

The influence of Instagram advertisements on generation Z buying behaviour: What's Next?

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Abstract

This paper sheds light on some investigation ideas based on the influence of Instagram adverts in generation Z buying behaviour. In recent years, society has become more and more digital. Consequently, generation Z, born surrounded by technology, is the one that uses smartphone the most and simultaneously Instagram, being involuntarily in contact with several adverts. This paper's methodology is based on a literature review, approaching recent qualitative and quantitative studies. Considering the importance of digital influence in society – especially among social media – it is important to focus future research on gen Z's interaction with Instagram and its impact on the relationship with brands. Due to the lack of previous studies regarding the subject, this investigation has an exploratory purpose, based on previous conclusions of studies related to Millennials. These seem to suggest a positive connection towards advertisement on Instagram. The authors attempt to provide clues for future investigations that consider gen Z. Finally, for the future, the authors recommend verifying a possible continuation of a positive relation towards Instagram ads with gen Z or, even if buying behaviour changes among the considered consumers.

Keywords: Instagram, Advertising, Generation Z, Millennials, Consumer behaviour

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1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, society lives in a digital era, where anything is as far as a click on the computer mouse. The possibility of contacting and obtaining immediate information overseas; the expectation and completion of a business transaction: everything is available online. Thus, marketing and advertising are not exceptions (Hunjet et al., 2019).

From a global perspective, according to recent statistics (in January 2021), 4,54 billion people are active internet users, encompassing 59% of the global population (Johnson, 2021). Social media usage has become an integral element to the lives of many people across the world. In 2019, 2,95 billion people were active social media users worldwide. This number is expected to increase to almost 3,43 billion by 2023 (Tankovska, 2021). Taking Portugal as an example, the country reveals an increasing use of digital among consumers: in January 2021 it registered 8,58 million internet users. Out of these, 7,80 million use social media which represents about 76.6% of the resident population. Furthermore, each person spends an average of 2 hours and 18 minutes on social media per day (Kemp, 2021).

The use of social media revealed an increasing consumers' perception of the products and services they purchase. Blogs, product reviews, discussion groups and others are valuable information sources that describe how clients collect and use that information in the decision-making process and consumer behaviour (Onishi & Manchanda, 2012).

Thereby, there is presently a predisposition for online buying and e-commerce. In the case of Portugal, 5,11 million consumers purchased online in 2020 for travelling (\$1,38 billion); fashion and beauty products (\$1,18 billion); and technologic devices (\$866,9 million), mainly. On average, Portuguese consumers invested \$1,251 on e-commerce (Kemp, 2021).

Social media advertisements (ads) have been proving to be a key factor to the increased notoriety of the companies (Iankova et al., 2019; Tuten, 2008). In January 2021 it was estimated that through Instagram ads, marketers had the potential to reach 4,80 million users in Portugal (Kemp, 2021). Nevertheless, it was verified that the ads were only reaching 53% of Instagram users aged more than 13.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to understand the effect of the adverts that appeared on Instagram on Millennials and Generation Z (gen Z) buying behaviours. Therefore, a literature review was conducted, to analyse a variety of quantitative and qualitative studies from other authors in recent years. Exhaustive research was made among various databases, namely Scopus and Google Scholar. To drive the research efficiently, it was needed to refine it, by using filters such as time intervals (from 2016 to 2021, mainly), boolean operators and keywords (essentially "instagram", "millennials", "generation z", "ads*" and "consumer behavio*r").

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Advertising, as a communication technique, aims at introducing a product or service, stimulating interest in it and sell it (Lampreia, 1996; Tuten, 2008), to establish a corporate and brand culture (Young, 2020). With the technological development and the rising of social media, advertising was no longer exclusive on traditional media. Marketing took advantage of the publication of adverts online, particularly in platforms where it is possible to find various audiences, as on Instagram, using a creative approach that makes the receiver of the message dream and fantasises (Pinto, 1997; Yusarifah et al., 2020). In a quantitative study, (Hudson et al., 2016) found that consumers that engaging customers via social media are associated with higher consumer-

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brand relationships and word of mouth communications when consumers anthropomorphize the brand and avoid uncertainty. Social media has turned into a new and impactful way to share the message to consumers and take them to action. Nowadays even the smallest companies feel the need to have a digital presence to survive.

