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Engaging Gen Z through Personalized Social Media Content: The Mediating Role of Perceived Relevance on Platform Engagement

Involucrar a la Generación Z mediante contenido personalizado en redes sociales: el papel mediador de la relevancia percibida en la interacción con la plataforma

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ABSTRACT

The raising usage of social media lead to an increase in the importance of platform engagement by Gen Z through personalized content provided by these platforms. However, the aim of this study is to understand the role of both personalization and interactivity in supporting the experience of Gen Z through investigating the mediating role of perceived relevance on platform engagement. This study utilized a sample of 412 from Gen Z to explore the proposed hypotheses. The data was collected using a survey containing 17 items to measure the proposed constructs and the collected data analyzed using SEM-PLS. The findings revealed that all the proposed hypotheses are supported. Specifically, the study found that content personalization and content interactivity lead to support the perception of relevance. Moreover, the findings also revealed that perception of relevance could be enhance the platform engagement through their mediating role in the relationship between content personalization and platform engagement, and between content interactivity and platform engagement. Such findings contribute to implementing content strategies by marketers to support the engagement of Gen Z in social media.

Keywords: Gen Z; Social Media Content; Perceived Relevance; Platform Engagement; Content Personalization; Content Interactivity.

RESUMEN

El creciente uso de las redes sociales ha incrementado la importancia de la interacción con las plataformas por parte de la Generación Z a través del contenido personalizado que ofrecen. Sin embargo, el objetivo de este estudio es comprender el rol de la personalización y la interactividad en la experiencia de la Generación Z mediante la investigación del rol mediador de la relevancia percibida en la interacción con las plataformas. Este estudio utilizó una muestra de 412 personas de la Generación Z para explorar las hipótesis propuestas. Los datos se recopilaron mediante una encuesta con 17 ítems para medir los constructos propuestos, y los datos recopilados se analizaron mediante SEM-PLS. Los hallazgos revelaron que todas las hipótesis propuestas se sustentan. Específicamente, el estudio encontró que la personalización y la interactividad del contenido

contribuyen a la percepción de relevancia. Además, los hallazgos también revelaron que la percepción de relevancia podría mejorar la interacción con las plataformas a través de su rol mediador en la relación entre la personalización del contenido y la interacción con las plataformas, y entre la interactividad del contenido y la interacción con las plataformas. Dichos hallazgos contribuyen a la implementación de estrategias de contenido por parte de los profesionales del marketing para apoyar la interacción de la Generación Z en las redes sociales.

Palabras clave: Generación Z; Contenido de Redes Sociales; Relevancia Percibida; Participación en la Plataforma; Personalización de Contenido; Interactividad de Contenido.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a powerful tool influencing the patterns of consumer behavior, specifically for Gen Z.[1,2] This generation refers to all individuals who were born during the revolution of Internet technology, making digital technology particularly social media an important part of their life.[3,4] Incorporating this generation through marketing in social media is highly welcomed for the businesses and organizations, and this may require more reaching for them to understand their behaviors.[5,6] Youtube, Tiktok and Snapchat and Instagram are platforms that have features that highlight the preferences of Gen Z through present different contents like short videos and interactive features.[7,8] In the last year, a report indicated that 95% of this demographic use Youtube, while 67 % of them use Tiktok.[9] However, the presence on these platforms is no longer enough to understand the preferences of Gen Z's, but we need to provide relevant content and personalized.[10]

This study aims to explore the influence of social media contents in terms of personality and interactivity on the engagement of Gen Z' in social media platforms, through understanding the mediating role of perceived relevance of contents on the relationship between content features like personalization and interactivity and the presence of engagement by Gen Z. While the existing literature indicates the importance of marketing activities through social media for this demographic, research problems are represented through lack of understanding of the mediating role of perceived relevance. However, the main objective of this research is to fill the gap through understanding how valuable and meaningful contents drive Gen Z to engage on social media platforms through exploring the relationship between contents features like personalization, interactivity and relevance. In addition, this study provides a deep understanding of the role of these factors in successful social media engagement by Gen Z.

This study draws upon the uses and gratifications theory, which suggests that individuals actively seek out media content that fulfills their specific needs and gratifications. It is expected that personalized and interactive content will be positively associated with platform engagement, as such content is more likely to satisfy Gen Z's need for entertainment, social interaction, and information seeking. Moreover, this study is expected to provide valuable recommendations for marketers and decision makers to incorporate Gen Z through developing social media strategies that enable Gen Z to effectively participate in social media. In addition, the study also will enhance the values and beliefs of Gen Z through creating content that led to fostering their knowledge, perceptions and purchase intention.

