inferential Statistics

Model Fit Assessment

The evaluation of the research model is conducted in three stages to determine if the data provides an appropriate fit for the model. In the first stage, the reliability of the model is assessed; in the second stage, the validity of the model is examined; and finally, in the third stage, the hypotheses are tested.

R² Value for Dependent Variables of the Model

Table 7. R² Coefficients Resulting from the Research Model

Description	User Engagement
R ² Value	0.97

One criterion for assessing the fit of structural equation models is the R² coefficients related to the dependent variables of the model. R² is a metric that indicates the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, with values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 considered weak, moderate, and strong, respectively. According to the table above, the R² value for the dependent variable indicators of the model demonstrates an appropriate fit.

2-Q2 Value (Stone-Geisser): This criterion signifies the hypothesis's predicting capability. A Q2 score of 0.02, 0.15, or 0.35 for the dependent variable shows weak, moderate, and great predictive power of the construct, respectively.

Table 8. R² Coefficients Resulting from the Research Model

User Engagement	Description
.32	Value Q ²

As shown in Table 8, the Q2 values for the indicators are above 0.15. Therefore, the model has moderate predictive power.

External Model

In this section, composite reliability is used to evaluate the external model or reliability.

Composite Reliability (CR)

This index was introduced by Werts and colleagues in 1974, and its advantage over Cronbach's alpha is that in composite reliability, the reliability of the indicators is not calculated absolutely but by considering the correlation between the indicators. If the composite reliability value is higher than 0.70, it indicates that the indicators are suitable for the model, and if it is less than 0.60, it suggests that the indicators are not appropriate for the model. In fact, composite reliability is considered a better measure than Cronbach's alpha because, in Cronbach's alpha, the data are treated with equal importance, but in composite reliability, an indicator with a higher factor loading is given more importance. This makes composite reliability a more accurate and realistic measure compared to Cronbach's alpha. According to Table 9, since the composite reliability values for all data are higher than 0.70, the data demonstrate adequate reliability.

Table 9. Composite Reliability Coefficients Obtained from the Research Model

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
User Engagement	0.808	0.862
local language	0.733	0.803
performance of content display algorithms	0.753	0.810
quality of visual content	0.742	0.853
technical features	0.800	0.732
the alignment of cultural values	0.724	0.846
user-generated content and the trust of Generation	0.752	0.855

Model Validity

To evaluate the validity of the model, the convergent validity criterion is used:

Convergent Validity

For model validity, convergent validity is used, which examines the correlation of each indicator with the questions. The higher the correlation coefficient, the better the model fit. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) index, introduced by Fornell and Larcker, is used to assess convergent validity, with a critical value of 0.5. In Table 10, the value of this coefficient for each construct is provided. It is important to note that if the AVE value for a variable is lower than 0.5, the indicator with the lower factor loading should be removed, and the model should be rerun. According to Table 10, the AVE values for all variables are higher than 0.5, indicating that the data have adequate convergent validity.

Table 10. Convergent Validity Coefficients Obtained from the Research Model

Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
User Engagement	0.512
local language	0.576
performance of content display algorithms	0.587
quality of visual content	0.660
technical features	0.502
the alignment of cultural values	0.649
user-generated content and the trust of Generation	0.662

Convergent Validity via Fornell-Larcker

Discriminant validity is a complementary concept, and two criteria for it are the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loading tests. Here, we will focus on the Fornell-Larcker criterion:

The criterion introduced by Fornell and Larcker compares the relationship between a variable and its indicators with the relationship of that variable to other variables. Acceptable discriminant validity indicates that a variable interacts more with its own indicators than with other variables in the model. Fornell and Larcker assert that discriminant validity is deemed satisfactory if the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each variable exceeds the shared variance with other variables, namely the squared correlation coefficients among the variables in the model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In PLS

software, this is checked using a matrix, where the cells of the matrix contain the association metrics among parameters and the derived value of the AVE measures (average variance extracted) corresponding to each variable. The model is considered to have acceptable discriminant validity if the values on the main diagonal are greater than the values below them.

Table 11. Convergent Validity via Fornell-Larcker

Variable	User Engagement	local language	performance of content display algorithms	quality of visual content	technical features	the alignment of cultural values	user-generated content and the trust of Generation
User Engagement	0.716						
local language	0.759	0.759					
performance of content display algorithms	0.615	0.714	0.766				
quality of visual content	0.930	0.650	0.563	0.812			
technical features	0.738	0.561	0.533	0.647	0.702		
the alignment of cultural values	0.815	0.714	0.586	0.609	0.565	0.805	
user-generated content and the trust of Generation	0.722	0.527	0.451	0.676	0.489	0.606	0.814

Overall Model Evaluation and Hypothesis Testing

After fitting the research model, the next step is to evaluate the overall structural model. In the structural model section, no direct relationships are considered between observed variables, and instead, the focus is on the relationships between latent variables and their interactions.

