

# A MIRACLE OF NOWADAYS AFFECTING CONSUMERS' BEHAVIOUR: THE OUTSTANDING INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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## ABSTRACT:

The submitted study points to social media and their outstanding position in marketing communication aiming at their impact on consumers' behaviour. Attention was paid to how individual generations are affected by social media contributions and whether these influencers affect their shopping behaviour. Indeed, social networking sites are a miracle in marketing communication nowadays. Their potential to influence consumers' behaviour is enormous. Today, almost every business has a profile created on social media such as *Instagram*, *Facebook* and *YouTube*. Businesses can use elements of influencer marketing within social networking, which is considered a modern phenomenon. Although influencer marketing is a relatively new element, it has quickly come to the forefront. It is widely used because it is effective, and the company can build a relationship with potential customers on social media. The present text evaluates the use of social networking sites in marketing communication by companies and their impact on consumers' behaviour based on a questionnaire survey involving 726 respondents from Generations X, Y and Z. To evaluate the established hypotheses, statistical methods and techniques such as the Chi-square test, Kruskal-Wallis test, Share test with known constant and two-share match test were used. The research results confirmed the significant differences in consumers' perceptions of corporate social media.

## KEY WORDS:

consumers' behaviour, influencer marketing, marketing communication, social media, social media marketing

## 1 Introduction

The most characteristic sign of today's business environment is the never-ending competition between existing companies. Many products have become very similar, and there needs to be more incentive for consumers to choose one over the others. This is why companies try to give their products higher value and



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differentiate themselves from their competitors.<sup>1</sup> In today's digital, wireless world, consumers are better informed and have more communication options. The Internet has transformed consumers, companies and corporations with widespread access to information, more complex social media and improved communication skills. Instead of relying on the information provided by merchants, they can use the Internet and other technologies to find the information themselves. As mass markets have fragmented, marketers are moving away from mass marketing.<sup>2</sup> The range of communication tools available is increasing as new technologies bring new opportunities. Rapid advances in communication technologies are causing remarkable changes in how companies and customers communicate. Today, marketers tend to perceive communication as customer relationship management over time.<sup>3</sup> Internet and social media provide a great platform with readily available pictures, videos and documents and help them create brand awareness.<sup>4</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every sector of the economy.<sup>5</sup> Individual marketing communication tools such as advertising, personal sales, sales promotion, Public Relations and direct marketing are gradually losing their effectiveness. This is mainly related to evolving social, global, economic and technological changes. Reaching consumers is becoming more and more challenging, as the consumer becomes immune to traditional forms of address.<sup>6</sup>

Social media marketing refers to using social media and social networking sites to market a company's products and services. Social media marketing allows companies to connect with existing customers and reach new ones while enabling them to promote their desired culture, mission or tone. Social media marketing possesses purpose-built data analysis tools that allow marketers to track the success of their efforts.<sup>7</sup> Social networking sites are used as a tool for corporate marketing communication. However, the most important fact is that the use of social media for generating and sharing thoughts or opinions among users has increased,<sup>8</sup> with advancements in network technology and mobile devices. Social media are communication means that facilitate interactions or develop interdependent relationships between individuals and groups.<sup>9</sup> The said social networks have changed the way information is delivered to customers, shifting from traditional one-to-many to one-to-one communication. Opinion-mining and sentiment analysis offer the possibility to understand user-generated comments and explain how a specific product or brand is perceived.<sup>10</sup>

A short overview of the popularity of social media worldwide proves that the world's top five most popular social media platforms are *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *WhatsApp*, *Instagram* and *(Facebook) Messenger*. *TikTok* comes right after that, but once popular *Snapchat* is now number 11, *Twitter* is number 15 and *LinkedIn* is not even included. This may seem surprising, but while 80% of customers engage with brands on social media, not all social media platforms are designed for this use. Some are purely for instant messaging and some platforms are wildly popular in other areas, like China.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned above, the most popular social medium in the world and market leader is *Facebook*, the first social networking site to surpass one billion registered accounts which currently sits at more than 2.89 billion monthly active users. Its parent company *Meta* owns four of the biggest social media platforms, all with over one billion monthly active users each: *Facebook* (core platform), *WhatsApp*, *Facebook Messenger* and *Instagram*. In the third quarter of 2021, *Facebook* reported over 3.58 billion monthly core Family Product users. Most top-ranked social media with more than 100 million users originate in the United States. However, services like Chinese social media *WeChat*, *QQ* and the video-sharing app *Douyin* have also garnered mainstream appeal in their regions due to local context and content. *Douyin*'s popularity has led to the platform releasing an international version of its network: a little app called *TikTok*. In 2022, social networking sites are estimated to reach 3.96 billion users, and these figures are still expected to grow as mobile device usage and mobile social networking sites increasingly gain traction in previously underserved markets.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding social media, it is essential to mention the term "influencer marketing" – a hybrid of old and new marketing tools. It takes the idea of celebrity support and places it in a modern content-driven marketing campaign. The main difference in influencer marketing is that the campaign results in collaborations between brands and influencers.<sup>13</sup>