3.1. ADVERTISING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The rising of social media platforms, like Instagram, allows brands and audience to openly contact each other, more cheaply and conveniently for both parties. Varma et al., (2020) consider social media to be the perfect tool to reach more people, with a wide range of content and with the minimum time. That opened new possibilities for the audience to see all their shopping options before the decision making but taking into consideration that all decision-making process is easily influenced by social media (Appel et al., 2020).

Nowadays, consumers are bombarded with online advertising (Sama, 2019) and Instagram as a platform allows targeting more audiences that may find traditional media advertisements too fabricated. Despite it, the variety of communication options and the possibility to have data that allows to segment consumers with the right offer at the right time gives marketers a huge power to involve consumers and, consequently, brands occupy a different space in consumers' lives (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). Nonetheless, this aptitude has turned into a problem for marketers, as this allowance has given people an opening to clearly express their opinions, which can result in a crisis. When dissatisfaction is exposed, there is a possibility it will turn viral and cause damages to the brand. Positive or negatively, everything will affect the consumers' perception of the brand.

“Considering the interest in integrated marketing strategies over the last few years, numerous strategies have been utilized to follow online and offline promotions and their impacts on behavior such as the usage of hashtags to bring conversations online, call-to-actions, utilizing matching strategies on “traditional” avenues like television with social media.” (Appel et al., 2020, p.88)

Arya and Kerti (2020) mention that ads like those on Instagram Stories allow the advertiser more personalization options. Because of data like gender, age and geographic location, “advertisers can craft a highly personalized ad visual to be displayed to users that trigger any of these characteristics” (p. 37). Although ads on social media allow advantages for brands, Munsch (2021) indicates that millennials are adept at avoiding advertising designed to influence their behaviour, using several subterfuges to ignore part or all the advertisement, with traditional methods of advertising being sidestepped by digital distractions. Marketers have researched, using qualitative methods, ways of getting the attention of both the millennials and gen Z and have found that short, concise marketing with emotion (especially humour) and music has a positive impact on the consumer behaviour of both generations, as well as the use of social media and influential people or opinion leaders.

3.2. GENERATION Z'S RELATION WITH INSTAGRAM

By December 2020, in Portugal already existed about 5 million Instagram users, which represents half of the Portuguese population, of which 51% was between 18 and 34 years old (Johnson, 2021). However, the data is not always consistent. According to NapoleonCat (2019), by January 2019, there was nearly 1,98 million Instagram users in Portugal, between 18 and 34 years old, which represents 53.8% of all users. In January 2020, the number of users increased to 2,07 million users, between the same age gap, representing 54% (NapoleonCat, 2020). In January 2021, the percentage values have not changed, although there was a

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significant difference of number of users. By then, there was around 2,68 million Instagram users between 18 and 34 years old (NapoleonCat, 2021). It appears that the spike was bigger in the COVID-19 pandemic year. It is among gen z that are most of the users of this social media platform of visual content share. They are active social media users and with daily relationships through social media platforms (Csobanka, 2016). Besides, gen Z access all the environment around them using mobile devices, spending about 21.1 hours per week on social media (Graham et al., 2020) and even share their opinions, photos and films on social platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, being Instagram the most used one (Wijaya et al., 2020), They do not just use online content, they also create it (Hardey, 2011).

Gen Z incorporates several ages. Although the age limits are still not unanimous, authors have similar descriptions. According to (Murtell, 2020), gen Z is the one that follows millennials (born between 1981 and 1996). The birth years occurred at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2010s, having a 15 years' time gap. Plus, Demock (2019) considered as part of gen Z all of those born between 1997 and 2012. However, Dolot (2018) describes gen Z as those born after 1995, also called I-generation and post-millennials.