A - Size and Significance of Path Coefficients

The significance coefficient Z (t-value) is one of the key criteria used to assess the model fit. The model is evaluated using T coefficients, and if these coefficients are higher than 1.96, it can be stated with 95% confidence that the research hypotheses are supported. However, it is important to note that the T coefficient only indicates the correctness of the relationships, while the strength of the relationships between the indices should be

measured through the path coefficient. Figure 7 illustrates the relationships between the variables and their significance coefficients.

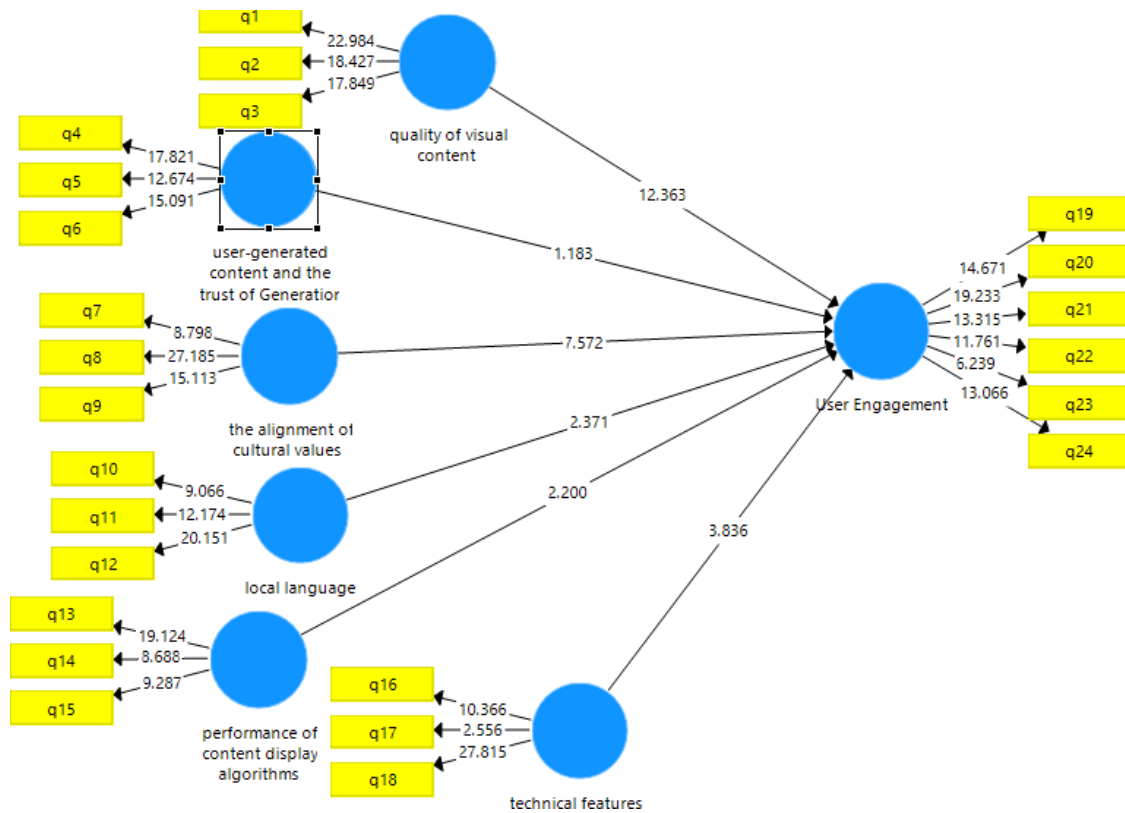


Figure 7. Relationships Between Variables and Significance Coefficients

The pathway value signifies the presence of a linear cause-effect association, along with the magnitude and orientation of this link between two unobserved constructs. Essentially, it corresponds to the standardized regression metric, which is a number between -1 and +1. If it = 0, it signifies the lack of a linear causality connection among the two constructs that are latent. The path coefficient is shown in Figure 8.

