



MASTER'S DISSERTATION

“STANDING FOR IMPORTANT CAUSES: AN ONLINE TREND FOR MILLENNIAL AND GEN Z USERS”

AUTHOR: MARIA JOÃO DA COSTA TORRES

SUPERVISOR: IRMA IMAMOVIC, Ph.D.

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AUTHOR: MARIA JOÃO DA COSTA TORRES

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on Gen Z and the Millennial generation perceptions and behaviours regarding digital activism. The main purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and behaviours of Instagram female users belonging to Gen Z and Millennial generations in regard to digital activism. The methodology used to achieve the main purpose of this dissertation was a qualitative approach and the research method selected was semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. All participants were females that use the social media platform Instagram and either belong to Gen Z or the Millennial generation. With this study it was possible to understand Gen Z and the Millennial Generation perceptions and behaviours towards digital activism. This study can also help brands and influencers understand the importance of digital activism and how to use it in an authentic way to target both generations.

Keywords: Digital, Online, Activism, Gen Z, Millennials, Generational Cohorts, Branding, Social Media.

RESUMO

Esta dissertação centra-se nas percepções e comportamentos da Geração Z e da geração *Millennial* relativamente ao ativismo digital. O principal objetivo deste estudo é explorar as percepções e comportamentos das usuárias do Instagram pertencentes às gerações Z e *Millennial* em relação ao ativismo digital. A metodologia utilizada para atingir o objetivo principal desta dissertação foi uma abordagem qualitativa e o método de pesquisa selecionado foi a entrevista semiestruturada com a participação de 10 entrevistados. Todos os participantes eram do sexo feminino, tinham de utilizar a plataforma social Instagram e pertencer à Geração Z ou à geração *Millennial*. Com este estudo foi possível compreender as percepções e comportamentos da Geração Z e da Geração *Millennial* em relação ao ativismo digital. Adicionalmente também foi possível gerar informação de forma a ajudar marcas e influenciadores a entender a importância do ativismo digital e formas de garantir que este é usado de forma autêntica para chegar a ambas as gerações.

Palavras-Chave: Digital, Online, Ativismo, Geração Z, *Millennials*, Coortes Geracionais, *Branding*, Redes Sociais.

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INTRODUCTION

Brand activism happens when a brand decides to take a public stand regarding any social issue with the goal of driving change and at the same time helping to solve some of society's most pressing issues. These social initiatives must be aligned with the company's beliefs, purpose, and values (Schoeneck & White, 2020).

However, 56% of consumers indicate that too many brands are now using social issues as a marketing strategy and consequently as a way of increasing sales (Edelman, 2019). This is an important issue that makes analysing brand authenticity essential.

Having said that, branding is not a cynical activity. This is because now, more than ever, consumers have access to the complete process, which, means that they do not have to buy the brand/product if they do not like it, if they don't identify with the brand, or even if it simply does not offer any added value. In the end, consumers can always choose (Murphy & Murphy, 1993).

Regarding online users and digital activism, it is important to consider the terms clicktivism and slacktivism, these concepts are provided by market analysts and compose an important topic for discussion.

The focus of this study, however, is younger generations, more specifically Millennials and Gen Z, these two demographic cohorts, as well as

their attitudes, interests, and opinions, may change over time. This is especially true for members of Gen Z, many of whom are still going through the maturation process and are about to enter the marketplace, hence the importance of studying them (Reisenwitz, 2021).

Additionally, it is important to note that both these generations have in their majority a lack of commitment to “real” social changes and also a lack of willingness to do what is necessary in order to make the world around a better place (Franklin, 2014). This phenomenon might have been driven by social media, which is something to be explored.

Consequently, there is a lack of research regarding consumers' feelings and opinions concerning their contribution towards social change through social media interactions. In addition, there is a need to explore the impacts of clicktivism on online users and if that detracts them from taking real-world action toward social issues (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

With that in consideration, the general objective of this research is “To explore the perceptions and behaviours of female Instagram users belonging to Gen Z or Millennial generations in regard to digital activism”.

This thesis is divided into different chapters, and it will follow this structure: chapter 1, the literature review, is where the state of the art will be presented on some of the most relevant findings for this subject. Some of the topics that will be found in the literature review, are Social Networks, Digital Activism, Brand Authenticity, Gen Z and the Millennial Generation.

Chapter 2 will encompass the methodology, the type of approach to the study, which will be Inductive qualitative, and the data collection techniques, which in this case will be done exclusively through the use of semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 3 presents the findings of the study, and it is often called the results chapter. This is one of the most important chapters of the dissertation because it showcases what has been found through the aid of all the data collected.

The following chapter is number 4, more precisely the discussion, which is where the meaning, importance, and relevance of the results are explored and explained in more depth. Additionally, it is also in this chapter where a connection between the literature review and the findings is presented.

Chapter 5 is the conclusions, and it provides a final and a clear understanding of the research objectives previously created, it is also where the key findings can be found in a summarized matter.

The final chapter is number 6, limitations and future research. Here each limitation is detailed in a concise matter and explained. Additionally, it is also where future research can be found, a natural result of the limitations.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to begin exploring the theme of this master thesis, it is important to understand the main concepts regarding it. The state of the art will be presented in the literature review, amongst the relevant references to this investigation.

Having said that, this chapter will start by presenting the concept and importance of social networks. Followed by, the mention and explanation of topics such as Digital and Brand Activism, Brand Authenticity, Gen Z, Millennials, and theories like Clicktivism and Slacktivism.

1.1. Social Networks

Firstly, it is essential to distinguish between social networks and social media, as they are concepts that are often confused. Taking that into account, social networks are a type of social media with a focus on relationships, in order for a platform to be considered a social network, it must have profiles and links between them (Coutinho, 2018). On the other hand, social media is composed by online platforms such as, content sharing sites, blogs, social networking sites, and wikis. These platforms allow the users to create, share and discuss online content (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.61) social networks can be characterized as “a group of Internet-based applications that are built on ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of consumer-generated content”. What sets it apart from traditional forms of media is that they focus on two-way communication.

Additionally, and according to an existing study, social media may be a fast, inexpensive, and convenient replacement for conventional polls and surveys (Xu et al., 2023).

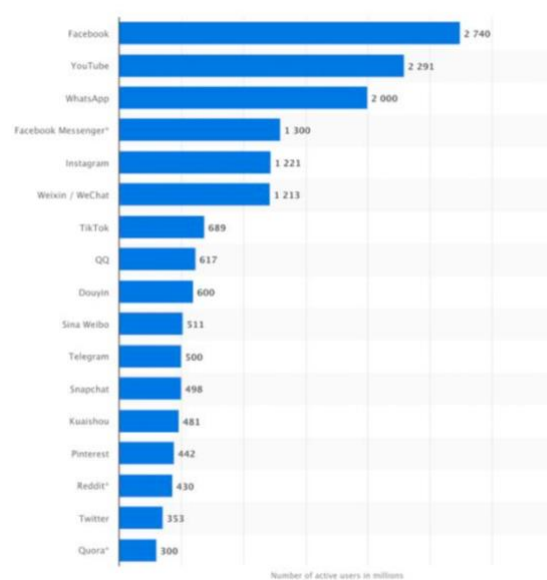


Figure 1- Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2021, ranked by number of active users.

Source: Statista (2021)

The graph in Figure 1 is part of a study on the social networks with the highest number of active users worldwide, as of January 2021. In this graph, it

is possible to identify that the most used social networks are Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp. However, Instagram is in fifth place with 1221 million active users, and TikTok is in seventeenth place with 689 million users.

The primary characteristic of social networks is their tendency for becoming viral and having an almost immediate response, which makes them the ideal platform for engaging people and capitalizing on favourable feedback. In recent years, both the academic and business worlds have paid close attention to the idea of engagement, with its measurement in market research growing in importance. As a result, user engagement is demonstrated through behaviours of different intensity, ranging from straightforward activities like viewing and reading a post to more involved ones like "liking", commenting, reacting, and sharing a post (Bonilla et al., 2019).

Kaur et al. (2019), discovered that there are two types of online interactions, the first one is active interaction which includes, liking, sharing, commenting, and reacting and the second is passive interaction which includes clicking, watching, viewing, and hovering.

Having said that, the number of likes, shares, and comments, are the metrics that are most frequently used to gather how engaged users are with social networks (Bonilla et al., 2019).

Regarding the use and impact of each interaction, people are eight times more inclined to click the like button compared to sharing or commenting. Having said that, the number of likes on a post helps to show positive feedback

for the item on display. However, sharing does show a greater commitment and because of that there is a strong link between the content users are inclined to share and their own self-presentation. Sharing also increases the content visibility.

Lastly and concerning comments, these are user generated content written under posts published by other users. Comments can play an important role in influencing readers' perceptions on important topics as well as changing opinions. To sum up, sharing and commenting have more impact than liking since they require more reasoning and effort (Kaur et al., 2019).

