



Master Thesis
Economics and Business: Marketing

The Impact of TikTok Video Content User Type (Influencer vs. Regular) on Purchase Intentions Among Generation Z in the Fast-Fashion Industry.

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Abstract

The fast fashion industry has been greatly impacted by the rise of social media trends and the power of user-generated content (UGC). However, social media influencers' efficacy and impact remain under scrutiny, and it is still unclear just how beneficial and influential they are.

This thesis aims to investigate how the effect of the type of user who is posting the video (influencer vs. regular) affects the purchase intention of the Z Generation in the fashion industry. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to explore the theoretical foundations of social media trends, more precisely, influencer marketing on purchase intention. To investigate the influence of the type of user on buying behaviour, a quantitative methodology and survey were used. A total of 148 questionnaires were collected on different social media platforms. The findings showed that the type of user does not have a significant impact on the purchase intention of Generation Z, as opposed to other findings.

Moreover, the study researches the mediating effect of perceived trust toward the content. However, the results did not fully confirm the theory. There are many things that could influence the outcome of the findings. Additionally, the results did not confirm that gender can moderate the correlation between the type of user and the purchase intention, whereas some other studies proved the opposite.

Despite the non-significant results of the hypothesis, it is interesting to acknowledge that the only variable that had an impact on the relationship between the two variables was perceived trust. Though not concluding full statistical significance, this result does suggest a potential positive influence that is worth considering for future research.

In conclusion, this study contributes to a wealth of knowledge about how social media trends and the type of user influence purchase intention in the context of fast fashion, on TikTok for Generation Z. The findings emphasize the importance of trust on social media, in order to increase purchase motivations among consumers.

1.Introduction

1.1 Background Information and Problem Statement

The purpose of this paper is to understand how to effectively market for Gen-Z on TikTok in the fashion industry. This paper will delve into how TikTok trends, specifically influencer marketing and User-Generated content (videos that are posted by regular users) influence the consumer purchase intention in the fast fashion industry for Generation Z. The research further examines how these trends have the potential to influence customers' purchase intention when it comes to purchasing fashion products. Moreover, it will explore how we can change the decision-making process with social media trends. The effect of the type of user who posts the video—either a regular person with less engagement and followers, or an influencer, with more engagement and followers, will be moderated by gender—and the relationship between the purchase intention and the type of user, who posts the video will be mediated by the trustworthiness of the content.

In the modern digital age, it is crucial to understand how social media trends affect customer's purchase intention, particularly when marketing to Generation Z consumers. When it comes to deciding on fashion choices, these platforms have grown to be key inspiration, expertise, and influence sources. Businesses should comprehend how these trends function as TikTok and other social media platforms have a big impact on customer behaviour and fashion trends. Businesses in the fashion industry must keep up with social media trends to stay current and effectively communicate with their target audience, especially on TikTok, also they can reach Generation Z consumers and benefit from their purchasing power by adapting their marketing strategies to these trends. This could result in significant revenue generation and the development of brand loyalty. Fashion firms can benefit from higher brand awareness, a wider consumer base, and ultimately higher revenue by being able to adapt to and employ social media trends.

Social media has transformed the way people interact, communicate, and consume products and services (Simangunsong & Handoko 2020). The emergence of social media, and the occurring trends have had a significant effect on the fast-fashion industry. (Dennhardt, 2012). Generation-Z, the digital natives born between 1997-2012, are the largest demographic group to be influenced by social media trends and UGC. This generation has grown up with social

media as a constant in their lives, and they mostly rely on it for inspiration when it comes to fashion and making decisions about what to buy. They also actively give product reviews and engage with others through online applications (Mitchell, 2020).