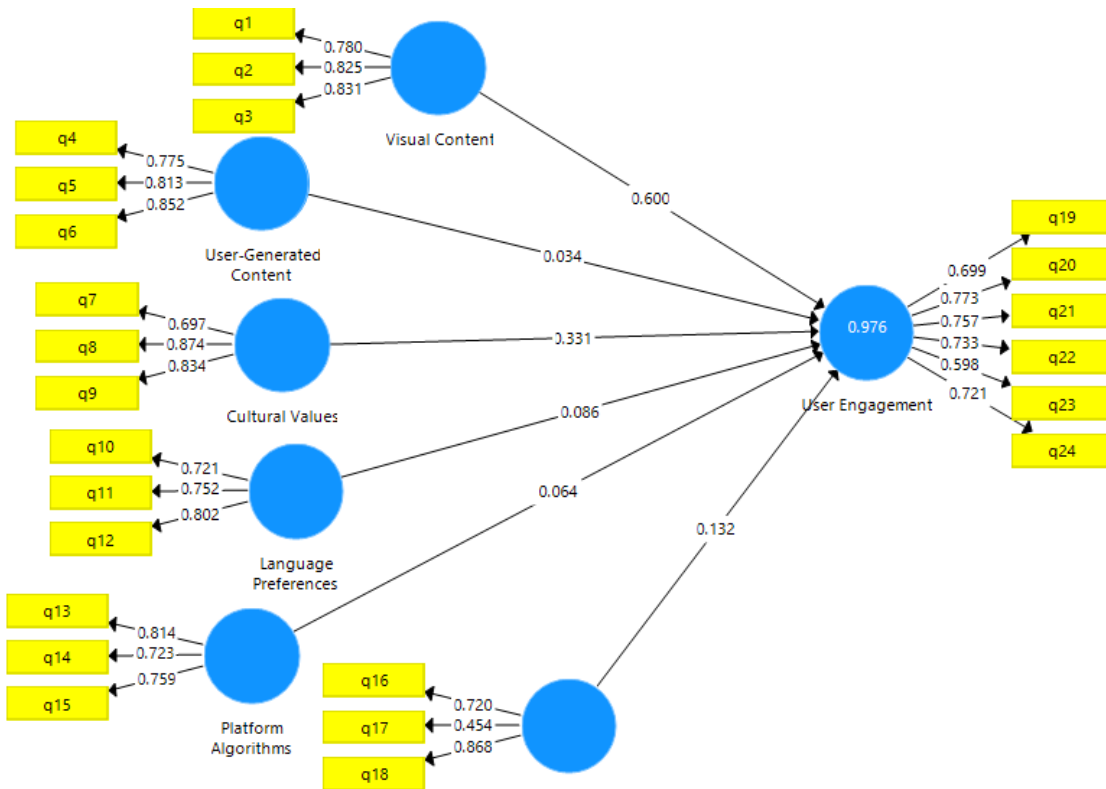


Figure 8. Path Coefficients Between Variables

Hypothesis Testing 1-1

In Hypothesis 1-1 of the research, the focus was on examining whether there is a positive relationship between the quality of visual content and the level of engagement of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok. The results of the study are shown in Table 12 below:

Table 12. T-Values from the Research Mode

Row	Description	Path Coefficient	T-Coefficient	Hypothesis Result
1	Quality of Visual Content -> Generation Z User Engagement	0.60	12.36	Hypothesis Supported

As shown in Table 4-9, the t-coefficient for Hypothesis 1-1 is 12.36, which is greater than 1.96. Therefore, with 95% confidence, it can be concluded that the quality of visual content significantly affects user engagement, and the research hypothesis is supported. Furthermore, since the path coefficient is positive, it can be stated that as the quality of visual content increases, user engagement also increases.

Hypothesis Testing 1-2:

In Hypothesis 1-2, the research aimed to examine whether there is a positive relationship between user-generated content and the level of engagement of Generation Z users with marketing content on Instagram and TikTok. The results of the study are shown in Table 13 below:

Table 13. T-Values from the Research Model

Row	Description	Path Coefficient	T-Coefficient	Hypothesis Result
1	User-generated content -> Generation Z user engagement	0.03	1.18	Hypothesis Rejected

As shown in Table 4-12, the t-coefficient for Hypothesis 1-2 is 1.18, which is less than 1.96. Therefore, with 95% confidence, it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between user-generated content and the level of engagement of Generation Z users. As a result, the research hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis Testing 2-1:

In Hypothesis 2-1, the research examined whether there is a positive relationship between the cultural value congruence of the content provided and the level of engagement of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok. The results of the study are shown in Table 14 below:

Table 14. T-Values from the Research Model

Row	Description	Path Coefficient	T-Coefficient	Hypothesis Result
1	Cultural value congruence -> Generation Z user engagement	0.33	7.57	Hypothesis Supported

As shown in Table 4-13, the t-coefficient for Hypothesis 2-1 is 7.57, which is greater than 1.96. Consequently, it is possible to infer with a 95% confidence level that there is a substantial correlation between the level of engagement of Generation Z users and cultural value congruence. The research hypothesis is validated, and the positive path coefficient

implies that the level of engagement among Generation Z users increases as the cultural value congruence increases.