Influencers represent a new category of opinion leaders with increasing opportunities on social media.<sup>14</sup> This should come as no surprise, as many social media influencers use *Instagram* as their HQ. Marketers spend about 69% of their influencer budgets on *Instagram*, which is more than any other social medium (the second on that list is *YouTube* at 11%).<sup>15</sup> Brands can take advantage of these close links by influencers promoting products to consumers who already accept the image or views of those influencers.<sup>16</sup> However, this effectiveness has encountered some challenges as consumers become more familiar with influencers' inauthentic marketing campaigns and become more sceptical.<sup>17</sup>

In the last decade, social media have been used increasingly and are becoming increasingly important. People often search for social media influencers to help them make the right purchasing decision.<sup>18</sup> Influencers can create conversations with the desired audience segment. Nowadays, influencers' opinions have a strong impact on consumer behaviour, especially among the young generation. Influencer marketing is one of the fastest-growing channels in marketing and the fastest-growing tool for acquiring customers.<sup>19</sup> Influencer marketing provides the power that virtual influencers can give to a brand. Among the most significant advantages of using influencer marketing in marketing communication is currently considered to be the building of credibility and authority with customers; influencer marketing represents lower costs for businesses, allows connecting with the target audience on preferred platforms, significantly improves the return on investment and provides customers with access to quality content.<sup>20</sup> Influencers can be divided into three categories characterised by the types of influencers present on social medias:

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1. Micro-influencers – they are characterised by having more than 1,000 followers. The advantages of micro-influencers are that, in particular, they have a close relationship with the audience and have a higher degree of involvement and conversion. They are often a cheaper option than other influencers.
2. Macro-influencers – they have more than 100,000 followers on their accounts. The audience is broad and diverse, with a wider reach. Macro-influencers have a good position in the community and more brand experience.
3. Celebrities – they have more than 1,000,000 followers on their accounts. They reach a huge audience. They are highly professional and help to raise awareness of the brand.<sup>21</sup>

Influencer marketing is becoming increasingly popular and many companies see the interest of customers together with the growth of sales, which they achieve mainly with the help of influencers.<sup>22</sup> Thus, influencer marketing builds credibility and shows authority, lowers costs, allows us to connect with our audience on preferred platforms, significantly improving return of investment and providing access to quality content.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, social media and influencer marketing create a base for almost never-ending possibilities to communicate with customers and influence their shopping behaviour.

## 2 Research Methodology

The submitted study points to social media and their outstanding position in companies' marketing communication, aiming at their impact on consumers' behaviour. Attention was paid to the individual Generations X, Y and Z affected by social media contributions and whether the influencers influence their purchases via social media. The study represents the results of questionnaire research conducted in 2022, where 726 respondents took part by answering 21 questions. The research involves customers of companies watching and following their social media accounts. Thus, respondents are users of social networking sites who come into contact with new trends in marketing communication, such as influencer marketing and video marketing. We further processed and analysed the data obtained from the questionnaire survey into tables and figures, followed by the interpretation of the results. Subsequently, we evaluated the established hypotheses using statistical methods such as the Chi-square test of good agreement, the Kruskal-Wallis test, the test of the agreement of the share with a known constant, and the Two-share test. As we were interested in a deeper analysis of the results, the following hypotheses were tested:

- H1: We assume that social media are used by a higher proportion of users of Generation Z.  
 H2: We assume that social media users prefer video posts over image/photo posts.  
 H3: We assume that the company's advertising contributions on social media affect Generation Z more than Generation Y.  
 H4: We assume that there is a dependence between Generations X, Y and Z in their consumer behaviour, which is influenced by the contributions of influencers.  
 H5: We assume that more than 25% of social media users communicate with the company via the info line.

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## 3 Research Results

Our research was conducted to determine how individual Generations X, Y and Z are affected by social media contributions and whether their influencers affect the purchase via social media. At the beginning of the questionnaire, in the first question, we asked the respondents if they had created a profile on a social networking site. As many as 92% of respondents indicated that they do use social media. The remaining 8% said they do not use social networking sites (Figure 1).