1.2. BRANDING & BRAND AUTHENTICITY

Branding can be defined as a creative process that utilizes research techniques as well as the skills of specialized personnel and it can be summed up as creating distinctiveness that is relevant to consumers (Murphy & Murphy, 1993).

According to Todor (2014), branding is, in its essence, a strategic marketing decision that follows through its structure in order to achieve several key objectives. These objectives must come from a strategic marketing perspective and may focus on the following elements: competitiveness, sustainable competitive advantage, and profitability above average.

Brand authenticity, already a significant characteristic, has evolved into a crucial asset for brands in the face of a quickly evolving marketplace, significant behavioural shifts, and rising social media usage (Campagna et al., 2021).

Consumers' awareness of the value of real brands continues to rise. According to recent research, brand, authenticity was cited as a critical factor by 90% of generation X and millennials when choosing which brands to support.

There have been several definitions put forth in the literature, such as being unique in one's craft, being genuine and the "real thing", having a distinctive identity, consistency, essence and self-authentication and lastly, having self-congruency, by articulating brand authenticity from a six-dimensional standpoint, accuracy, connectivity, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and competency, where the application of the particular dimension can vary depending on the situation (Campagna et al., 2021).

Brand authenticity has been defined in a variety of ways, including adhering to one's core values and beliefs, being sincere and truthful, following through on marketing claims, being transparent, and having consistency in marketing communication.

Taking that into consideration, if a definition of brand authenticity is to fully address the full scope and key areas of this variable, it must not only take into account tried-and-true indicators, like being genuine, open, and honest. It

must also be contemporary and include areas that encompass consumers' desire for individualization and customization, whilst encompassing the changing conditions in the Marketplace.

Therefore, and according to Campagna et al. (2021, p. 138), brand authenticity can be defined as *“a genuine brand with a unique style that cares about being open and honest with consumers and will survive times and trends”*.

The terms used in the previous definition come from a variety of authors. The application of "genuine" is consistent with Napoli et al. (2014), who defined it as representing reality and the truth and not being false. The concept of "unique" is taken from Kadirov (2010), who emphasizes the significance of being viewed as unique and having a distinctive, unmistakable style. Followed by the authors Ilicic and Webster (2014), who emphasize the value of companies focusing on openness and honesty in their relationships with consumers, for the "open and honest" aspect of the definition.

Lastly and for the definition of "surviving times and trends," Morhart et al. (2015) is cited, and it emphasizes the significance of brands having continuity and a rich history, including a pattern of success through lengthy time periods and varied trends.

Brand authenticity is more crucial than ever because of the rapid expansion and adoption by consumers of the digital world and social media platforms, as well as the improvements brands have made to these platforms. Having said that, these are frequently the only way that consumers interact

with brands, as a consequence content that comes across as unauthentic can quickly turn consumers off while negative feedback circulates (Campagna et al., 2021).

Nowadays there is a growing importance of social media for branding purposes, it is becoming a crucial platform where businesses can create and develop the identity and image of their brands, but it is also a place for dialogues and active conversations, which can increase engagement and connection. The likelihood of continued interest increases with the authenticity of a brand's content, imagery, and communication (Campagna et al., 2021).

Authenticity plays an important role in brand activism, the main reason being the continuous growth of consumer awareness concerning social issues. In addition, there is a growing trend regarding consumers' perceptions of brand activism as inauthentic. Having said that, 56% of consumers indicate that too many brands are now using social issues as a Marketing strategy and consequently as a way of increasing sales. (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Regarding Branding and its authenticity, it can be stated that Branding is not a cynical activity. The reasoning for that is that consumers are part of the complete process, which means that they do not have to buy the brand/product if they do not like it or if it does not offer value. In the end, they can always reject it (Murphy & Murphy, 1993).

1.3. DIGITAL ACTIVISM

Activists are moral actors that promote social, legal, business, economic, political, and environmental reforms through their communication and practices (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018).

In accordance with McCafferty (2011), There is a visible increase in the use of blogs, social media sites, mobile apps, and other online tools by activists in order to propagate their messages and gather support. This is because technology can be a highly effective tool in activism, more specifically video content is a great way of grabbing viewers' attention and appealing to their emotional side whilst tugging their heartstrings.

Whilst it cannot be negated that online campaigns like this increase awareness of a cause, but opinions on whether they have a meaningful, long-lasting impact vary. According to a number of reputable thinkers, technology does not truly help activism achieve its most important objectives, which are to influence the hearts and minds of the public and bring about substantive change.

On the opposing side of the argument are activists and other decision-makers that argue that it is impossible to quantify the effect on hearts and minds. However, that can be assessed and measured through user traffic statistics, e-petition signature delivery, Facebook likes, among other metrics that show rising support.

It is also believed that social media activism is dependent on weak-link connections. This is because, organizers actively solicit participation from strangers that they have never met, meaning that these connections would not be possible without the aid of social media platforms.

Individuals who are both participating and supporting online activism acknowledge that it is difficult to quantify the extent to which technology motivates individuals to take action regarding social issues. They assert, however, that any publicity, whether from the mainstream media or elsewhere does increase the possibility of influencing perceptions and motivating behaviours. Online platforms enable the sharing of opinions on a particular stance and boost the capability for pure organizational logistics and calls to action. In other words, new activism methods act as a way to amplify and even better organize the traditional methods.

The beliefs and ideas that drive efforts towards change are also the same foundational principles of Web 2.0., which are the need for interaction, cooperation, sharing, and the pursuit of goals.

It involves more than just utilizing technology more frequently, it is about regular people using creativity to explore technology in the aid of social causes in ways that were not initially intended. For example, for connecting activists to data tools that can assist in establishing, managing, and disseminating the quantifiable foundation of their positions (McCafferty, 2011).

Regarding the most relevant social causes online and according to Xu et al. (2023), some of the most pressing social issues are feminism, animal care, and LGBTQI + activism. These fields make petitions and protests proliferate on social media.

Finally, and according to a study done by the Pew Research Centre (2020), social media can have both positive and negative impacts when it comes to building online movements. Some of the positive impacts are, raising awareness, highlighting important issues that might not get a lot of attention, helping to give a voice underrepresented group, changing mindsets and making it easier to hold accountable powerful people for their actions. Regarding the negative impacts, they are distracting people from issues that are truly important and making people think they are making a difference when in reality they are not.

Since there is a need to explore the possibility of digital activism detracting online users from taking real-world action toward social issues (Vredenburg et al., 2020). It becomes fundamental to touch on the ability of digital activism to manipulate and influence actions. According to a study social media can manipulate users to change their behaviours and pursue ends that are not authentically those of the user (Sahebi & Formosa, 2022). So, it can be deducted that indeed digital activism would have the capacity to deter online users from going into the streets and practicing what they believe in.

1.3.1. Social Marketing

According to (Roy, 2016), social marketing can be defined as a comprehensive, strategic, multi-faceted, marketing-based approach that facilitates and/or maintains social good. It takes a citizen-centered approach in which insight developed with participants and stakeholders informs the process.

Social marketing's main objective seeks to develop and incorporate marketing concepts amongst other approaches in order to influence behaviours that will bring benefits to individuals as well as communities for the greater social good. Additionally, it seeks to integrate research, best practices, theories, and participant and partnership insights, to inform the delivery of competition-sensitive and segmented social change programs that are effective, efficient, equitable, and sustainable (iSMA et al., 2013).

According to Dann (2010), social marketing's core function is to facilitate social change by increasing the adoption of positive behaviours or decreasing the use of negative behaviours, depending on the situation, by moving the individual's preference away from negative actions toward more positive outcomes for the overall benefit of the individual, group, or even society.

1.3.2. Brand Activism

Research provided several definitions of the term 'brand activism. The first definition and according to Manfredi-Sánchez (2019), brand activism can be defined as a strategy that aims to influence consumers through the creation of campaigns and is sustained by political and social values. In order to achieve this, it requires a transformation in corporate communication management and social responsibility practices, which takes away from those of social movements.

As claimed by Schoeneck & White (2020), Brand Activism can be observed when a brand makes a public statement to drive change while helping to solve some of society's most pressing problems. It is important to say that these actions must be based on the company's beliefs, purpose, and values.

Regarding the importance of Brand Activism, as a trend in company branding, it is stated that 65% of individuals have a demand for companies to take a stand on social issues (Vredenburg et al., 2020). This trend can be identified especially in younger audiences who are far more progressive and political than their parents. To reach these younger generations, brands must tap into the political energy that generation created and show young people that they can take a stand (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019).

Sarkar and Kotler (2018), define brand activism as business efforts focused on a brand that aim to promote or direct social, political, economic,

and/or environmental changes with the goal of making improvements in society.

To correctly authenticate brand activism, the brand's competency must be assessed, based on the following moral skills: moral sensitivity, vision, and integration. With that in consideration true activist brands must demonstrate competency in all skills. Otherwise, the brand will be seen as deviant, opportunistic, and/or conformist, if and when they demonstrate poor sensitivity, integration, and/or vision respectively (Sibai et al., 2021).