Hypothesis Testing 2-2:

Hypothesis 2-2 investigates the correlation between the utilization of local languages in marketing content and the engagement levels of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok. The study's results are presented in Table 15 below:

Table 15. T-Values from the Research Model

Row	Description	Path Coefficient	T-Coefficient	Hypothesis Result
1	Use of local languages -> Generation Z user engagement	0.08	2.37	Hypothesis Supported

Table 4-12 shows that the t-coefficient for Hypothesis 2-2 is 2.37, above 1.96. Consequently, with 95% confidence, it can be stated that a substantial correlation exists between the utilization of local languages and the involvement level of Generation Z users. The research hypothesis is supported, and since the path coefficient is positive, it can be claimed that as the usage of local languages increases, the degree of participation of Generation Z users also increases.

Hypothesis Testing 3-1:

In Hypothesis 3-1, the research examined whether there is a positive relationship between the performance of content display algorithms on platforms and the level of engagement of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok. The results of the study are shown in Table 16 below:

Table 16. t-Values from the Research Model

Row	Description	Path Coefficient	T-Coefficient	Hypothesis Result
1	Performance of content display algorithms -> Generation Z user engagement	0.06	2.20	Hypothesis Supported

As shown in Table 4-15, the t-coefficient for Hypothesis 3-1 is 2.20, which is greater than 1.96. Consequently, with 95% confidence, it can be asserted that a substantial correlation exists between the efficacy of content presentation algorithms and the engagement levels of Generation Z consumers. The research hypothesis is validated, indicating that a positive route coefficient suggests enhancing content presentation algorithms elevates engagement levels among Generation Z users.

Hypothesis Testing 3-2:

In Hypothesis 3-2, the research examined whether there is a positive relationship between the technical features and editing capabilities on platforms and the level of engagement of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok. The results of the study are shown in Table 17 below:

Table 17. t-Values from the Research Model

Row	Description	Path Coefficient	T-Coefficient	Hypothesis Result
1	Technical features and editing capabilities -> Generation Z user engagement	0.13	3.83	Hypothesis Supported

As shown in Table 4-16, the t-coefficient for Hypothesis 3-2 is 3.83, which is greater than 1.96. Consequently, with 95% confidence, it can be asserted that a substantial correlation exists between technological features, editing capabilities, and the engagement level of Generation Z consumers. The research hypothesis is validated, and given the positive path coefficient, it can be concluded that enhancing technological features and editing capabilities elevates the engagement levels of Generation Z users.

4.4 Summary of Research Results

The summary of the research results is presented in Table 18:

Table 18. Summary of Research Results

Row	Research Hypotheses	T-Statistic	Significance Level	Hypothesis Test Result
1	Theme 1: Content Preferences			
1-1	There is a positive relationship between visual content quality and the engagement level of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok.	12.36	.000	Confirmed
1-2	There is a positive relationship between user-generated content and the engagement level of Generation Z users with marketing content on Instagram and TikTok.	1.18	.185	Not Confirmed
2	Theme 2: Cultural and Regional Influences			
2-1	There is a positive relationship between the alignment of cultural values in the content provided and the engagement level of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok.	7.57	.000	Confirmed
2-2	There is a positive relationship between the use of local languages in marketing content and the engagement level of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok.	2.37	.000	Confirmed
3	Theme 3: Platform Dynamics			
3-1	There is a positive relationship between the performance of content display algorithms on platforms and the engagement level of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok.	2.20	.000	Confirmed
3-2	There is a positive relationship between technical features and editing capabilities on platforms and the engagement level of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok.	3.83	.000	Confirmed

In Chapter 4, the research data was analyzed, and the hypotheses were tested. In the first part of the chapter, descriptive statistics were performed, and the demographic characteristics of the research samples were examined. In the second part, inferential statistics were used to test the research hypotheses.