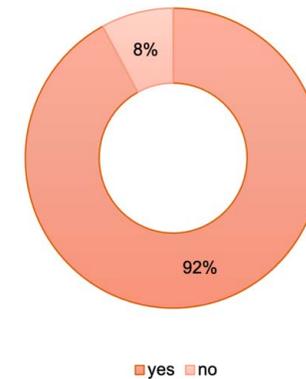


Figure 1: Presence of respondents on social media  
 Source: Own processing

In connection with this question, the first hypothesis was established: We assume that social media are used by a higher proportion of users of Generation Z. Through H1, we examined the statistical dependence between users of social media and Generations Z and X. To evaluate this dependence, we used a 2-match agreement test. We have established a null and alternative hypothesis:

- H0: We assume that social media are used by a lower proportion of users of Generation Z.  
 H1: We assume that social media are used by a higher proportion of users of Generation Z.

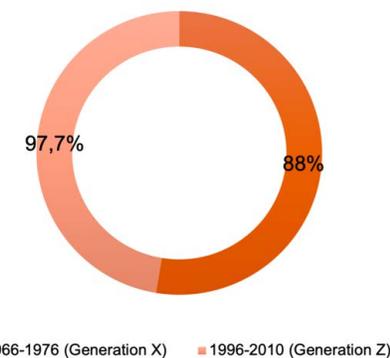


Figure 2: Use of social media – Generations X and Z  
 Source: Own processing

As seen in Figure 2, a total of 88% of respondents from Generation X (88 out of 100 respondents) use one or more social networking sites. In Generation Z's case, 97.7% (340 out of 348 respondents) use social media. The P-value of the 2-share match test is 0.00002, and therefore we reject the null share-by-case

hypothesis. Although up to 88% of Generation X users use social media, this proportion is statistically smaller than in case of Generation Z social media users. We have confirmed our assumption – a higher proportion of Generation Z people use social media.

The second hypothesis H2 was established as follows: We assume that social media users prefer video posts over image/photo posts. This hypothesis examined the statistical dependence between social media users and their preferences. We used a right-hand test to evaluate this dependence. We have established a null and alternative hypothesis:

H0: We assume that social media users prefer fewer video posts than image/photo posts.

H1: We assume that social media users prefer more video posts than image/photo posts.

In this case, we only focused on people who use social media. Based on the answers of the respondents, it is clear that the share of users who chose the video should be statistically significantly higher (H1 right-hand test). The P-value is 1. We cannot reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, we have not confirmed our assumption that videos encourage users to buy more. On the contrary, pictures/photographs stimulate a higher proportion of people to buy than videos.

Our third hypothesis (H3) was aimed at advertising contributions on social media: We assume that the company's advertising contributions on social media affect Generation Z more than Generation Y. We have established a null and alternative hypothesis:

H0: We assume that the company's advertising contributions on social media affect Generation Z less than Generation X.

H1: We assume that the company's advertising contributions on social media affect Generation Z more than Generation X.

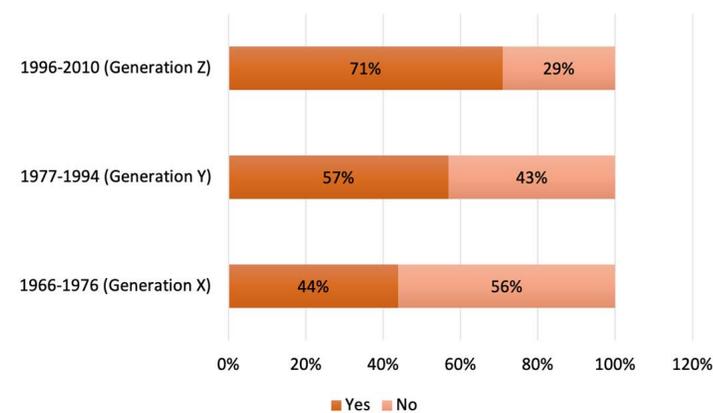


Figure 3: Generations X and Z their use of social media

Source: Own processing

Figure 3 represents the total number of respondents born in the years 1995 – 2010 (Generation Z) of which 71% are affected by advertising contributions on social media. Approximately 29% of respondents are not affected by advertising. Advertising on social media also stimulates shopping behaviour by more than half of the interviewed Generation Y members. A total of 57% of respondents answered the question in the affirmative. Advertising does not stimulate 43% of people in this group. The situation is different in the case of the oldest Generation X, born between 1966 – 1976. Only 44% of people in this group are influenced by advertising on social medias when purchasing products. 56% of people in a given group are not directly stimulated by advertising.