Finally, brand activism can also be defined as the act of taking a stand on controversial social or political issues for which society has yet to reach an agreement on. When brands do take a stand regarding controversial social matters, they are also engaging in controversial activism and by taking that risk they are able to resonate more with consumers (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020).

1.3.3. Slacktivism & Clicktivism

The term Slacktivism refers to individuals who are content to click the "like" button in support of a cause and possibly make other small, supportive actions. But they scarcely possess the emotional fervor necessary to cause a change in the public's perception (McCafferty, 2011).

Clicktivism can be identified when consumers feel that they are contributing to social change through passive liking, sharing of posts, and commenting (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Similarly, to its corollary *clicktivism*, slacktivism is a term that reprehends younger generations for their lack of commitment to “real” social changes and also their lack of willingness to do what is necessary in order to make the world around a better place (Franklin, 2014). This specific term existed long before the Internet came of age in the 1990s with the appearance of W.W.W. and can be defined as actions in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement (Franklin, 2014).

1.4. GENERATIONAL COHORTS

As a means of understanding the perceptions and behaviours of online social media users regarding digital activism, two generations were chosen, Generation Z and Y (Millennials).

Concerning the process of defining generations and creating generational cut-off points, it is important to note that it is not an exact science. Generational cut-offs should be viewed primarily as segmenting tools, that allow for more detailed and precise analyses of different age gaps.

Having said that, a generational cut-off or cohort is composed by individuals who share the same values, external environment, and have

experienced similar life events, which influence their attitudes, beliefs, values, preferences, behaviours and even way of thinking. Cohorts are not initially defined by birth year, but by events that impact a generations' life, which later on can help define age gaps (Reisenwitz, 2021).

Having said that, these boundaries are not arbitrary, the most common form of segmenting is through time spans, but again it is important to mention that there is no agreed-upon formula for how long that span should be (Dimock, 2019).

With the exception of the Boomers as a generation, there are no definitive thresholds by which later generational boundaries are defined. But for analytical purposes, and according to Dimock (2019) Generation Y is defined in this research as those born during the years of 1981- 1996 and Generation Z is defined as those born during the years of 1997-2012, as can be observed in figure 2.

The generations defined

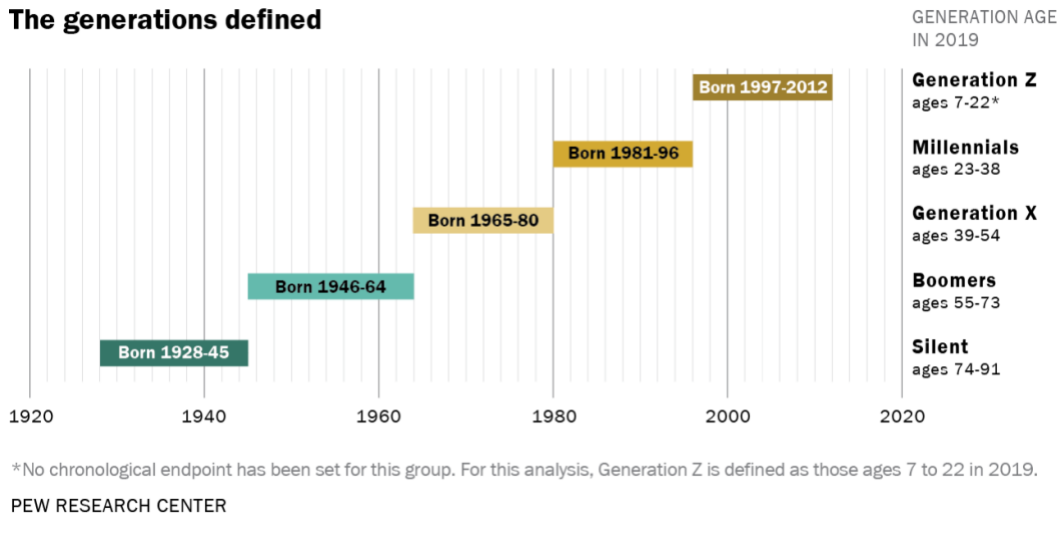


Figure 2 - The Generational Cut-offs.

Source: Pew Research Center (2019)

After explaining how generational gaps are defined it is fundamental to understand the moments that shaped each generation, more precisely, Millennials and Generation Z in order to fully distinguish them as potential online activists.

1.4.1 Millennials & Gen Z

The term, Generation Y, was first used to describe the final generation to be born wholly in the 20th century in 1993 by Advertising Agency. These individuals are currently between 26 and 39 years old. Also known as Millennials, Gen Y are the first generation to have an online presence, especially when it comes to being on social media. Additionally, this generation would

rather spend money on experiences like travel than on material things (Reisenwitz, 2021).

In addition to high unemployment rates and decreasing salaries, Millennials have experienced high technology advancements, stock market crashes and the increase of housing prices, Wall Street scandals, and the 2009 recession (Larson et al., 2016). They have struggled with areas such as independence of thought, taking decisions and show an aversion to risk, this is due to the fear of making mistakes, failing and a need for structure because they were shielded and protected whilst being pressured to succeed by their parents (Larson et al., 2016).

This generation was shaped by many events, one of them being, a phenomenon called globalisation, which created a blurring of boundaries between countries, the adoption of different cultures, and the increased availability of products and services from around the world due to the internet.

Another one of the events that shaped most Millennials as a generation is the 9/11 terrorist attack on the twin towers in New York. This is because, at that time, many of these individuals were between the ages of 5 and 20 and were old enough to comprehend the gravity of the event as well as its historical significance. Whilst most members of Gen Z have little or no memory of the event (Dimock, 2019).

Even though this generation grew up having dual-income households which guaranteed good conditions for their personal development, (Hysa et al.,

2021) most Millennials came of age and entered the workforce at the height of the 2009 economic recession came to be. This phenomenon affected many Millennials' life choices and future earning, providing them with a slow entrance to adulthood, which will have long-term effects on their overall life (Dimock, 2019).

Although Millennials developed in a digital landscape and are comfortable with technologies there is a consensus that Gen Z is much more internet-savvy and has a higher digital knowledge than Millennials (Reisenwitz, 2021).

Generation Z individuals, share many characteristics with Millennials, however, there is a common opinion among researchers that they differ in many aspects. This Generation is a multitasking generation, where social media is their main form of communication, they are very open to the world, however, they are not financially independent. The main reason being that they are not yet professionally employed and hence are completely dependent on their parents (Hysa et al., 2021).

One reason why Gen Z is referred to as the technology generation is because its members were born a decade after the widespread introduction of the World Wide Web (Reisenwitz, 2021).

According to Reisenwitz (2021) Gen Z is the most app-friendly and website-savvy generation that uses the Internet for most of its daily tasks. Additionally, it has a high interest in new technologies, as well as a need to be

safe and escape reality. This generation tends to have high expectations and an appreciation for experiences. It is predicted that Gen Z will be the largest generation by 2034, with approximately 78 million individuals.

Taking into consideration that Gen Z the first true mobile native generation that grew-up in an environment of smartphones, tablets, and the internet, they can be considered more technologically dependent and up to date (Reisenwitz, 2021).

Similarly, to Millennials, Gen Z has grown up with an aversion to risk, viewing it as unacceptable. An event that market Gen Z as whole was witnessing the 2008 recession, marked by the loss of millions of jobs as well as the loss of homes. Again, and similarly to the Millennials, this generation would prefer to save than spend money, making them frugal individuals (Reisenwitz, 2021).

Lastly, Gen Z is the most racially and ethnically diverse adult generation in the nation's history (Dimock, 2019).

Regarding Brand Authenticity and these two generations, first it is important to note that both have significant purchasing power and value brand authenticity and because of that, the significance and impact of this concept can only grow in the future.

This new generations of consumers demand authenticity from brands, so all of a brand's touchpoints, from communication to imagery must be

perceived as authentic. Additionally, it is important that brands follow through on their brand communications as they are the main driver for perceived authenticity; and if inconsistent can trigger, spread unfavourable information about the brand, especially with the rise in social media usage (Campagna et al., 2021).

1.4.2 Gender Disparities

Online news sources are equally informative for both men and women, and internet usage appears to be at comparable levels, with the majority reporting they spend more than 5 hours a day online. However, there are variations in the qualitative aspects of internet use, and more particularly, in the kind of social media they favour. Men use Twitter and YouTube more than women, 2% versus 7.2% and 35.5% versus 44.2%, respectively, whereas women use Instagram more than men, 81.3% versus 68.1% (Magda, 2019).

According to one study, where the gender gap is statistically significant, women are more likely than men to protest, meaning that the negative value suggests that women are less likely to abstain from protest. Accordingly, men are typically urged to engage in more confrontational activities while women are frequently encouraged to engage in less confrontational ones. Accordingly, women are more inclined to participate in non-confrontational strategies like boycotting and signing petitions. Whereas men, are more likely to have

experience with direct action protests like demonstrations, strikes, or building occupations. Lastly, men are also more prone to engage in both types of activities, confrontational and nonconfrontational.