5 Discussion

5.1 Key Findings

The examination of data acquired from Finnish Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok gives valuable insights into their engagement habits, particularly in terms of content qualities, cultural alignment, and platform-specific features. The findings demonstrate that high-quality visual material and alignment with Finnish cultural norms, and the use of local language in marketing have a considerable influence on engagement, but user-generated content has no statistically significant effect. Furthermore, platform-specific features, notably algorithmic customization and interactive tools, play critical roles in maintaining engagement. These findings are useful for marketers seeking to engage with Generation Z in Finland via culturally appropriate and visually appealing tactics customized to platform characteristics.

5.2 Discussion on Content Characteristics and Engagement

Hypothesis 1-1: There is a positive relationship between the quality of visual content and the engagement level of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok.

This result is consistent with research that highlights Generation Z's preference for visually rich, aesthetically appealing content, especially on platforms like Instagram and TikTok where visual engagement is central (Dolot, 2018). Auxier and Anderson (2021) also noted that Generation Z is particularly drawn to short-form, visually compelling media that quickly captures their attention. These findings suggest that brands targeting Finnish Generation Z should invest in high-quality, visually attractive content to effectively engage this demographic.

Hypothesis 1-2: There is a positive relationship between user-generated content and the engagement level of Generation Z users with marketing content on Instagram and TikTok.

This study contradicts original predictions, suggesting that UGC may not have the same influence on engagement among Finnish Generation Z users as previously thought. Several factors could explain this finding, stemming from both the evolving nature of UGC and Generation Z's specific preferences for authenticity.

One primary limitation affecting UGC's impact on engagement is the increasing commercialization of user-generated content. As brands integrate UGC more heavily into their marketing strategies, Generation Z users may begin to see this content as less authentic. For example, Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard (2020) address how hyper-commercialization of UGC, particularly when influencers prioritize brand partnerships above authenticity, might result in "influencer fatigue." This is where viewers lose interest in information that feels too promotional, reducing its effect. Generation Z, in particular, values authentic, peer-like content that does not feel overtly manipulated for commercial gain (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016).

Additionally, Generation Z's engagement with UGC may depend significantly on the perceived trustworthiness and relatability of the content source. De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) found that micro-influencers, who are generally seen as more relatable and authentic, tend to drive higher engagement compared to large-scale influencers or generic brand-driven UGC. This aligns with Generation Z's preference for content that reflects their values and social circles. Similarly, Jin, Muqaddam, and Ryu (2019) state that Generation Z is more attentive to influencers who appear "real" and approachable, implying that if UGC lacks this perceived relatability, engagement may decline.

The study's small sample size may further restrict the ability to uncover complex interaction patterns linked with various forms of UGC. Cohen (1988) states that higher sample sizes are required to increase statistical power, allowing researchers to identify subtle effects that would otherwise go unnoticed in smaller samples. Maxwell (2000) also underlines the importance of sample size in discovering complicated interactions across different regression studies, which might have offered a more detailed knowledge of how various UGC kinds influence engagement. With a larger sample, future research could investigate whether organic UGC (content created without commercial intent) performs differently than branded UGC, thus offering more accurate insights into Generation Z's engagement behaviors.

Furthermore, Generation Z's relationship with UGC continues to evolve as social media landscapes change. As platforms like Instagram and TikTok modify their algorithms to promote both sponsored and organic user-generated content, Generation Z consumers may become increasingly suspicious of material that appears unduly manicured or marketed. According to Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), Generation Z users are skilled at detecting

authenticity signs, making them more likely to disengage with information that appears inauthentic or unduly edited. This dynamic suggests that brands may need to balance their UGC strategies by favoring more organic, peer-driven content that aligns with Generation Z's demand for authenticity and relatability.

In conclusion, while UGC has traditionally been viewed as a driver of engagement, its effectiveness among Finnish Generation Z appears complex and context dependent. The absence of meaningful outcomes in this study is most likely due to factors such as commercialization, content source, and sample size restrictions. Future study that focuses on specific types of UGC and involves a bigger sample size may provide a better knowledge of how Generation Z interacts with UGC, offering clearer direction for marketers looking to improve their content strategy on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

Concluding Discussion on Theme 1 Findings

Overall, the findings related to Theme 1 reflect Generation Z's strong engagement with high-quality visual content but a limited response to user-generated content. While visually engaging content resonates well with Generation Z, the lack of impact from UGC may be influenced by perceived commercialization and sample size limitations. Future research with a larger sample size and a focus on specific forms of UGC, such as content from micro-influencers or niche communities, could provide a deeper understanding of UGC's role in driving engagement among Generation Z.