We verify the hypothesis by using the Chi-square test of independence (Table 1). The P-value of the test is less than the selected significance level of 0.05 and therefore, we reject the null hypothesis. Advertising affects different generations. We used corrected residues in SPSS to determine differences. We consider values that are outside the range  $\pm 1.96$  to be significant. In the case of Generation X, advertising does not stimulate people enough to buy. Only 44% of people answered the question about the impact of advertising on the purchase within this group positively, but for all groups, it was up to 62% of respondents. This difference is statistically significant. The situation is different in the case of Generation Z. Here, 71% of people are affected by advertising. The corrected residue in the 'yes' answer is 4.7; thus, this percentage differs statistically significantly from the percentage intended in the null hypothesis. Generation Z is affected by advertising more than Generations X and Y.

Table 1: Chi-Square test

Chi-Square Tests				
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	27,422 <sup>a</sup>	2	,000	,000
N of Valid Cases	671			

Source: Own processing

Based on H4, we assume that there is a dependence between Generations X, Y and Z in their consumer behaviour, which is influenced by the contributions of influencers. In connection with the fourth hypothesis, we examined the dependence between Generations X, Y and Z and whether the contributions of influencers influence individual generations and their consumer behaviour. As this is an ordinal variable scale, we used the Kruskal-Wallis test. We have established a null and alternative hypothesis:

H0: We assume there will be no significant differences between the generations.

H1: We assume that there will be significant differences between the generations.

The graphic visualisation shows a box plot (Figure 4). The highest average belongs to Generation Z, while the lowest belongs to Generation X. Generations X and Y are similar.

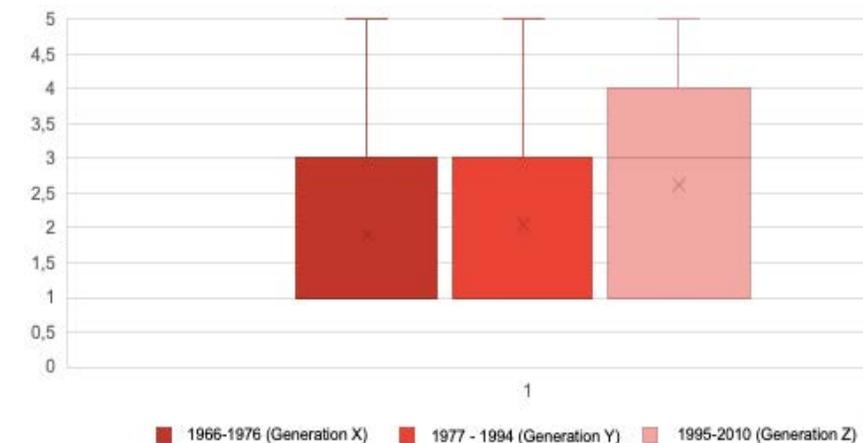


Figure 4: Box plot

Source: Own processing

Based on the calculation, we found that the value of the test is less than 0.05; therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there are differences between the generations. Contributions to social media affects different generations.

Table 2 presents pairwise comparisons and will help us identify the pairs of generations that exist. The differences are between Generation Z and X as well as Z and Y. The influencer contributions have an impact on Generation Z more than in case of Generations X and Y.

Table 2: Pair comparison

Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
Generation X - Generation Y	-19,509	17,734	-1,100	0,271	0,814
Generation X - Generation Z	-78,076	17,175	-4,546	0,000	0,000
Generation Y - Generation Z	-58,567	13,507	-4,336	0,000	0,000

Source: Own processing

H5: We assume that more than 25% of social media users communicate with the company via the info line. To evaluate the statistical dependence, we used a test of the agreement of the share with the known one. We have established a null and alternative hypothesis:

H0: We assume that less than 25% of respondents chose the info line.

H1: We assume that more than 25% of respondents chose the info line.

The P-value of the proportion concordance test with the known constant (0.25 and 25%, respectively) is 0.0408, and therefore we reject the null hypothesis at the significance level of 0.05. The proportion of people who have chosen info line is higher than 25%.