The nations where gender ideology adopts a more conventional direction are that where gendered activism is most prevalent. In contrast, nations with more progressive gender ideologies tend to have lower levels of gendered activity (Dodson, K., 2015).

2. METHODOLOGY

Following the conceptualization of the theoretical framework, in this chapter, it can be found the research methodology, which includes: the general objective, the specific objectives, the methodological approach, the empirical setting, the data collection techniques and sources, the data collection process, and lastly the data analysis procedure.

2.1. RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The term research philosophy alludes to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge. Researching implies making assumptions, that will inevitably shape the way the findings are interpreted. A well-thought-out and robust set of assumptions will constitute a credible research philosophy, which will sustain the methodological choice, research strategy and data collection techniques and analysis procedures (Saunders et al., 2019).

In order to understand the research philosophy, it is essential to be reflexive, which implies, questioning our own thinking and actions, and learning to evaluate and analyse our own beliefs with the same rigor as we would apply to the beliefs of others (Haynes 2012).

This study's research philosophy is interpretivism and it emerged as a critique of positivism from a subjective viewpoint. This philosophy emphasises that individuals create significance and because of that they stand apart from physical phenomena. Interpretivism is explicitly subjectivist due to its emphasis on complexity, richness, multiple interpretations, and meaning creation, hence the importance of empathy on the part of the researcher for this philosophy (Saunders et al., 2019).

The goal of interpretivist study is to develop fresh, more in-depth perspectives on social contexts and worlds, because of that the focus of this research will be on the participants' lived experiences, that is, the participants' memories and interpretations of those experiences.

Entering the social world of the study participants and comprehending it from their perspective presents a challenge for the interpretivist researcher, as these situations are often challenging, complex and unique. They depict a specific collection of events and interactions involving people coming together at a specific moment (Saunders et al., 2019).

Accordingly, this study's main goal, as it was previously stated, is to explore the perceptions and behaviours of Instagram female users belonging to Gen Z and Millennial generations in regard to digital activism.

2.2. GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The present study's main research objective is "To explore the perceptions and behaviours of Instagram female users belonging to Gen Z and Millennial generations in regard to digital activism".

2.3. SPECIFIC RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To understand if female Instagram users think that digital activism detracts individuals from taking real life actions to mitigate social issues.
2. To define clicktivism and slacktivism.
3. To explore the positive and negative impacts of "clicktivism" in concerns to Instagram female users taking a stand on social issues.
4. To analyse Instagram female users' perceptions towards the creation of social change through passive liking, social media sharing and online commenting.
5. To understand how brands can ensure that their online activism is regarded as authentic.
6. To identify the top three social issues on Instagram that create the highest number of interactions.
7. To identify the differences between Gen z and Millennials females.

2.4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The choice of research approach for this study is qualitative and exploratory. This methodology is conducted to handle new problem areas which haven't been explored before, in this case, the perceptions and behaviours of Instagram users belonging to Gen Z or Millennial generations in regard to digital activism. In addition, this methodological approach helps ensure a depth of understanding that is associated with words, sounds, emotions, and other elements that are non-quantifiable. Finally, it is based on a data-to-theory approach, given its inductive nature (Saunders et al., 2019).

To easily understand what qualitative research is, it is important to understand what it is not. In this case, qualitative research is not a gathering of procedures dependent on statistical analyses. On the contrary, qualitative research is based on qualitative data, more specifically, detailed descriptions of phenomenon, behaviours, recordings, interview transcriptions, speeches, direct citations, in other words data with more detail and depth as well as interactions between individuals and organizations. Qualitative research does not seek to enumerate, or measure studied events, nor use statistical instruments for the data analyses (Câmara, 2013).

To summarize, qualitative research allows for data collection techniques, such as interviews and data analysis procedures, such as categorising data, that generate non-numerical data (Saunders et al., 2019).

2.5. EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

For this study, the primary source of information used was semi-structured Interviews. Concerning the type of sampling chosen, it was non-probability and purposive. In non-probability or non-random sampling, the probability of each case being selected from the target population is unknown, meaning that it is impossible to answer research questions or to address objectives that require statistical inferences about the characteristics of the population.

Additionally, and because the sampling is purposive, it is implied that judgement to select the cases is used, this will enable the researcher to answer your research question(s) and to meet your objectives. For this reason, it can also be addressed as judgemental sampling (Saunders et al., 2019).

With that in consideration, the criteria chosen in order to define focus were the following:

- To belong to either Gen Z or Millennial Generation (ages between, respectively).
- To be an Instagram user.
- To be a female.

It is important to note that for an individual to belong to either Gen Z or the Millennial generation, also known as Gen Y, it must have been born during the years of 1997-2012 and 1981- 1996, respectively (Dimock, 2019).

Having in consideration the exploratory nature of this research, semi-structured Interviews were identified as the most appropriate technique for this study. This data collection technique will enable to understand the perceptions and behaviours of Instagram users belonging to Gen Z or Millennial generations in regard to digital activism.

2.6. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

According to Dawson (2002), semi-structured interviews are the most used type of interview in qualitative social studies. They are a useful method that allow access to individuals' opinions, that cannot be secured by formal questionnaires or open-ended interviews (Zakaria, 2004).

Additionally, it allows the researcher to gather specific and detailed information that later can be compared and contrasted in a precise matter to the information from the other interviews. To enable that comparison it is strongly advised that the researcher produces a list of specific questions/ list of specific topics to be discussed and carried out through all the interviews. However, it is still important that the interview remains flexible so that other (Dawson, 2002).

Unstructured and semi-structured interviews are considered "non-standard." The term "qualitative research interviews" is frequently used to describe them. In semi-structured interviews, each interview is guided by a

predetermined list of themes and perhaps some key questions that are linked to those themes, that are decided based on the philosophical presuppositions.

By adopting a realist attitude, there is an assumption that the undiscovered truth is external to the interpretations of the participants. In this specific case, semi-structured interviews are the best fit, since it enables the researcher to systematically explore each theme with every. By doing that, it allows for the comparison of the responses to each theme to determine the underlying truth (Saunders et al., 2019), which in this case is to explore the perceptions and behaviours of Instagram female users belonging to Gen Z and Millennial generations in regard to digital activism.

2.7. DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

In the phase of the data collection process 10 participants were interviewed online via Zoom, using the data collection technique of semi-structured interviews, as they allow for a more flexible and detailed collection of qualitative information.

The first step of this process was to select and identify the participants, as can be seen in the following table:

Identification	Age	Generational Cohort
A.R. T	27	Millennial
C.O	23	Gen Z
M.R	23	Gen Z
C.J. V	26	Millennial
L.P	23	Gen Z
B.C. S	22	Gen Z
R. L	26	Millennial
F. J	23	Gen Z
D.M	26	Millennial
J.C	29	Millennial

Table 1- Participants Identification.

Source: Self-elaboration.

2.7.1. Interview Questions

This study’s semi-structured interview questions were created by gathering specific information written by authors cited in the literature review chapter and by linking them to the specific research objectives previously defined, as can be observed in table number 2.

Specific Research Objectives	Questions	Adapted From
<p>To understand if female Instagram users think that digital activism detracts individuals from taking real life actions to mitigate social issues.</p>	<p>Q1. Can you tell me about your thoughts on digital activism?</p> <p>Q2. Do you think that digital activism is an effective way to bring about social change?</p> <p>Q3. Do you think that digital activism can detract individuals from taking real-life actions to mitigate social issues?</p>	<p>Vredenburg et al. (2020)</p>
<p>To analyse Instagram female users' perceptions towards the creation of social change through passive liking, social media sharing and online commenting.</p>	<p>Q4. Have you ever used Instagram to spread awareness about a cause or issue that you are passionate about? If so, can you describe the experience and the impact it had?</p> <p>Q5. How do you feel that your online presence and actions make a difference in supporting social issues?</p>	<p>Vredenburg et al. (2020)</p>

	<p>Q6. How do you think social change can be created through passive liking, social media sharing and online commenting?</p> <p>Q7. Do you think there are any differences in the impact each interaction can have? If so, what are they?</p>	
<p>To understand how brands can ensure that their online activism is regarded as authentic.</p>	<p>Q8. Have you ever been influenced by a brand regarding online activism? If so, can you describe the experience?</p> <p>Q9. Can you describe any strategies that brands use to influence online activism?</p> <p>Q10. How can brands ensure that their involvement in online activism is authentic and not seen as performative or opportunistic?</p>	<p>Manfredi-Sánchez (2019)</p>