By recognizing the nuances in Generation Z's content preferences, marketers can tailor their strategies to focus on high-quality visuals while critically evaluating how they incorporate UGC into their campaigns. Emphasizing authenticity and aligning with the values of Generation Z may enhance the effectiveness of UGC in engaging this demographic.

5.3 Discussion on Cultural Congruence and Engagement

Hypothesis 2-1: There is a positive relationship between cultural value congruence and the level of engagement of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok.

This finding aligns with research by Kymäläinen, Seisto, and Malila (2021), which suggests that Generation Z values content that reflects societal values such as sustainability and social responsibility. Finnish Generation Z is known for engaging more deeply with brands

that demonstrate alignment with their cultural values, such as transparency and ethical practices.

Furthermore, this contributes to the research purpose by demonstrating the relevance of cultural alignment in developing brand engagement, particularly in places like Finland where values such as environmental concern are culturally ingrained. According to Hendl (2024), Finnish consumers are inclined toward brands that authentically represent these values, making cultural congruence an essential component of effective marketing strategies.

Hypothesis 2-2: There is a positive relationship between the use of local languages in marketing content and the level of engagement of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok.

This result is consistent with Zenad's (2021) study, which stresses how local language use may improve cultural authenticity and relatability, resulting in increased engagement. Finnish Generation Z sees local language as a representation of cultural identity, and anything delivered in Finnish seems more real and trustworthy, hence strengthening its influence.

This finding supports the premise that language localization is critical for companies looking to connect with Finnish audiences. Balancing global themes with localized components, such as Finnish-language advertisements, may generate a sense of inclusion and respect among Generation Z in Finland, successfully engaging them and boosting brand loyalty. This finding clearly addresses the research purpose, indicating that local language use has a major impact on engagement.

Concluding Discussion on Theme 2 Findings

The findings related to Theme 2 strongly indicate that both cultural alignment and language localization are critical in driving engagement among Finnish Generation Z users. Finnish Generation Z prefers content that reflects their cultural values and local identity, highlighting the necessity for companies to create culturally relevant content. Incorporating Finnish cultural values and language can develop a stronger connection, increase engagement, and promote loyalty.

By recognizing the importance of cultural congruence and the use of local languages, marketers can tailor their strategies to better resonate with Finnish Generation Z.

Emphasizing authenticity and aligning with the cultural preferences of this demographic may enhance the effectiveness of marketing efforts on platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

5.4 Discussion on Platform-Specific Dynamics and Engagement

Hypothesis 3-1: There is a positive relationship between the performance of content display algorithms and the engagement level of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok.

The findings confirmed this hypothesis. Social media algorithms, which curate content based on user preferences, create personalized experiences that align with Generation Z's desire for relevant content (Montag et al., 2021). Zulli & Zulli (2020) stated that Generation Z appreciates curated, personalized content, implying that good algorithmic use might boost engagement by ensuring material is relevant and visible to consumers.

This result supports the study's objective of understanding platform-specific engagement factors and suggests that brands can increase engagement by optimizing content for algorithmic reach. Marketers should focus on creating timely and relevant content that aligns with user preferences, thus leveraging the platforms' algorithms to ensure visibility and engagement.

Hypothesis 3-2: There is a positive relationship between technical features and editing capabilities on platforms and the engagement level of Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok.

This hypothesis was supported. Generation Z's preference for interactive, creative content aligns with the features available on Instagram and TikTok, where advanced editing tools allow users to create personalized, engaging content (Antipova, 2020). Taylor and Choi (2022) also found that tools enabling creativity and personalization are especially appealing to younger users, suggesting that brands can use these tools to foster a more immersive, engaging experience.

This aligns with the study's research question, which sought to identify the factors influencing Generation Z engagement on social media platforms. By leveraging interactive tools like filters, effects, and editing options, brands can encourage user-generated content and participation, creating an engaging and immersive experience. This finding reinforces the study's objective by showing that technical features that support creativity are essential for fostering engagement with Generation Z.

Concluding Discussion on Theme 3 Findings

The findings related to Theme 3 fully support the notion that platform-specific features, such as content display algorithms and technical editing capabilities, are crucial for engagement among Generation Z users. Personalized content recommendations and creative tools align with Generation Z's preferences for tailored, immersive experiences. For brands, leveraging these platform-specific features is essential to deliver relevant, engaging content that resonates with this audience.