The introduction of social media has further accelerated the emergence of fast fashion. In the world of fashion, the term "fast fashion" refers to the rapid production and economical dissemination of fashionable clothing. Fast fashion, primarily due to its affordability became popular among customers. Fast fashion is characterized by short lead periods and has been "lean retailing's long-awaited fruition from a management and economics standpoint (Caro & Martinez-de-Albéniz, 2015). The way fast fashion is produced has significantly changed in the fashion business as a result of the growth of social media (Bandara, 2020). Fashion firms now have a direct channel of communication with consumers thanks to social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, which enables them to respond immediately to shifting consumer wants and fashion trends (Mohr, 2013). In turn, social media has accelerated the development of fast fashion by influencing consumer behaviour and enhancing the rate at which trends emerge. As a result, social networking has had a significant impact on the fashion industry, changing the way fast fashion is manufactured and upending conventional retail structures (Koivulehto, 2017).

Social media trends have a significant impact on the decision-making process and purchase intentions of consumers in the fashion business as fashion is all about following styles, influencers, and current trends (Bandara, 2020). According to the Digital Global Overview Report in 2022 which is published with Hootsuite and We Are Social, the use of social media has skyrocketed in the last few years. It is seen that both the pandemic conditions in the current years and social trends cause an increase in the usage of social media. The associated paper claims that nearly 5 billion people use social media, and that over the past ten years, the number of social media users has increased at a faster rate than the number of internet users. (Hootsuite, 2022). Compared to the previous year, it is seen that the number of social media users increased by approximately 424 million (Hootsuite, 2022).

These platforms have made it easier for consumers to stay up to date with the latest fashion trends and can be also a source of fashion inspiration, especially for the Z Generation. The current generation is drawn to internet communication, which makes them eager to engage and stay connected (Mitchell, 2020). Social media trends and UGC can create a need or

desire for a particular product or service. Generation-Z consumers are exposed to an endless stream of social media content, and they are heavily influenced by the latest trends and styles. Through influencer endorsements and hashtag campaigns, fast fashion firms may use social media channels to highlight their items and generate demand for them (Mitchell, 2020).

As a result, marketers are working to develop innovative approaches to connect with this generational cohort. To do this, it is crucial to comprehend the fundamental Social Media Marketing references of Gen Z consumers that shape their buying behaviour. Therefore, social media's influence on contemporary shopping behaviour is hard to ignore. Certainly, these and countless other examples demonstrate the critical role that social media plays in raising consumer awareness of goods and companies dramatically.

1.2 Research Questions

In the fashion industry, the changes and emerging trends change rapidly, therefore, fashion brands need to pitch their communications correctly and should have the flexibility to respond to the trends immediately (McCormick et. Al., 2014) Thus, it is important to urge businesses to think outside the box to adapt to the changes in consumer behavior that these transformations have brought about. In today's digital marketing landscape, it is crucial to comprehend how the type of user, whether regular users or influencers, affects the purchase intention of Generation Z in the fashion industry on TikTok (Raimundo & Rosario, 2021). Knowing the influence dynamics at effect is essential as the fashion industry increasingly employs social media communication to reach its target audience. Besides, it is key for brands to learn how to successfully market on these platforms that target Z Generation (Kozinets, 2010). This research can provide valuable information on the complex relationship between user-generated content, social influence, and consumer behavior within the context of one of the most popular social media platforms by examining the interplay between user-generated content, influencer content, and engagement metrics. Understanding this information is extremely useful for fashion companies and marketers aiming to equip the power of TikTok to effectively connect with and engage this influential demographic. By addressing this study question, we may discover more about the preferences and behaviours of Generation Z consumers. In this paper it will be researched how to effectively market to Generation-Z. This is especially important in the current digital environment, where TikTok

has quickly established itself as one of the major social media sites, particularly among the examined generation. Besides, it will delve into how to exploit the current social media trends, in order to attract customers and get customer loyalty.

The research will be examined through a quantitative study that answers the following research question:

How does the type of user (regular vs. influencer) posting the video change the purchase intention for Generation Z in the fashion industry, specifically on TikTok?

1.3 Academic Relevance

The research is relevant, firstly because of the increased usage of social media in the fashion industry (Mohr, 2013). Secondly, there is limited research related to TikTok and consumer behavior since the platform is relatively new released in 2016 (D'Souza, 2023).