<p>To define clicktivism and slacktivism.</p>	<p>Q11. How would you define the term "Clicktivism"?</p> <p>Q12. How would you define the term "Slacktivism"?</p> <p>Q13. Do you think that clicktivism and slacktivism are the same thing?</p>	<p>Vredenburg et al. (2020)</p>
<p>To explore the positive and negative impacts of "clicktivism" in concerns to Instagram female users taking a stand on social issues.</p>	<p>Q14. Have you ever participated in clicktivism on Instagram? If so, can you describe your experience?</p> <p>Q15. Can you describe any positive impacts that clicktivism has had on you or others?</p> <p>Q16. Do you think that clicktivism can be an effective way to bring about social change?</p> <p>Q17. Can you describe any potential negative consequences of clicktivism?</p>	<p>Vredenburg et al. (2020)</p>

	<p>Q18. Do you think that clicktivism can be seen as a way to avoid taking real-life actions to mitigate social issues?</p>	
<p>To identify the top three social issues on Instagram that create the highest number of interactions.</p>	<p>Q19. In your opinion, what are the top three social issues on Instagram that create the highest number of interactions?</p> <p>Q20. Can you describe any reasons why these issues might be more popular than others?</p> <p>Q21. Do you think that the popularity of these issues has any impact on their ability to bring about social change?</p>	<p>Xu et al. (2023)</p>
	<p>Q22. In your opinion, are there any differences in the way that Gen Z and Millennial females approach social issues and online activism?</p>	

<p>To identify the differences between Gen Z and Millennial females.</p>	<p>Q23. Can you describe any differences you have noticed?</p> <p>Q24. Do you think that these differences have any impact on the effectiveness of online activism among these groups?</p>	<p>(Reisenwitz, 2021).</p>
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Table 2 - Semi-structured Interview Questions.

Source: Self-elaboration.

2.8. Data Analyses

This chapter intends to analyse the data gathered in the semi-structured interviews, where all the results obtained will be presented and discussed. Through this chapter all the primary data will be analysed with the support of the literature review previously defined.

The data analysis process used was content analysis, which consists of communication analysis techniques that use systematic and objective procedures to describe the content of messages (Bardin, 2011). This process is composed by three main steps, first the pre-analysis, secondly the material exploration, and lastly the treatment of results which encompasses both the inference and interpretation phases (Câmara, 2013).

The first phase, the pre-analysis allows the researcher to organize the data collected. Here, a precise scheme of work is established, with well-defined procedures, but still allowing for some flexibility. It is also the first contact with the documents and demands a more superficial reading (Bardin, 2011).

In this specific case, of semi-structured interviews, after the data collection, the interviews were transcribed, using the Microsoft 360 – Word Transcription tool, representing the core of this research. This procedure was followed by the organisation of the data gathered from the 10 interviews and by the first reading of each individual interview, through a skimming reading technique, which was then organised by research question.

The second phase was the material exploration, where the data was analysed in-depth in order to allow for the identification of patterns. These patterns were then put into different categories, that become more appropriate and clearer as the research progressed. In order to aid this process, the program NVIVO was utilized.

The third and last phase of this process is the content analysis, previously defined as results treatment. In this part the results were interpreted and made significant in order to gather important insights, using an inference process.

3.RESULTS

3.1 INTERVIEW RESULTS

The interviews were conducted with 10 people, all female, belonging to Gen Z or the Millennial generation and aged between 23 and 29 years old. The topics analysed were based on questions posed in the semi-structured interview guide and based on each point previously presented in the literature review.

3.1.1.To understand if female Instagram users think that digital activism detracts individuals from taking real life actions to mitigate social issues.

Regarding the first specific objective it was important to first understand the interviewees general ideas on the topic of digital activism. Having said, regardless of the generation every interviewee mentioned that digital activism is something that happens online, more specifically in social media platforms and it regards activism on a variety of social issues. Additionally, there was a common trend of mentioning its importance and the fact that it has the tendency to grow even more. As C.O. (Gen Z) and J.C. (Millennial) respectively state:

C.O. – “I think that activism in social media and all of that is pretty important nowadays because it is the way that younger generations consume information. I also think it is still gaining importance, so we have not reached the maximum importance yet.”

J.C. - “Online activism is defending or exposing something regarding social causes that is your personal opinion through online platforms.”

Concerning the effectiveness of digital activism, every interviewee regardless of the generation answered in a positive way saying that digital activism can indeed be effective. However, even though every individual agreed that it was an effective tool, some of them also said that it had some challenges and that the impact might not always be positive. As F.J. (Gen Z) and C.J.V. (Millennial) respectively express:

F.J. – “Yes, I think it can be. I think some people take advantage of the situation, so if there is something trendy going on with the climate, some people will take advantage by talking about the topic to gain followers. But at the end not considering the intentions it has the power to influence people and to bring change.”

C.J.V. – “Yes, because it enables people that usually don’t go on the streets to protest to also share their voices and again it enables them to reach a bigger audience.”

Concerning the possibility of digital activism detracting individual from taking real-life actions, the majority of interviewees (6) said that digital activism could indeed detract since it is easier and even more comfortable to take action online. Regarding each generation, there was a larger number of members belonging to Gen Z agreeing on this premise. As expressed by M.R. (Gen Z) and A.R.T. (Millennial):

M.R. – “It can motivate but it can also act as detractor, it has both sides of the coin. Having said that, it can be the easy way out of going out into the streets and taking action.”

A.R.T. – “The act of sharing, signing a petition online or just talking about that subject on a post or comment makes you feel part of something. This can actually make you forget about the need to be more present physically in order to make a change. In other words, interacting online can give the psychological sensation of helping and creating change.”

The remaining participants said that was not the case, instead that digital activism worked as a complement of traditional activism. As expressed by B.C.S. (Gen Z) and R.L. (Millennial):

B.C.S. – “I don’t think it actually detracts people from taking action, it just depends on the person, also if the cause affects them directly or not and their involvement with it.”

R.L. – “No.I honestly think digital activism works as a complement of normal activism and makes it much easier to take real measures, that is, it is a promoter of activism and not the other way around.”

3.1.2.To define clicktivism and slacktivism.

Regarding the definition of the term Clicktivism there was a general consensus among generations that it was about doing activism online through social media interactions. As B.C.S. (Gen Z) and R.L. (Millennial) respectively state:

B.C.S. – “It is related with promoting activism, by clicking, liking, sharing, and commenting online.”

R.L. – “Clicktivism is a type of activism that does not require taking action to the streets, that keeps individuals behind a screen and allows for the validation of opinions on a certain subject.”

In regard to defining the slacktivism, the majority of interviewees associated the term with a negative connotation, such as doing online activism without any specific intention, doing it just for the sake of it, not believing in what is being said, having no interest and being lazy. As it is stated by F.J. (Gen Z) and D.M. (Millennial) respectively:

F.J. – “Doing activism just for the sake of it and with no intention of creating actual change.”

D.M. – “Being too lazy to do something proactive. You sharing something and clicking gives you the false sense of being an activist when in reality you are doing nothing relevant.”

Concerning if these two terms meant the same thing, every interviewee, apart from 1 belonging to Gen Z, agreed that they were two different concepts

and hence signified different things. As B.C.S. (Gen Z) and D.M. (Millennial) respectively express:

B.C.S. – “No, they are different, one is positive and the other is negative, respectively.”

D.M. – “I think there is a difference. Clicktivism can have a big and positive impact and it means that you still care. Whereas slacktivism means that there is no interest from the person that is doing it and has a negative connotation.”

3.1.3. To explore the positive and negative impacts of “clicktivism” in concerns to Instagram female users taking a stand on social issues.

Regarding the participation in clicktivism every single interviewee said they had previously been part of it, whether it was by liking, sharing, or commenting a post. As it is started by M.R. (Gen Z) and D.M. (Millennial) respectively:

M.R. – “Liking I do a lot to show agreement and to give visibility to certain issues. However, I don’t think I have ever commented something. I usually only share and like.”

D.M. – “I think there is a difference. Clicktivism can have a big and positive impact and it means that you still care. Whereas slacktivism means that there is no interest from the person that is doing it and has a negative connotation.”

Some of the positive impacts mentioned by the interviewees were, the creation of awareness and visibility, starting discussions, generating call to actions, spreading knowledge and information, showing support, making people feel heard and promoting the changing of behaviours. As it is respectively mentioned by M.R. (Gen Z) and C.J.V. (Millennial):

M.R. – “Generating awareness, starting conversations and in some cases, it can generate call to actions that transport themselves into the real world.”

C.J.V. – “Spreading awareness, knowledge and changing of behaviours.”

Concerning the effectiveness of clicktivism, every single interviewee apart from 1 belonging to the millennial generation answered in a positive way,

saying that they thought clicktivism could be an effective way of bringing about change. As respectively stated by F.J. (Gen Z) and R.L. (Millennial):

F.J. - "It is effective, it can be a means to an end in the sense that even if you are not acting because of it you can still influence others to make a change".

R.L. - "No, I think online activism can definitely start change, it can work as an excellent lever, however it is not enough to achieve real social change, it needs to be combined with other tools."