Hypotheses development

The term of content personalization refers to the providing of content through social media platforms to meet specific user preferences.[11, 12] On the other hand, the concept of perceived relevance refers to the extent to which online users perceive the value and meaning of the provided contents.[13] However,[14] indicated that when online content supports individual preferences, it's more potential to be seen as relevant. In the context of social media marketing. Several empirical research demonstrated that personalized recommendations and targeted ads increase the level of user participation and click-through rates.[15,16,17] However, this argues that personalization contributes to fostering the perceived value of online content and can be utilized as a tool to increase the attention of users.[18] Therefore, social media platforms can increase the value of online contents through tailoring it in related with preferences and interests for Gen Z.[19,20] Therefore:

H1: Higher levels of content personalization will increase Gen Z users' perceived relevance of the content.
[21] demonstrated that content interactivity refers to some dynamic elements like polls, quizzes, comments and live streams that enable online users to participate actively. These interactive features lead to higher involvement and more personalization and make the online contents more relevant with Gen Z.[22,23] Moreover, several empirical studies indicated that interactive content formats like shoppable posts and enjoyable experiences contribute to increase the rates of participation and generate a positive perception toward a brand for among the younger demographic.[24,25,26] This argues that interactivity supports the perceived connection between Gen z and online contents, and this leads to boost its perceived relevance.[27] Therefore,

by incorporating interactive elements into social media content, platforms can create a more engaging and personalized experience for Gen Z users, ultimately increasing the perceived relevance of that content.[28,29]

H2: Greater content interactivity will positively impact perceived relevance among Gen Z users.

[30] indicated that personalized content doesn't directly lead to increased engagement, but personalization increases perceived relevance, and this perception of relevance, in turn, drives engagement. Empirical studies demonstrated that personalized recommendations increase user engagement by enhancing the perceived value and relevance of the recommended items.[31,32] This suggests that users are more likely to interact with content they find personally relevant and meaningful, and personalization serves as a mechanism to enhance that perception of relevance.[33,34,35] Moreover, the presence of interactive features doesn't directly lead to increased engagement; but the interactivity enhances the perceived relevance of the content, and this perception of relevance drives engagement.[36,37,38] Research revealed that interactive elements like maps, quizzes, videos and images enhance the engagement and lead to improve the brand perception.[39] This indicates that online users are more likely to engage with relevant and attractive content. Moreover,[40,41] reported that the concept of interactivity acts as an approach used to support that perception of relevance. Thus:

H3: Perceived relevance mediates the relationship between content personalization and platform engagement.

H4: Perceived relevance mediates the relationship between content interactivity and platform engagement.

METHOD
Research Instrument

This study aims to understand the influence of engaging Gen z through personalized social media content through exploring the mediating role of perceived relevance on platform engagement. This study suggests that Gen Z engagement is influenced by three predictors including perceived relevance of content, content interactivity and content personalization. A questionnaire approach was utilized for data collection. Such a questionnaire includes two parts, the first part included demographic information of the study sample, and the second part included 17 items measuring the proposed constructs. Moreover, a 5 liker-point scale was utilized to measure the agreement and disagreement with the statement of study items.

Sample and Sampling

Gen Z was the targeted population for this study. As we discussed previously, Gen Z includes all individuals who were born during the revolution of digital platforms and Internet. Furthermore, 420 surveys were distributed randomly among Gen Z. Such an approach is very useful to prevent bias. In addition, the total number of valid surveys was 411. SEM-PLS was used to analyse the data collected.

RESULTS
Measurement Model

Several tests were applied on the measurement model to evaluate it in terms of validity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha was utilized to test reliability and internal consistency, where the threshold value of Cronbach's alpha is 0,70 as reported by Hair et al., (2006). Table 1 depicts the value of Cronbach's alpha, where exceeded the acceptable value (0,70). Such results indicate a high level of internal consistency. The composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) are both tests that can be utilized to measure convergent validity. The value of CR and AVE should exceed the threshold 0,70 and 0,50 respectively. The analysis findings indicated that the values of both tests surpassed the acceptable values. Moreover, the findings also revealed that all measurements of the indicators were significant through an acceptable value of (greater than 0,50) for standardization path loadings.

The Heterotrait-Monotrait ratios (HTMT) test was utilized to measure the validation of the measurement model. Such a test is used to measure the differentiation among constructs. Table 2 revealed that all of the values are below 0,90 and ranging from 0,297 to 0,457. Such findings indicate that each construct is distinct and unique, and there was no any overlap between that laten construct.