Criteo (2018) identifies that inside gen Z, the older prefer Facebook and the youngest Instagram, also considering that this is the generation that uses the mobile phone the most. Considering the same study, gen Z are also the ones that prefer personalized and valuable ads. On the other hand, their decision making varies between online and offline, because they have concerns about security and privacy. Unlike Criteo, Gaber et al. (2019) focused their investigation on millennials and gen Z and found that personalization is not an important factor in determining consumers' attitudes, explained by the failure of companies to make consumers feel that the ads are personalized for their preferences. However, the authors underline the fact that this study was taken place in Egypt and explained that many companies are still in the beginnings of their Instagram usage and are unable to customize the advertisements to the consumers' needs and preferences.

“Considering that social media has become one of the best places for brands to engage with consumers, build relationships, and provide customer service, it's not only in the best interest of social media platforms to “do better” in terms of policing content, but the onus of responsibility has been placed on brands to advocate for privacy, trust, and the removal of fake or hateful content.” (Appel et al., 2020, p.84)

When using Instagram, there is a huge number of subjects to be followed and accessed, namely fashion, business, technology, art, movies, among others (Varma et al., 2020). Nuseir (2020), otherwise, identifies the need to communicate with family as the main reason why people use social media. Since the author refers that family ties are probably the most important factor for engaging in social media usage, businesses can formulate their ads with overall themes centred around family. Djafarova and Bowes (2021) identified that Instagram was the favourite social media, especially for females, to gather insights into the lives of celebrities, in addition to inspiring choices.

From a general point of view, it can be concluded that Instagram became the most popular social media platform for underage and young adults around the world (Huang & Su, 2018). The authors took a quantitative approach, regarding smartphone as the main Instagram platform. This study found that the biggest drive behind Instagram usage was for the sake of social interaction and diversion, with varying content interests among different groups, with females being more receptive to ads. It was found by Raja Suleiman and Mohd Fauzi (2020) that gen Z is more affected by entertainment video content rather than breaking news content, with more incidence of "likes" compared to "shares" in either case.

According to Arya and Kerti (2020), most millennials attitude towards ads can be explained based on entertainment, informativeness, credibility and advertising value. With a study focused on Instagram Stories

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ads, the authors got to the conclusion that millennials care more about the informative content on the ads and their quality, which leads to the implication that advertisers must give relevant visual content to this target, as that seems to be the way to a positive attitude towards ads. On the other hand, it was also concluded that entertainment has a strong effect on millennials perception of Instagram Stories ads. Despite having a maximum of 15 seconds, the investigators realized that millennials find them entertaining, contributing to a positive perceived value. As expected, anything that could annoy the respondents was seen negatively, which led to a negative attitude towards ads – these tactics should be avoided.

3.3. INTERACTION WITH BRAND AND BUYING INTENTION

In the online world, especially on social media, the interaction with the brand can either be delivered, by liking a brand's Instagram profile or unintentional, as when appears an ad or when someone mentions a brand (Humphrey et al., 2017). Consequently, communication and ads occupy a bigger space in the digital world comparing to traditional channels. Another important aspect considering ads on social media is mobile devices fast growth, where gen Z does a big part of their daily tasks, in prejudice to computers (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). Despite that, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) also seems to be relevant among millennials Instagram users, which positively affects their buying intention (Durmaz & Yüksel, 2017; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Shidqi et al., 2019). However, it must be considered that not all users see the continued existence of ads on social media positively (Ferreira & Barbosa, 2017).

Regarding the ads published on Instagram, buying intention has also changed. Instagram can affect consumer's buying intention and process, as well as their relationships with brands (Gaber et al., 2019). When it comes to millennials, consumers are more likely to impulsively purchase something when they get more pleasure from the page(s) they visit, since that same pleasure leads them to stay longer on those pages and improve the likelihood to make purchases. The purchase features on Instagram made e-commerce even easier (Shahpasandi et al., 2020). The primary reason for shopping online was found to be the need for better deals and convenience. The rise of new types of offers to pull customers has been increased tremendously. The usage of coupons and discounts is valued by customers above others (Varma et al., 2020). In their study, Djafarova and Bowes (2021) concluded that Instagram leads to an increase in impulse purchases from gen Z, specifically by women, who were able to access a wide variety of fashion items, without having to go into brand pages, while keeping up to date with current trends.