Regarding the negative effects of clicktivism some of the impacts mentioned were: the causes not being genuine or reliable, spreading misinformation and fake news, the spreading of invalid sources, biased information, the creation of tunnel vision, manipulation of ideas, the lack of real-world impact, being less critical and less reflexive about issues, the existence of scams, the minimization of movements and detraction of people from participating by bullying the issue and creating the false sensation that you are doing something towards a solution. As it is stated by L.P. (Gen Z) and D.M. (Millennial) respectively:

L.P. - "The lack of real-world impact, being that it is online. Also the fact that the information is so fast passed and easy to scroll past, means that you are less critical and less reflexive on the subject."

D.M. – “Fake news, misinformation, biased information, manipulation of ideas and tunnel vision.”

In regard to the interviewees perception on clicktivism being seen as a way of avoiding taking real life actions in order to aid social causes and mitigate them, the vast majority (8), answered in a positive way that indeed it could happen. As it is expressed by C.O. (Gen Z) and A.R.T. (Millennial) respectively:

C.O. – “Yes, it can create the wrong idea of actually doing something, this is because, just by sharing people think they are doing their part in changing the world.”

A.R.T – “Yes, because it creates the false sensation that you are doing something it can detract you from taking real life action because you feel you have done your part.”

Only 2 having answered negatively, 1 from each generation, saying that was not their perception and both actions were not necessarily related, that it depended on the person, that having an active profile and sharing it online can actually promote action and real-life activism. As it is expressed by L.P. (Gen Z) and J.C. (Millennial) respectively:

L.P. – “I think it depends more on the person. Because some people can be inspired to take action because of those online interactions whether others can move further away from that reality.”

J.C. – “No, I don't think it's directly related, it depends on the person. Having an active profile and sharing it online can actually promote action.”

3.1.4. To analyse Instagram female users' perceptions towards the creation of social change through passive liking, social media sharing and online commenting.

In concerns to the interviews role in spreading awareness on Instagram every one of them said they had previously used the platform to do so apart from J.C., belonging to the Millennial generation, who said that she had never done it, at least not in an intentional way and that she was not the type of person to give her opinion online.

Regarding the impact, most of the answers mentioned giving out knowledge, motivating people to take action, spreading visibility, awareness and creating open discussions. As it is stated by L.P. (Gen Z) and C.J.V. (Millennial), respectively:

L.P. – “Yes, I have used it to spread awareness about different social causes. I have previously shared on Instagram stories about a group rape that happened in Spain and also shared about where the protests about that issue were taking place. Additionally, I have used it to spread awareness about climate change, because I was doing Erasmus in Germany and decided to participate in a protest there and shared it on social media. Regarding the impact it helped spread visibility, awareness and knowledge about topics that weren’t being talked about in the mainstream media.

C.J.V. – “Yes, I have. I usually share in my Instagram stories from different sources that I consider valid. My experience is honestly quite surprising because I receive a lot of messages asking about the topics and people saying that they weren’t aware of them.”

Concerning the differences their online presence and actions could make in supporting social issues, the participants enumerated the following, spreading awareness, knowledge, starting conversations, promoting the discussion of ideas, changing mindsets, helping people be more reflexive and critical about issues. As it is mentioned by B.C.S. (Gen Z) and R.L. (Millennial), respectively:

B.C.S. – “It can help spreading awareness, changing mindsets and bringing discussions to the table into the offline world.”

R.L. – I feel like even if you have a small online following like me, the smallest step, even if it’s just a post or a comment, as long as it triggers someone positively or negatively and creates a discussion of ideas, it is always very positive. So, I feel like I can make a difference by making other reflect and be more critical about certain issues.”

According to the interviewees social change can be created through passive liking, social media sharing and online commenting, by increasing online visibility, starting conversations and discussions, spreading awareness, showcasing different perspectives, spreading information. It can also help bring discussions to the offline world and changing mindsets. Lastly, the sharing of knowledge as well as experiences through, online testimonials. As it is enumerated by M.R. (Gen Z) and C.J.V. (Millennial), respectively:

M.R. – “Passive liking can help the engagement of posts and make them more visible. Sharing can help start conversations and spread awareness whereas Commenting can help create discussions and start debates about certain topics as well as showcase different perspectives.”

C.J.V. – “For example, asking brands in the comments how things are made and making challenging questions can help generate buzz and create important discussions. It can also help avoid misinformation by commenting on something that is fake and pointing that out.”

Regarding the differences in impact of each interaction, opinions were divided between two possibilities. The first was that sharing was indeed the most effective interaction to promote social change online, which had a higher number of Gen Z agreeing with that, as it is expressed by B.C.S. (Gen Z) and A.R.T. (Millennial), respectively:

B.C.S. – “For me sharing is the most effective and impactful interaction, since it can reach a larger number of people. If I like a post, you probably won’t see that I like it. However, commenting also helps showing support for a cause and validation.”

A.R.T. – “Sharing is more effective and has a bigger impact because it has more visibility than the other interactions. Commenting is the second best because you can interact with the other people commenting the post and maybe share some enlightening conversation. Liking only, you can see it so for me it’s the least effective.”

The second possibility was the three interactions being equally as effective, the only difference being their purpose and the way in which they are used, which had a higher number of Millennials agreeing between them. As it is expressed by L.P. (Gen Z) and R.L. (Millennial), respectively:

L.P. – “They are all important and can be equally effective, however they are used for different purposes. Sharing helps spread the word, to spread awareness and information, commenting is good to start discussions, to create reflection and to express an opinion. Lastly liking, even though it only affects you it is a good way to show support. However, sharing and commenting involve more reflection and engagement from your part.”

R.L. – “I think they can all be impactful just in different ways, it depends on the purpose and of the subject. For example, a like can promote the dissemination of a particular subject and reach more people in a more general and broad way. This is also the case for sharing since it can be used for spreading ideas as well. At a more specific level, the comment allows for the changing of mentalities and allows for the discussion of specific subjects in more depth.”

3.1.5. TO UNDERSTAND HOW BRANDS CAN ENSURE THAT THEIR ONLINE ACTIVISM IS REGARDED AS AUTHENTIC.

In concerns to being influenced by a brand regarding online activism, nine out of the ten participants said they had been previously influenced and proceed to give examples. As it is explained by C.O. (Gen Z) and D.M. (Millennial), respectively:

C.O. – “Yes, I remember that some years ago it was not usual to have wooden toothbrushes and I saw an ad of a Portuguese brand advertising it. It was because of that ad and some of the influencers I follow that I decided to buy it and be more sustainable.”

D.M. – “Yes, I have been previously influenced. For example, I have stopped buying fast fashion because of some influencers I follow. It has also made me stop buying from amazon because I was made aware of their unethical practices towards their employees and tax fraud. I have also been influenced to participate in marches because I saw they were happening online and also signed petitions because of brands sharing.”

Some of the strategies that brands use to influence online activism mentioned by the interviewees were, using activist personalities, sharing information and knowledge about activism, advocating for it, changing the

colours of the brand's communication to the issue in cause, being more inclusive, avoiding sales and promotions, being transparent regarding pricing, showcasing in a concrete way how their impact in the environment is being reduced. As it is stated by L.P. (Gen Z) and A.R.T. (Millennial), respectively:

L.P. - "For example, I know of a brand that sells reusable bottles and shares information related to that topic, like how you can recycle plastic, the pollution in the oceans. So basically, their strategy is advocating and giving out knowledge related to the product they sell."

A.R.T. - "I know this Spanish brand, Alohas, they try to adopt sustainability by avoiding sales and promotions, they also show a lot of information on their website, and they are transparent about their pricing."

In regard to ways that brands can help ensure authenticity concerning online activism, some of the answers given by the interviewees were, sharing real stories with real people, being consistent, going accordingly with the values of the brand, talking about issues directly related with the brand, walking the talk, respecting regulations, showing KPI's, sharing reports and being transparent. Having said that, the aspect mentioned the most was consistency. As it is explained by F.J. (Gen Z) and J.C. (Millennial), respectively:

F.J. – “To be something related with the brand, so for example, if it’s a brand that sells swimwear it makes total sense for them to be inclusive in sizes and to show different bodies, going according to the brands values and image. The second would be for them to try and approach the issue in a consistent way not only when it’s trendy.”

J.C. – “For me, a brand is more authentic when the problem addressed is in line with the company's ideas or at least it is related.”

3.1.6. To identify the top three social issues on Instagram that create the highest number of interactions.

Concerning the top three social issues that create the highest number of interactions according to the participants are, Environmental issues (5), Wars (5) and Feminism (7). Additionally, the interviewees also mentioned LGBTQ (4), and Racism (4) with close proximity. Regarding each generation the most popular topics for Gen Z were Feminism and Wars and for the Millennial generation Feminism, Environmental issues, and Racism. As it is identified by F.J. (Gen Z) and A.R.T. (Millennial), respectively:

F.J. – “Body Inclusivity, LGBTQ and Feminism.”