By understanding and utilizing the dynamics of platform algorithms and interactive features, marketers can enhance their content strategies to better engage Generation Z users on Instagram and TikTok. Emphasizing personalization and creativity in content delivery can significantly improve engagement levels within this demographic.

5.5 Practical Strategies and Recommendations for Marketers

The study's findings suggest a variety of strategic approaches for marketers looking to effectively interact with Finnish Generation Z on Instagram and TikTok. Understanding this demographic's engagement preferences—such as high-quality visuals, cultural relevance, and content customized to their values—is critical for organizations aiming to foster meaningful connections (Williams & Page, 2011).

Initially, marketers must prioritize high-quality visuals that resonate with Generation Z's preference for visually appealing and engaging storytelling. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok demand creative formats that are concise and attention-grabbing. For example, professional-quality TikToks depicting a "day in the life" or Instagram reels featuring seasonal themes can captivate this demographic. Such approaches align with their affinity for immersive and visually stimulating experiences (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

Additionally, embracing authentic user-generated content (UGC) can be a powerful way to foster trust and engagement. Resharing customer posts or collaborating with micro-influencers can provide relatable and credible endorsements for brands. For instance, casual product reviews from Finnish micro-influencers who embody transparency and authenticity are likely to resonate deeply with this audience (Jin et al., 2019). However, the commercialization of UGC, particularly when it involves branding or sponsorship, can lead

to a phenomenon known as “influencer fatigue” within Generation Z. This occurs when users become increasingly discerning and critical of content they perceive as overly commercialized or inauthentic (Zhang, Liu, & Bi, 2022). Marketers should focus on maintaining a balance between organic and branded content to preserve authenticity and avoid alienating their target audience.

Incorporating culturally relevant content is another key strategy. Finnish Generation Z demonstrates a strong preference for material that reflects their cultural values, such as sustainability, transparency, and social responsibility (Kymäläinen et al., 2021). Brands can collaborate with local influencers to highlight eco-friendly routines or Finnish traditions, showcasing a genuine connection to their audience’s values. For example, campaigns promoting sustainability through relatable TikTok challenges or routines could enhance relatability and brand loyalty (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

The use of language plays a critical role in connecting with Finnish Generation Z. Marketing strategies should balance the use of local and international languages to maximize cultural authenticity and broaden appeal. Using Finnish in advertisements enhances cultural relevance and relatability, creating stronger connections with the audience by tapping into their cultural identity (Kabadayi & Lerman, 2011). For example, Finnish captions, hashtags, and colloquial expressions can establish familiarity and inclusivity. However, English can be strategically utilized to align with global trends and expand reach, especially for products with an international identity (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008). A balanced approach that respects local culture while incorporating international elements can yield a more profound impact on this demographic.

Optimizing content for platform algorithms is essential to enhance visibility and engagement. Using trending hashtags, posting during peak engagement hours, and leveraging platform-specific tools can significantly increase content reach (Cotter, 2019). For example, aligning fitness-related posts with trending hashtags like #WellnessChallenge can attract greater attention during active periods (Taylor & Choi, 2022).

Lastly, leveraging interactive tools unique to each platform can drive engagement by enabling Generation Z to participate creatively. Instagram polls, TikTok quizzes, or creative challenges encourage users to interact with branded content in dynamic and personalized

ways. For instance, a workspace transformation challenge with a catchy hashtag can prompt users to showcase their creativity while associating positively with the brand (Ahlse et al., 2020).

By combining visually appealing, culturally resonant, and algorithmically optimized content, marketers can better align their strategies with the preferences of Finnish Generation Z. While the study indicates potential limitations of UGC, future research with larger sample sizes and a focus on purely organic versus branded content may uncover further nuances (Munsch, 2021).

6 Conclusion

This research investigates Finnish Generation Z's interaction with marketing on Instagram and TikTok, with an emphasis on content choices, cultural alignment, and platform-specific features. The primary question guiding this study is: *"What types of content and factors most influence Generation Z's engagement with marketing on Instagram and TikTok in Finland?"*

The findings show that visually appealing, high-quality content has a significant beneficial impact on engagement, emphasizing the significance of aesthetics in attracting Generation Z's attention. This demographic prioritizes content that is consistent with their cultural identity and values, such as sustainability and social responsibility, emphasizing the importance for companies to comply with these goals in order to develop trust and connection. Furthermore, utilizing the local language promotes involvement by strengthening cultural authenticity, which is especially essential in Finland, where cultural values are strongly embedded.