By combining the fields of social media marketing, influencer marketing, and consumer behavior, this research topic possibly fills a gap in the academic landscape. Although plenty of research has been done on the effects of influencer marketing, there isn't a rigorous analysis that distinguishes between regular users and influencers on TikTok, an extremely popular platform among Generation Z. Moreover, this study will delve into the possible differences relating the female and male genders, when it comes to the topic of fashion and purchase intention, on TikTok. However, according to an article, there is a decrease in the favour of influencers on the US market (Kemp, 2023). This study will examine the European market, which will provide meaningful data for scholars, to compare the possible differences between the two markets.

Social media platforms have grown to be significant sources for Generation Z customers (Król & Zdonek, 2020), and TikTok in particular, has a big following and influence over this demographic of consumers (Araujo et. Al., 2022). Since the platform's endless scroll keep users interested in long stretches of time, it has become a crucial element of their daily digital consumption habits. This enables businesses to draw in customers by placing the appropriate adverts, occasionally concealed in influencer or user-generated content campaigns (Pitre, 2023). Therefore, this study will give a broader idea of the influence of influencer marketing and User-Generated content.

Overall, researching the relevant social media trends will help to get a better understanding of how they can change and influence buying decisions. To fill a gap in the literature and add to the body of knowledge in the field, my research on current social media trends and their impact on purchasing decisions seeks to do both. While earlier studies examined at how social media affects consumer behaviour, more recent and thorough studies are needed that concentrate on the always-changing social media trends and how they affect purchasing choices.

1.4 Managerial relevance

The social media trends, especially influencer marketing and UGC are spreading on TikTok are changing and evolving at an incredible speed, therefore, it is useful to look at current trends, as they have huge potential for companies (Korabine & LaBire, 2021). This study can help organizations get a competitive advantage by keeping them on top of digital marketing trends. Keeping up with TikTok marketing, a platform popular with Generation Z, can lead to greater market share (Plötz et al., 2023). In the highly competitive fashion market, companies should be faster at responding to the changing consumer landscape and emerging social media trends. With social media becoming increasingly prevalent in the fashion industry, marketers stand to gain valuable insights from this study, therefore they can benefit from the findings of this research paper (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Firstly, TikTok gives companies access to an extensive community of fashion-conscious people, allowing them to connect and engage with a wide and diverse audience (Tran, 2020). Companies can enhance brand visibility, generate conversation about their fashion products or services, and receive exposure through participating in viral challenges, collaborating with trending influencers, and producing captivating content (Diayudha et. al., 2022). Secondly, through comments, likes, and shares, TikTok offers direct audience involvement and interaction, establishing a sense of community and facilitating valuable customer feedback. Companies may learn more about client preferences, acquire data, and customize their fashion offerings to the changing demands of their target market with the support of this real-time engagement. Lastly, due to TikTok's algorithm, smaller fashion firms, that are not very popular yet, can get attention and compete with more established competitors and fashion brands (Taneja, & Toombs, 2014). By collaborating with influencers or encouraging regular users to keep posting about the purchased products, companies may incorporate the popular social media and TikTok trends into their marketing strategies, in order to showcase their products in the most creative ways.

Applying the most relevant trends at the right time lead to increased brand awareness and higher online engagement (Ibrahim, 2018). As TikTok is expected to generate three times more advertising revenue by 2026, studying the platform and the current trends become essential for businesses seeking growth prospects, especially for companies who want to target the younger target audience (Statista,2023).

In summary, this research will enhance comprehension of the ways in which TikTok social media trends impact fashion industry purchase intentions and may hold useful consequences for influencers, fashion firms, and marketers. It will further delve into whether influencer content, where likes and the number of followers matter, or regular posters, where the ‘average’ scrollers might find the content more believable, increase the purchase decisions of Gen-Z consumers. The results of this study may assist marketers and companies in developing more successful and targeted social media marketing campaigns, improving their capacity to interact with customers, build brand loyalty, and boost sales in a more competitive industry.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This research paper consists of five sections. The first section provides background information about the study as well as pertinent research subjects. The existing literature review, as well as the conceptual framework, will be discussed in the second section. The third component of this study's methodology, which also includes the way that data was collected and its variables, is then followed by the fourth section, which presents the findings. The last section is the summary and conclusions, including recommendations for further research and discussion of their theoretical and practical implications.