Table 1. Measurement Model Properties				
Construct	Items	Factor loading	Composite Reliability	AVE
Content Personalization (CP)	CP1	0,841	0,846	0,794
	CP2	0,796		
	CP3	0,805		
	CP4	0,781		
	CP5	0,814		

Content Interactivity (CI)	CI1	0,872	0,834	0,804
	CI2	0,869		
	CI3	0,825		
	CI4	0,837		
Perceived Relevance (PR)	PR1	0,795	0,829	0,831
	PR2	0,768		
	PR3	0,758		
	PR4	0,806		
	PR5	0,798		
Platform Engagement (PE)	PE1	0,857	0,872	0,795
	PE2	0,838		
	PE3	0,841		

Table 2. HTMT Test

	CP	CI	PR	PE
CP				
CI	0,357			
PR	0,297	0,457		
PE	0,409	0,411	0,398	

Hypotheses Testing

The structural modeling test is the next step after calculating the validity of the measurement model. The findings revealed the value of R^2 was 48,1 %. Moreover, the findings as depicted in table 3 also revealed that all the proposed hypotheses are supported. Specifically, content personalization and content interactivity are predictors of perceived relevance of the content (ß = 0,514; $p < 0,05$) and (ß = 0,234; $p < 0,05$) respectively. Such findings support H1 and H2. Moreover, the findings also revealed that perceived relevance of the content plays a mediating role in the relationship between content personalization and platform engagement (ß = 0,313; $p < 0,05$), and in the relationship between content interactivity and platform engagement (ß = 0,419; $p < 0,05$), thus confirming H3 and H4.

Table 3. Research Hypotheses Test

	Path	Beta	p-value	Result
H1	CP > PR	0,514	0,016	Supported
H2	CI > PR	0,234	0,000	Supported
H3	CP > PR > PE	0,313	0,000	Supported
H4	CI > PR > PE	0,419	0,000	Supported

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to understand the influence of engagement of Gen Z through personalized social media content. The study also aimed to explore the mediating role of personalized relevance on platform engagement. The findings of this study offer meaningful insights into how personalized and interactive content strategies can foster greater engagement among Gen Z users on social media platforms. All four hypotheses were supported, highlighting the pivotal role of perceived relevance as both an outcome of content strategies and a mediator leading to platform engagement.

Consistent with H1, the results demonstrate that content personalization significantly enhances Gen Z users' perception of relevance. This supports previous literature suggesting that tailored content resonates more with digital natives who value authenticity and individualized experiences.[24,25,26] Gen Z, often characterized by their demand for meaningful digital interactions, is particularly responsive to content that aligns with their interests, behaviors, and preferences. Similarly, H2 was supported, revealing that interactive content elements such as polls, quizzes, or interactive stories positively influence perceived relevance. This finding aligns with prior studies highlighting the importance of interactivity in digital engagement.[28,29] For Gen Z, whose digital experiences are often immersive and participatory, interactivity serves not only as a functional feature but as a key driver of content relatability.

The study further confirmed H3 and H4, indicating that perceived relevance mediates the relationships

between both personalization and engagement, as well as interactivity and engagement. These mediating effects suggest that the success of personalization and interactivity strategies hinges on their ability to create content that users find relevant. In other words, simply customizing or adding interactive features is insufficient unless such strategies also foster a sense of personal connection and value in the content. This aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that media users actively seek content that meets their psychological and informational needs.[16,36,38]

These outcomes are one hundred percent in the interests of effectiveness of relevance as a psychological mechanism that can induce engagement. With this in mind, it makes complete sense for the marketers and content creators who are in the process of Gen Z segmentation to realize that personalization and interactivity should not be the only focus in their strategy rather they should be consciously crafted to enhance perceived relevance. Those platforms and brands which become the embodiment of success by directly aligning their content with the values, needs, and identities of Gen Z users, will most likely remain being attractive to their core audience and retain continuous engagement. Besides, these results further the broader comprehension of social media engagement through the provision of a multidimensional view of how various content attributes impact behavioral performance through cognitive and emotional pathways. Succeeding studies might probe other psychological factors, like trust or emotional resonance, for example, and their joint efforts with perceived relevance in the aspect of platform engagement issue. Additionally, examining these relationships across different types of platforms (e.g., short-form video apps vs. traditional networks) could yield deeper contextual insights.

CONCLUSIONS

The results reveal how crucial it is to design social media apps with interactive and personalized content that is particularly effective in targeting the Gen Z population. The results indicate that content which has been very personalized to Gen Z users makes them see it as more relevant to their life and interests and consequently, more probable for their engagement with the platform. The study revealed that the content that is more interactive not only is highly important in creating the feeling of an area's relevance, but it also initiates the users to interact more with the content and the platform in general. The results of the research also pointed to the idea that increasing the feeling of relevance was a mediator for both personalization and interactivity, on the one side, and platform engagement, on the other side. Thus, the research shows the significance of producing Gen Z-oriented content by not only taking into account the interests and expectations of this demographic but also by ideating content that is capable of engaging and emotionally connecting with the audience. The author concludes that the concept of user-generated/dynamic content based on data analytics driven by AI should be the new marketing and creation strategy on social media. However, the Hyper-Personalisation Concepts and Tools allow even more modern and efficient customer understanding, for example, rich data sources of Gen Z's desires that creators can study, which results in developing even more interactive user experiences for the brands in the digital market.

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