According to Seng and Keat (2014), this influence in the consumer's perception and buying intention is also related to adverts' quality, as well to consumers' engagement with the product category or the buying situation. In fact, (Belanche et al., 2019) mention in their study that Instagram ads have a strong influence on consumer's behaviour. This investigation focuses on millennials, and it was concluded by the authors that this generation tends to have a positive attitude towards Instagram ads, whether it is on Instagram Wall or Stories, especially when compared with Facebook Wall. Strøm Haukeberg and Klyve (2019) had already got to a similar conclusion: among younger generations, Instagram is perceived as more informative and entertaining and less disruptive and intrusive than Facebook, which means that the general attitude towards advertising is perceived more positive for Instagram than it is for Facebook. Milaković et al. (2020) say that consumers' attitudes towards social media advertising have a positive influence on buying intention, word-of-mouth information spread and buying.

On the other hand, Belanche et al. (2019) got to a different conclusion concerning the attitude towards Instagram ads. The authors found out, contrary to their expectations, that consumers tend to be annoyed when an ad is displayed between the Stories. That appears to be because there is no pre-announce of the commercial

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content, which leads to the feeling of intrusion and a negative experience while navigating on the platform. Besides that, it is reminded of the particularity of Instagram Stories that allows to “incorporate flashing or animated tags and calls to action embedded in the full screen” (p. 85). Milaković et al. (2020) despite concluding the existence of a positive attitude towards social media ads, also infer that consumer search for novelty was shown not to influence attitudes towards social media advertising. The authors conclude that the reason for this might be that the respondents were neither highly innovative nor paid much attention to the search for novelties.

Johnson et al. (2019) got to the clear conclusion that the message format played an influence on ad attitudes. Moreover, the authors concluded that social posts were liked better than sponsored ones. Following it, social posts are seen as more credible, which led to the indication that credibility and social comparison contribute positively to ad attitude, brand attitude and buying intention.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Social media had major growth in recent years, having a very significant impact on how marketers and consumers are extending their communication (Cavlak, 2021; Shareef et al., 2019). Business executives, consultants, and decision-makers alike all struggle with understanding and decrypting how to best make use of the various social media applications that are available (Kaplan, 2015). Social media is becoming both more convenient and more important, leading many companies to use it in external promotions, marketing, customer management, and as an internal channel for employee communications (Seo & Park, 2018). Therefore, organizations, companies and brands are aware of the importance of a social and digital presence, and the opportunities that are “offered” through lower costs, improved brand awareness and increased sales (Dwivedi et al., 2020).

In the extent of the study, it was noticed that social media also contribute to ease the buying process, since companies that use an integrating strategic approach through social media platforms are likely to be most successful in reaching, engaging, and maintaining a consumer. This strategy involves content that is created by consumers in response to specific brands or brand requests and influences the perceptions of other consumers. However, this kind of approach requires a high degree of maintenance and companies that decide to adopt this method should be prepared to designate a marketing service for the management of online customer relationships (Ertemel & Ammoura, 2016).

Focusing on millennials, it was found that they try to avoid ads. According to Youn & Kim (2019), native advertising in newsfeeds is usually less obtrusive than other forms of online advertising, so due to the covert nature, consumers may not necessarily develop persuasion knowledge and reactance to these native ads. However, Wojdyski (2016) emphasize the fact that if consumers recognize that newsfeed native ads are sponsored by companies, they develop persuasion knowledge and express negative views of the ads. Since consumers feel they are being misled, they will experience heightened disliking toward these ads, which will motivate them to react adversely toward newsfeed ads and lead to avoiding or disengaging with them (Van Reijmersdal et al., 2015; Wojdyski et al., 2018).