2. Literature review and Conceptual Model

2.1 Online advertising

Internet as an advertising medium is very multi-faced compared to the traditional advertising. It is more adjustable since it allows you to make changes very easily and instantly without

much additional costs. One of the biggest strengths of online advertising is its capacity to simultaneously reach much of the targeted audience (Anusha, 2016). As people watch more time-consuming media on the Internet, it is beneficial for marketers that online advertising is making up a larger and larger portion of the overall advertising industry (Goldfarb, 2013, Gizem, 2015).

The effectiveness of online advertisement stems from several factors. According to Goldfarb (2013), the main important reason is the relatively easy measurement. The usage of a variety of tracking technologies, such as clickthrough's and the availability of responses, allows marketers to easily access data from customers. This source of data contributes to a better understanding of the customers; consequently, online advertising's effectiveness relies on successful targeting (Goldfarb, 2013). Publishers use different content to attract customers and sell the products to the viewers. Since it functions to educate consumers about the products or services and what the brands or companies stand for, it is essential to understand how people respond to various aspects of different advertisements (Keller, 2003). In sum, online advertising provides businesses with a measurable and trackable way to evaluate the success of their advertising campaigns, enabling businesses to maximise the results of their marketing initiatives by making data-driven decisions.

2.2 Social media marketing in the fashion industry

The rapid advancement of the internet and information technology has transformed not only advertising but also the way businesses interact with their target audience (Barcyk & Duncan, 2011). For this reason, social media has become a crucial area of attention in our investigation of contemporary marketing strategies.

How social media has developed and changed the global community and its entire way of functioning while also bringing people closer collectively. In terms of social advertising, the fashion industry is currently experiencing a change in direction. According to Ahmad et.al. (2015) the fashion sector is significantly predicted by social media. Their findings demonstrate a strong connection between the industry and social media. Therefore, it is essential for brands to join these platforms, especially for brands targeting a younger, Gen-Z audience.

Social media refers to the acts, customs, and interactions of social groups that come together online to exchange knowledge, and share stories, experiences, and viewpoints through informal media. Nowadays, it is recognized as the transparent, most interesting, and interactive type of public relations (Ahmad et.al, 2015).

Social media's popularity spread to firms and companies and became a strong part of their strategies over the last ten years. Additionally, social media marketing offers benefits to businesses, they attract new customers, improve customer interaction, and forge partnerships. (Pradiptarini, 2011). According to Beheshti (2014), e-business has pushed a lot of companies to go global in order to get a competitive edge. This is particularly relevant for the fashion sector, where the success of fast fashion can only be attributed to internet marketing and technology (Muralidhar, 2019). Social media has had a spectacular development in the over the last ten years and is growing in popularity in the fashion industry. It is being used by businesses as a tool for promotion and is an especially practical and affordable form of communication for the industry, moreover, it is being used to research trends and forecast consumer behaviour (Ahmed et.al., 2015).

2.3 Social media trends and the User-generated content

It's clear that these changes have given rise to a variety of social media trends when we move our attention away from the development of social media marketing in the fashion business. The fashion industry's relationship with its audience is significantly shaped by these trends. Social media trends, such as UGC, hashtag campaigns, and social media challenges, have become popular strategies for fast fashion brands to increase brand awareness and drive sales. Since social media is centred on different individuals and trends, which inspire and impact people's decisions, it is essential for marketers to comprehend and utilise these platforms (Rapp et al., 2013). Das & Mandal (2016) emphasize this relationship between young customers' brand loyalty and their propensity to buy. Moreover, it is proved that social media usage and presence influence the consumer's decisions and satisfaction (Anas et. Al., 2023).