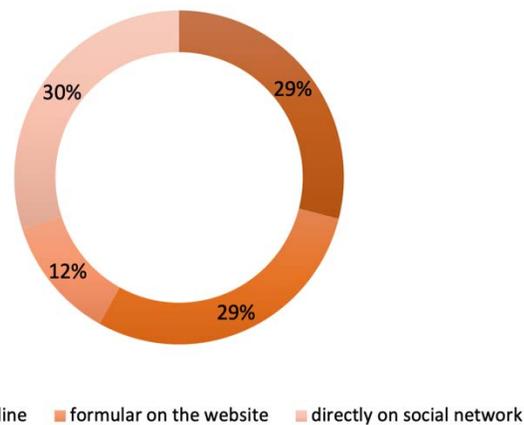


Figure 5: The attitude of respondents to the company's contributions

Source: Own processing

## 4 Discussion and Conclusion

Internet use has increased significantly in recent years – especially in the last ten years. Many businesses have found new ways to promote their products. These new approaches are mainly used as communication tools and are called social media. As soon as companies became aware of the change and saw the potential of the Internet, they developed new approaches to presenting and communicating with customers in the online segment. The advent of social networking as a marketing tool has significantly changed how companies communicate with their customers. With a vast number of users worldwide, social networking can be a strategic marketing communication tool for service providers. *Instagram*, *Facebook* and *YouTube* are currently among companies' most used social networking platforms.

Over time, businesses have found that traditional marketing communication tools are less effective than they once were. As technology advances, they have become as much a part of our lives as possible. These technologies give companies the opportunity to communicate in other ways, such as traditional marketing communication tools, e.g., television advertising, newspaper advertising, etc. Business marketing communications have begun to adapt to new trends that are more efficient, less costly and bring businesses faster profits. Businesses often claim that their presence on social media is a key element of success.

*Statista* says photos and links are the leading types of branded posts on *Facebook* (videos and status updates pale in comparison). However, this is just the quantity of posts – not the engagement with posts. So, on the one hand, links and photos are a good bet since they are what users expect, but they are most frequent because they are the easiest to create. *Facebook* can work for any industry or business, but according to the data, we can see that for ads. The industries that see the highest conversion rates are beauty and fitness, jobs and education and employment and job training. But when it comes to purchasing intent, it is highest on *Instagram*, with 36% of users using it to follow brands (compared to just 19% for *Facebook*).<sup>24</sup>

Influencer marketing, video marketing and overall activity on social media are considered to be among these trends in marketing communication. It is more difficult for companies that have been on the market for many years to gain new followers, so they will often use the impact of influencer marketing for promotion and visibility. Influencer marketing is one of the most used trends in marketing communication. For the company, this form of communication with the customer is both less costly and more efficient. As social media are mainly used by the younger generation, their consumer behaviour is greatly influenced. New trends in marketing communication have little impact on the older generation because new technologies are not close to them, and they may not even have a profile on social media.

Our research evaluated the use of social networking sites in companies' marketing communications, including influencer marketing. We also presented an overview of the behaviour of social media users in association with their overall relationship to advertising on social media and influencer marketing based on a questionnaire survey. Given the study's results, social media are a widespread element used in marketing communication by companies. Social networking has an overall impact on consumer behaviour but affects different generations. Social media have the most significant impact on Generation Z and, conversely, the least on Generation X. The use of influencer marketing also has a significant impact on Generations Y and Z. Because users of Generation X are mostly indifferent to social media and do not use new technologies to the same extent as the younger generations, their consumer behaviour is less affected.

Knowledge and proper understanding of the needs, expectations, desires, demands, values or preferences of customers of all generations is an important goal of any company. Communication strategy, therefore, has a unique role to play. While Millennials are easier to target, persuade or even influence through social media, Gen-Xers are more conservative, preferring to look for additional information about products and companies themselves, which makes the marketer's job even more difficult. Nowadays, social media play an increasingly important part in influencing consumers and their consumption behaviour. Being able to

<sup>24</sup> MCCORMICK, K.: *The 6 Biggest, Baddest, Most Popular Social Media Platforms (+How to Wield Their Power)*. WordStream. Released on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2022. [online]. [2022-08-04]. Available at: <<https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2022/01/11/most-popular-social-media-platforms>>.

expand beyond geographical borders, social media create strong links between consumers in different states and social environments.<sup>25</sup>

As companies come to understand the behaviour of customers and social trends, they are increasingly faced with the need to define and pursue a social media-based communication strategy by creating *Facebook*, *LinkedIn*, *Twitter*, etc. pages, blogs and forums, fostering the emergence of strong online communities whose exchange of ideas and information helps to improve products and develop new ones.<sup>26</sup> Businesses should continue to use elements of influencer marketing and move forward, take advantage of the opportunity to attract new customers, and arouse interest in buying products by social media users.

*Acknowledgements: The study is the outcome of the research project VEGA 1/0404/22 'Rationality and Irrationality in Creating Preferences in Consumer Shopping Behaviour on the Threshold of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium', investigated at the Institute of Marketing, Trade and Social Studies, Faculty of Economics and Management, Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra; and the project KEGA 030SPU-4/2022 'Implementation of Selected Goals of 2030 Agenda in Consumer Psychology Education – Production of Multimedia E-Textbooks and Web-Based Platform for the Higher Education'.*

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