Turning to gen Z, they use social media to express their creativity through sharing content. Driven by an enthusiasm for self-expression, they distribute information and opinions through different forms of creative art, like essays, music, games, and videos (Ekström & Östman, 2015). Apart from that, social media adopted user-friendly applications, which turned online production into a mass activity, because of the easy access and low time investment (Leung, 2009). By publishing their work online, creative users can make an impact and establish a reputation (Zhu et al., 2019).

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Considering both generations, it was concluded that ads on Instagram are better perceived compared to the ones on Facebook. This might be because the innovative features of Instagram Stories increase the user's opportunities to interact with advertising content (e.g. skip, stop, go back, follow a hashtag, etc.). This could be perceived by the user as an almost unrestricted interaction with the ad when compared to the less dynamic Facebook Wall ads that may be understood as intrusive or as threatening the user's freedom during online navigation (Belanche et al., 2017, 2019; Li et al., 2002). Millennials and gen Z also value privacy and safety, being that the main reason why they don't choose exclusively online, but offline as well. Since consumers know that social media and advertisers are in a position to collect their personal information for marketing purposes, they are more likely to take actions to avoid social media ads such as scrolling down Internet pages, closing windows, or not clicking ads (Jung, 2017).

Moreover, it is also relevant to mention that eWOM plays an important role in buying intention. Nowadays consumers can interact more frequently with each other, especially with friends and families, who know each other well and share a lot of common preferences, making the exchange of messages more trustworthy. Therefore, consumers are consequently vulnerable to these recommendations and think highly of the overall evaluation of the product, thus triggering a high perceived value and strong buying intention (Wang et al., 2018).

Lastly, Nuseir (2020) recommends that the formulation of ads should be more focused on the needs of individual users, rather than in the general interests of social media. Although to have the chance of doing this, it is mandatory an internal evaluation of marketing procedures so that businesses will position themselves to comprehend the best ways to use social media and the right social media platforms to use to reach their customers.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The main limitation concerning this research has to do with the fact of being a literature review, therefore restricted to existing investigations. Since there is still not an empirical approach to this subject, for future investigations we recommend a quantitative analysis focused on gen Z to understand their actual attitude towards Instagram ads, given the fact that this generation has not been targeted enough and they represent the new and future buyers.

What's next? Gen Z and their social media behaviour are next; everything concerning these topics must be taken into consideration in the future. Once Instagram is growing and adding new tools constantly, we suggest for the future the investigation of gen's Z relation with Instagram and all its tools, like Reels, Stories and Lives, as well as other new social platforms that have emerged, such as TikTok. We also recommend an empirical investigation on how gen Z behaviour on Instagram changed since the COVID-19 pandemic started.

Another aspect that needs to be considered for future investigations is how gen's Z relation with the brands is affected by Instagram and brands' presence on it. We suggest both qualitative and quantitative analysis focused on different brands, whether they are known all over the world or are small local brands. Plus, it is important to focus on the impact that eWOM has on gen's Z buying intention, especially regarding the influence that digital influencers have on their behaviour as consumers. Besides, it may also be relevant to analyse how these adverts influence gen Z's loyalty to brands.

Furthermore, during our research, we have not come across pertinent information on how adblockers impact advertising on Instagram. Thus, we consider any type of research regarding how ad blockers impact gen's Z usage of Instagram to be relevant. Gen Z will soon represent most consumers and with the increase of their

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concerns for social and environmental responsibility, we also suggest the investigation of how this will affect customer engagement with brands in general, but specially on social media.

6. IMPLICATIONS

This research must be taken into consideration by marketers, as gen Z is nowadays the generation that uses more not only social media but also technology. Besides, marketing professionals must be careful with segmented campaigns, once these young adults seem to be more and more conscious about privacy and the data used to target them. Marketers also need to consider that the content created must be relevant, informative but also creative. If these consumers do not find it pertinent and appealing, then they will not consider it and will keep scrolling or skipping their screens - resources will be lost.

Furthermore, eWOM can have drastic consequences for a brand if not well controlled. Marketing professionals must be extremely careful with what other consumers may comment or post on social media posts, as well as what they say to those that are close to them, like friends and family. A negative comment or post can take down an entire campaign and damage the brand's name.

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