In this study, we will delve into the different social media trends that are trending on TikTok in the fashion-related contents. Some additional trends will be mentioned in order to get a clearer understanding, what trends exist apart from influencer content and UGC:

#TikTokMadeMeBuyIt, a trend where users showcase their newly purchased items which they bought under the influence of TikTok videos. This trend attracts billions of views, and it

greatly boosts conversion by driving visitors to a brand's content, and definitely increases sales for the brand, if the video goes viral (Jelic, 2022).

The Haul videos are videos, where users reveal their purchases from a specific brand, making recommendations, about whether it is worth buying the product. It is frequently shared by influencers, whether paid or unpaid, and it can help brands generate income in exchange for word-of-mouth advertising. (Pilon, 2019). The videos contain actual hauls, where the consumers showcase their newly purchased clothing items. In the comment section people are sharing their opinions with each other, making an actual conversation about the items. The main social media trend that will be researched in this study will be the User-generated Content, which will also be shown as an example in the survey later.

In the fast fashion industry, social media trends like influencer marketing and user-generated content (UGC) are now major influences on consumer decisions (Romero-Rodriguez & Castillo-Abdul, 2023). The key advantage of user-generated content (UGC) is credibility, which derives from the expertise and trustworthiness of the communication source, consequently, customers develop trust towards the products and the brand. Since consumer engagement can result in conversions in the form of sales, it is a highly desired side effect of UGC for marketers (Shing & Chakrabarti, 2020). According to Romero-Rodriguez & Castillo-Abdul (2023), there are two types of User-Generated content, one is called self-motivated content production, where the content creator is producing content for self-entertainment, self-promotion or ego protection on social media. These content creators are usually regular people who post voluntarily and do not receive or expect any payment in return, only feedback from their followers, more likes, comments, and views. They provide information about the products, such as reviews or comparisons of the prices. However, the most utilized UGC differs from the self-motivated content, it is driven by economic factors, where the organizations and businesses pay the influencers for promoting their products on social media. These influencers often receive free products, with several recruitments, such as including a link or incentivising with coupon codes.

These User-generated content is considered positively, which increases purchase intention by the consumers. (Mayrhofer, et. Al., 2019) Social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest, have become powerful marketing tools for fast fashion brands to reach and engage with Generation-Z consumers. Hashtag campaigns, such as #OOTD (outfit of the day) and #FashionNovaPartner, have become ubiquitous on social media (Davies et al., 2008).

This content is typically accessible via the web and typically includes like restaurant reviews, wikis, and videos (Davies et al., 2008). UGC has also become an essential component of the fast fashion industry. UGC has become a valuable source of information for Generation-Z consumers, and it greatly influences their purchasing decisions. UGC provides social proof, a psychological phenomenon indicating that people are more willing to trust and follow the activities of others. User-generated content reflects word of mouth (WOM) on the internet (Kvia, 2022). UGC is a type of WOM shared via social media, in contrast to traditional WOM, which is frequently shared face to face (Kvia, 2022).

UGC contents can be several things, it can be dance or singing videos, reviews of products, blog postings, or any other kind of online self-expression (Kvia, 2022). UGC channels are various social media platforms, websites, and blogs that let users create content. Since each of these platforms has a different format, user interface, and feature set, among other attributes, marketers must tailor and construct their messaging to appeal to specific target audiences on each of these platforms (Killian and McManus, 2015). It is not only present on TikTok, although it is the most well-known platform nowadays, but in the past, blogs were one of the primary forms of UGC, for example, luxury fashion brands collected customer satisfaction from content shared on Facebook pages. UGC originated from blogging, where users shared brand-related stories and opinions with people with similar interests. Users liked and commented to express their likes or dislikes (Shing & Chakrabarti, 2020). According to Roma & Aloni (2019) brand-related UGC varies across the different social media platforms. Our primary research paper focus will be on user-generated content (UGC) in product-related material.

2.4 Influencer – content marketing

From examining how social media trends are affecting the fashion industry these trends have improved influencers' status in addition to changing how firms interact with their target market. Influencers are now important participants in the fast fashion industry, and their endorsements and recommendations can greatly influence the purchasing decisions of Generation Z consumers (Suddha & Sheena, 2017). The term "online influencer marketing" (OIM) describes a tactic whereby a business chooses and encourages online influencers to engage with their followers on social media to capitalise on these influencers' unique selling

points and market the business and its goods while enhancing overall performance (Gu and others, 2022).