A.R.T. – “LGBTQ, Racism and Environmental Issues.”

Some of the reasons that might contribute to the popularity of these issues are the fact that participants can feel their direct effect and consequences, they are easy to relate to, they are in vogue, the social context of the interviewees, there being a general consensus on the topics, their currency, their ability to make people emotional and sensitive, the fact that they impact a lot of people and there being a societal pressure to do so. As it is explained by L.P. (Gen Z) And C.J.V. (Millennial), respectively:

L.P. – “I think they are not as controversial as other issues, there is more of a shared opinion, so it’s easy for a lot of people to talk about them. Also, because they are recent and current problems that are quite impactful.”

C.J.V. – “Because they are issues that influence a large amount of people, issues that are palpable and imminent.”

Regarding if the popularity of the issues previously mentioned and their capacity to bring about change were related there was a general consensus in the sense that every participant agreed that indeed the popularity of the issues had any impact on their ability to bring about social change and that even if

small there was a positive correlation between them. As explained by M.R. (Gen Z) and D.M. (Millennial), respectively:

M.R. – “Yes, if it is getting a lot of traction, we see that it is a problem and something happens, it doesn’t solve it, but it helps, there is definitely a positive correlation between the two.”

D.M. – “Yes, I do see more change happening because they are more talked about. For example, the creation of quotas to demand the employment of woman.”

3.1.7.To identify the differences between Gen z and Millennials females.

Regarding if there were differences between Gen Z and the Millennial generation, every single one of the interviewees agreed that there are differences in the way that each generation approached online activism and social issues in general. As stated by B.C.S. (Gen Z) and C.J.V. (Millennial), respectively:

B.C.S. – “Yes there are differences, however, there are a lot of similarities as you get closer to the generational cohorts.”

C.J.V. – “Yes, there are definitely generational differences in the way of approaching social issues online.”

Regarding specific differences, nine out of the ten participants agreed that Gen Z is a lot more active on social media than the Millennials generation. Additionally, they also mentioned the fact that these two generations usually take interest in different topics and issues. Lastly, another important point that was made was the fact that millennials tend to be more critical, reflexive and take more action offline. As it is explained by F.J. (Gen Z) and A.R.T. (Millennial), respectively:

F.J. – “Gen Z shares more online, likes more and comments more. Whereas Millennials do more offline and less online. Millennials don’t share as much but they are doing more outside the house.”

A.R.T. – “First they use different platforms. Also, Gen Z are more vocal and active on social media in comparison. Millennials use social media to reshare information and are more critical about what they share whereas Gen Z uses it to create their own content and showcase their personal opinion.”

Regarding the effectiveness of digital activism for each generation there was not a general consensus, however the majority of Gen Z interviewees agreed that it was as effective for both generations and that the approach was just different. As it is explained by L.P.:

L.P. – “It is not more effective for one generation than the other they just use it in different ways. I think millennials, might have more maturity and bigger sense of responsibility, and might take more action. Whereas Gen Z is more used to technology, meaning that it is more agile online and are able to spread more awareness.”

However, the Millennial interviewees were extremely divided in opinion in the sense that some agreed with Gen Z. As it is explained by J.C.:

J.C. – “I think it's more effective for Gen Z simply because they use social platforms more.”

Others thought that it was more effective for Gen Z because they are more used to digital platforms and hence are more active. As it is explained by D.M.:

D.M. – “I think it’s as effective for both generations since both are online and both are impacted by online activism. Gen Z just be more agile in the way they approach it.”

Others believed that it is more effective for millennials because they are more mature and proactive. As it is explained by R.L.:

R.L. – “I think it's more effective for millennials because of the maturity associated with this generation. Although Gen z usurps the digital part and can create more fuss about issues, they are usually explored in a superficial way. Millennials are more proactive and take issues more seriously, as they are already at the age of being economically independent and hence are concerned with matters that directly affect their lives. With that they end up taking more real actions regarding those issues, such as going out to the streets and protesting.”

4. DISCUSSION

After analysing the results in the Results section, the data is discussed in this section in light of the literature review. The present study intends to explore the perceptions and behaviours of Instagram female users belonging to Gen Z and Millennial generations in regard to digital activism. The discussion chapter will use this knowledge to connect these practical findings to the defined specific research objectives.

4.1 TO UNDERSTAND IF FEMALE INSTAGRAM USERS THINK THAT DIGITAL ACTIVISM DETRACTS INDIVIDUALS FROM TAKING REAL LIFE ACTIONS TO MITIGATE SOCIAL ISSUES.

Since there is a need for future research regarding specifically the possibility of digital activism detracting online users from taking real-world action toward social issues (Vredenburg et al., 2020). It becomes fundamental to touch on the ability of digital activism to manipulate and influence actions, which according to a study, social media can manipulate users to change their behaviours and pursue ends that are not authentically those of the user (Sahebi & Formosa, 2022). So, it can be deduced that indeed digital activism would have the capacity to deter online users from going into the streets and practicing what they believe in.

In this study the majority of interviewees agreed with this statement, saying that indeed could happen since it is easier and even more comfortable to take action online. Regarding each generation, there was a larger number of members belonging to Gen Z agreeing on this premise.

4.2 TO DEFINE CLICKTIVISM AND SLACKTIVISM.

According to Vredenburg et al. (2020), clicktivism can be identified when consumers feel that they are contributing to social change through passive liking, sharing of posts, and commenting. The present study also aligns with Vredenburg et al., (2020) definition of clicktivism, since there was a general consensus among all interviewees as well as generations that it was about doing activism online through social media interactions, such as clicking, liking and sharing.

Regarding slacktivism the majority of interviewees associated the term with a negative connotation, such as doing online activism without any specific intention, doing it just for the sake of it, not believing in what is being said, having no interest and being lazy. Which according to Franklin (2014), slacktivism is a term that reprehends younger generations for their lack of commitment to “real” social changes and also their lack of willingness to do what is necessary in order to make the world around a better place. It can also be defined as actions in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement.

4.3 TO EXPLORE THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF “CLICKTIVISM” IN CONCERNS TO INSTAGRAM FEMALE USERS TAKING A STAND ON SOCIAL ISSUES.

According to McCafferty (2011), Individuals who are both participating and supporting online activism acknowledge that it is difficult to quantify the extent to which technology motivates individuals to take action regarding social issues. However, they assert that online activism does increase the possibility of influencing perceptions, motivating behaviours, enables the sharing of opinions on a particular stance, boosts the capability for pure organizational logistics and promotes calls to action. In other words, new activism methods act as a way to amplify and even better organize the traditional methods.

With that information in mind, some of the positive impacts mentioned by the interviewees were, the creation of awareness and visibility, starting discussions, generating call to actions, spreading knowledge and information, showing support, making people feel heard and promoting the changing of behaviours.

Regarding the negative impacts, and according to the Pew Research Centre (2020), some of those can be distracting people from issues that are truly important and making people think they are making a difference when in reality they are not.

Some of the negative impacts of clicktivism mentioned by the interviewees were: the causes not being genuine or reliable, the spreading misinformation and fake news, the spreading of invalid sources, biased information, the creation of tunnel vision, manipulation of ideas, the lack of real-world impact, being less critical and less reflexive about issues, the existence of scams, the minimization of movements and detraction of people from participating by bullying the issue and creating the false sensation that you are doing something towards a solution.

4.4 TO ANALYSE INSTAGRAM FEMALE USERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE CREATION OF SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH PASSIVE LIKING, SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING AND ONLINE COMMENTING.

According to McCafferty (2011) social change can be created through social media by increasing the possibility of influencing perceptions and motivating behaviours. Additionally, online platforms enable the sharing of opinions on a particular stance and boost the capability for pure organizational logistics and calls to action. In other words, new activism methods act as a way to amplify and even better organize the traditional methods.

The present study also aligns with this view, as the interviewees agreed that social change could be created through passive liking, social media sharing and online commenting and proceed to enumerate how that could happen. Some of the examples go accordingly with McCafferty (2011) such as

showcasing different perspectives and changing mindsets. Additionally, the interviewees also mentioned the possibility of increasing online visibility, starting conversations and discussions, spreading awareness and information, they also said that it could help bring discussions to the offline world and lastly, the sharing of knowledge as well as experiences through online testimonials.

Regarding each type of online interaction, it is important to distinguish between two types, the first one is active interaction which includes, liking, sharing, commenting, and reacting and the second is passive interaction which includes clicking, watching, viewing, and hovering (Kaur et al., 2019). This study is specifically focused on active interactions, such as sharing commenting and liking.

According to Kaur et al. (2019), and concerning the use of each interaction, individuals are eight times more inclined to click the like button compared to sharing or commenting. However, sharing does show a greater commitment and because of that there is a strong link between the content users are inclined to share and their own self-presentation. To sum up, sharing and commenting have more impact than liking since they require more reasoning and effort.