Platform-specific dynamics also have an important influence. Instagram and TikTok's algorithmic personalization and interactive features, such as editing tools, significantly boost engagement by catering to Generation Z's preference for tailored and participatory content. These findings highlight the importance of platform characteristics that promote creativity and personalization in connecting with Generation Z, which values immersive and relevant experiences.

In sum, Finnish Generation Z's engagement is driven by a blend of visually compelling content, cultural congruence, and the effective use of platform-specific tools. These factors collectively create an engaging social media experience that resonates with this audience, offering valuable insights for brands and researchers seeking to understand and connect with this demographic in Finland.

6.1 Suggestions for Further Studies

Future studies could expand on this research by exploring additional facets of Generation Z's engagement with social media platforms. A key direction is examining how preferences

evolve over time by adopting longitudinal methods. This approach could uncover how trends in digital marketing, platform features, and user behavior impact engagement patterns, offering insights into the sustainability of current marketing strategies.

Moreover, research could delve into the nuanced role of user-generated content (UGC) by differentiating between organic content and branded collaborations. This would clarify how varying degrees of perceived authenticity affect Generation Z's interaction with UGC. Such insights could guide marketers in developing strategies that strike a balance between leveraging UGC and maintaining trust.

The exploration of other social media platforms, such as Snapchat or YouTube, could provide a comparative perspective on platform-specific dynamics. Understanding how these platforms influence engagement in contrast to Instagram and TikTok would shed light on whether certain engagement drivers are universal or platform dependent.

Additionally, with the increasing influence of artificial intelligence in content curation, future research could assess how AI-driven personalization impacts user trust and overall engagement. Generation Z's perceptions of algorithmic fairness and transparency could be a particularly rich area for investigation, given their critical approach to digital authenticity.

By pursuing these avenues, future studies can provide deeper, more comprehensive insights into Generation Z's engagement behaviors, helping academics and practitioners adapt to the ever-changing landscape of digital marketing. These efforts will not only refine our understanding of engagement dynamics but also guide the development of more effective, audience-aligned strategies.

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Appendix (A)

Questioner ⁽¹⁾

General questions:

What is your gender?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Male ▪ Female ▪ Non-binary ▪ Prefer not to say
What is your age group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 18-22 ▪ 23-27
How often do you use Instagram or TikTok?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Daily ▪ Several times a week ▪ Once a week ▪ Less than once a week ▪ Never

Likert-scale questions:

raw	description	variables	Questions
1	Content Preferences	Visual Content	Visually appealing content (e.g., vibrant images and videos) makes me more likely to follow a brand on Instagram and TikTok.
2		Visual Content	I often choose to watch visual content (like reels or stories) over scrolling through static posts.
3		Visual Content	Attractive graphics and designs make me spend more time on these platforms.
4	Content Preferences	User-Generated Content	I trust content that is created by other users more than content created by brands
5		User-Generated Content	Seeing other users' experiences makes me interested in products or services.
6		User-Generated Content	User-generated content on Instagram and TikTok greatly influences my purchase decisions.
7	Cultural and Regional Influences	Cultural Values	Content that aligns with my cultural values is more appealing to me.
8		Cultural Values	The social responsibility of brands influences my purchasing decisions.
9		Cultural Values	I value sustainable and eco-friendly content.

10	Cultural and Regional Influences	Language Preferences	I am more attracted to content in my native or local language.
11		Language Preferences	Using Local language in content is more understandable for me.
12		Language Preferences	Combining Local language and English languages in content adds to its appeal.
13	Platform Dynamics	Platform Algorithms	The personalized content suggestions I receive on Instagram and TikTok enhance my overall experience on these platforms.
14		Platform Algorithms	Algorithmic recommendations on these platforms help me find content I enjoy.
15		Platform Algorithms	The algorithmic categorization on platforms like Instagram and TikTok makes it easier for me to find content that resonates with me.
16	Platform Dynamics	Technical Features	New editing capabilities on platforms like Instagram and TikTok motivate me to explore and create more content.
17		Technical Features	Having special editing features and effects on the platform is important to me.
18		Technical Features	Using filters and special features makes my content more engaging.
19	Engagement	User Engagement	I regularly interact with content on Instagram and TikTok (like, comment, share).
20		User Engagement	Participating in platform surveys and challenges is interesting to me.
21		User Engagement	Being active on these platforms helps strengthen my connections with friends and followers.
22		User Engagement	I prioritize responding to comments and direct messages from friends.
23		User Engagement	I follow posts and stories and react to them.
24		User Engagement	These platforms have introduced me to more brands and products, and I like sharing my opinions on them.