With that in consideration and taking into account this specific study opinions were divided between two possibilities. The first was that sharing was indeed, the most effective interaction to promote social change online, which had a higher number of Gen Z agreeing with that and goes accordingly with

these authors opinion. However, the second possibility was opposing in the sense that some interviewees agreed that the three interactions were equally as effective, the only difference being their purpose and the way in which they are used, which had a higher number of Millennials agreeing between them.

Regarding how each interaction can create social change and according to Kaur et al. (2019) sharing increases the content visibility, whereas comments can play an important role in influencing readers' perceptions on important topics as well as changing opinions. Lastly, likes on a post can help show positive feedback for that specific topic.

In this study it was found that the interviewees perceptions regarding the way in which each interaction enables the creation of change was that social change can be created through passive liking, social media sharing and online commenting, by increasing online visibility, starting conversations and discussions, spreading awareness, showcasing different perspectives, spreading information. It can also help bring discussions to the offline world and changing mindsets. Lastly, the sharing of knowledge as well as experiences through, online testimonials, which goes accordingly with what was previously defended in the literature review.

4.5 TO UNDERSTAND HOW BRANDS CAN ENSURE THAT THEIR ONLINE ACTIVISM IS REGARDED AS AUTHENTIC.

According to Campagna et al. (2021), it is important that brands follow through on their brand communications as they are the main driver for perceived authenticity; and if inconsistent can trigger, spread unfavourable information about the brand, especially with the rise in social media usage.

With that in consideration, the present study findings were that in order to brands ensure authenticity concerning online activism they should share real stories with real people, be consistent, go accordingly with the values of the brand, talk about issues directly related with the brand, walk the talk, respect regulations, show KPI's, share reports and be transparent. Having said that, the aspect mentioned the most was consistency which goes accordingly with what is defended by Campagna et al. (2021).

4.6 TO IDENTIFY THE TOP THREE SOCIAL ISSUES ON INSTAGRAM THAT CREATE THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF INTERACTIONS.

Regarding the most relevant social causes online and according to Xu et al. (2023), some of the most pressing social issues are feminism, animal care, and LGBTQI + activism. These fields make petitions and protests proliferate on social media.

However, according to the present study and concerning this same issue, the top three social issues that create the highest number of interactions are, Environmental issues, Wars and Feminism. Nevertheless, the interviewees still mentioned LGBTQ related issues, and Racism with close proximity.

4.7 TO IDENTIFY THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GEN Z AND MILLENNIALS FEMALES.

Regarding the differences between generations, specifically Millennials and Gen Z and accordingly to Reisenwitz (2021), although Millennials developed in a digital landscape and are comfortable with technologies there is a consensus that Gen Z is much more internet-savvy and has a higher digital knowledge than Millennials.

In this present study there was a general consensus that Gen Z is a lot more active on social media than the Millennials generation. Additionally, the interviewees also mentioned the fact that these two generations usually take interest in different topics and issues. Lastly, another important point that was made was the fact that millennials tend to be more critical, reflexive and take more action offline.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter begins by delivering the final conclusions of the present study, in the form of objective answers to the proposed research objectives. Then, both the theoretical and practical contributions of the study are presented. Lastly, the study's limitations and possible paths for future research are introduced.

5.1. ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

5.1.1 To understand if female Instagram users think that digital activism detracts individuals from taking real life actions to mitigate social issues.

Throughout this research it was found that female Instagram users think that it is a possibility that digital activism actually detracts individuals from taking real-life action. This is because even though the potential to change the world exists in digital activism there is also a spot for commodity and for people to believe that by interacting online, for example by sharing a post, they are already doing their part when it comes to mitigating social issues. So, in a sense, interacting online, can create the false psychological sensation of helping to create change.

5.1.2 To define clicktivism and slacktivism.

Regarding the creation of definition for both terms, clicktivism, and slacktivism the research was successful. The definition of clicktivism that originated was doing activism online through social media interactions, such as clicking, liking and sharing.

In regard to slacktivism the study originated the following definition: doing online activism without any specific intention, doing it just for the sake of it, not believing in what is being said, having no interest and being lazy. Which carries a very negative connotation, contrary to the previous term of clicktivism.

5.1.3 To explore the positive and negative impacts of “clicktivism” in concerns to Instagram female users taking a stand on social issues.

Concerning this third objective interviewees were able to enumerate both positive and negative impacts of clicktivism. The positive impacts were, the creation of awareness and visibility, starting discussions, generating call to actions, spreading knowledge and information, showing support, making people feel heard and promoting the changing of behaviours.

Regarding the negative impacts enumerated by the interviewees, they were the following, spreading misinformation and fake news, spreading of

invalid sources, biased information, the creation of tunnel vision, manipulation of ideas, the lack of real-world impact, being less critical and less reflexive about issues, the existence of scams, the minimization of movements and detraction of people from participating by bullying issues and lastly, creating the false sensation that you are doing something towards a solution.

5.1.4 To analyse Instagram female users' perceptions towards the creation of social change through passive liking, social media sharing and online commenting.

The fourth objective was to analyse Instagram female users' perceptions towards the creation of social change through passive liking, social media sharing and online commenting, which all interviewees responded in a positive way, saying that it had the ability to create social change, for example by increasing online visibility, starting conversations and discussions, spreading awareness, showcasing different perspectives, spreading information and knowledge.

5.1.5 To understand how brands can ensure that their online activism is regarded as authentic.

Concerning how brands could ensure that their online activism was perceived as authentic interviewees said that it was important for brands to share real stories with real people, to be consistent, to go accordingly with its own values, to talk strictly about issues directly related with the brand, to walk the talk, to respecting regulations, to show KPI's, to share reports and to be transparent.

5.1.6 To identify the top three social issues on Instagram that create the highest number of interactions.

This study was also successful in identifying the top three social issues that according to the interviewees create the highest number of interactions. The three social issues are, Environmental issues, Wars and Feminism.

5.1.7 To identify the differences between Gen z and Millennials females.

In the present study the identification of differences between Gen Z and the Millennial generation was possible. The first one being that Gen Z is a lot

more active on social media than the Millennial generation. The second, that these two generations usually take interest in different topics and issues and because of that consume different content The third and last difference identified was that the millennial generation tends to be more critical, reflexive and even take more action offline.

5.1.8. To explore the perceptions and behaviours of Instagram female users belonging to Gen Z and Millennial generations in regard to digital activism

Regarding the general objective of this study which was to explore the perceptions and behaviours of Instagram female users belonging to Gen Z and Millennial generations in regard to digital activism, it can be stated that it was successful in the sense that each specific objective contributed with knowledge that helps achieve and answer this main objective.

5.2. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The study fills a gap in the existing literature by simultaneously analysing the perceptions and behaviours of female online users towards the contribution of passive liking, sharing, and commenting to social change and by analysing their perceptions and behaviours regarding if digital activism can

deter consumers from taking real action toward social change. This contributes to a deeper understanding on both subject areas.

5.3. PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

One of the main practical contributions of this study is related to the various action's brands can take in order to practice digital activism in a way that is perceived as authentic by their online followers, this way avoiding looking opportunistic and performative online. Some of those recommendations are: sharing real stories with real people, being consistent, going accordingly with the values of the brand, talking about issues directly related with the brand, walking the talk, respecting regulations, showcasing KPI's, sharing reports and being transparent.

Additionally, it allowed to understand how social change can be created online, specifically through these three interactions, liking, commenting, and sharing. Some of the ways enumerated by the interviewees were increasing online visibility, starting conversations and discussions, spreading awareness, showcasing different perspectives, spreading information and knowledge.

5.4. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

As any piece of research, this study had some limitations. The first one was the size of the sample, since there were only 10 participants, 5 of each generation, Gen Z and Millennial respectively. Additionally, even though the participants were from different generational cohorts the majority of them were close to the generational cut-offs meaning that there was a higher probability of them having similar opinions regarding this subject. As a result, the findings from this study may be limited in regard to creating generalizations and may not represent in an accurate way each generation.

Another limitation, still regarding the sample, is the fact that this study was strictly focused on female online users of Instagram and as a consequence it completely disregarded the male gender. Taking that into consideration, It would be relevant to explore the same issues on the male users of Instagram in future studies.

Future research could also be carried out to deepen the knowledge in this area of digital activism. First, it is suggested that the sample size and its diversity are increased, since it would result in a more robust and generalizable study. Secondly, it would be beneficial to focus on the brand side of digital activism and explore in more depth the approach of brands to digital activism as well as its effects on online users.

It would also be advantageous to implement a comparative analysis regarding each gender in future research. This would enable researchers to identify differences between Male and Female individuals and the way they approach digital activism, by examining the similarities and differences in perceptions and behaviours.

Lastly, a mixed-methods methodological approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of such a complex subject, in the sense that whilst qualitative data can provide rich contextual insights and capture the opinions and beliefs in a better way, quantitative data could aid with statistical analysis and being able to create generalizability in a more precise matter.

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