Brands increasingly empower online influencers to present and promote their products (Leung, F.F, 2022). Given that online celebrities can increase brand awareness, encourage user engagement, and influence millions of users' purchasing decisions, it should come as no surprise that expenditure on influencer collaboration is anticipated to increase even more in the future (Dencheva, 2023). Marketers have access to a growing number of social media platforms that they may use to connect with businesses and clients. The market for Instagram influencers as a whole passed through the two-billion-dollar threshold in 2020. Marketers are increasingly employing video-based platforms like TikTok in addition to the photo-sharing app. From 35.5 thousand to over 106 thousand, the number of TikTok influencers grew considerably in 2020 (Dencheva, 2023).

People view celebrities as more credible product endorsers than non-celebrities, therefore celebrity endorsement in advertising has become a popular marketing strategy worldwide. Celebrities are increasingly getting involved in business, not simply as endorsers but also as participants in financial decision-making. According to the research of Borhan et. al. (2013), the results showed that attitudes about advertising and attitudes toward the brand were positively impacted by both celebrity credibility and advertisement credibility. According to Daneshvary and Schwer (2000), an essential characteristic for them is to possess expertise, which can help them build credibility with their audience and fans. Consequently, according to the above-mentioned information, it is a useful technique to advertise on platforms like TikTok with influencers, especially in the context of fashion. However, according to the study of a new article by Kemp (2023), the vast majority of people do not trust influencers anymore. As per the results, buyers are more inclined to make purchases from companies that offer content generated by actual customers (UGC) as opposed to conventional sponsored influencer content. Some of the participants claimed that if a brand or company uses influencers, that has a negative impact on them, consequently they trust regular users more. The survey was released in the US and has only data from people who live and use social media in America. However, this study seeks to underline and prove that Europeans have the same opinion.

2.5 Stages of the decision-making process

The study aims to research the decision stages of the Z Generation, with a main focus on the fourth stage, the purchase intention.

Making decisions about what to purchase involves considering, assessing, and analysing the various types of products and services that are available (Khuong & Duyen, 2016).

Consumers must take into consideration a number of factors while making purchases (Blackwell et al., 2012). Trends and innovations in social media marketing have significant effects on how customers make choices (Kurdi et. Al., 2022) Because users trust and rely on this knowledge more than if it is shared by companies, content provided by users performs better in the information search process on social media (Kurdi et. Al., 2022). During the many stages of the decision-making process, social media provides a source for the customers at every stage as the consumer get closer to the final decision (Alalwan, 2018).

The traditional decision-making model describes the five stages of the consumer purchasing process. These five steps involve all the stages that the consumer moves through when considering buying a product or a service (Kotler & Keller, 2012). It is crucial for the marketer to understand all the steps and make the decisions accordingly in order to move the consumers to buying the product. Each stage of the process can be influenced by social media marketing trends, which will be observed in this research paper in the following chapters.

The model's initial stage is 'Need recognition,' in which clients recognise that they desire something. Marketers claim that this stage describes the difference between the customer's present and preferred status. The identification of needs may be brought on by internal or external cues (Stankevich, 2017). Internal stimuli refer to personal needs, such as hunger, thirst, or a desire for a new phone, or dress. External stimuli, on the other hand, refer to factors outside of the individual, such as advertisements, recommendations from friends or family, or changes in the environment (Toates, 1981). Customers develop a want when they notice a gap in the market and believe that a product can fulfill it (Stankevich, 2017).

The 'Information search' stage is what comes next and it may include both internal and external sources (Stankevich, 2017). Internal sources include the consumer's own memories and prior encounters. For example, a consumer may rely on their past experience with a brand or product when making a decision. External sources, on the other hand, refer to

sources outside of the consumer, such as advertisements, reviews, recommendations from friends or family, and expert opinions (Stankevich, 2017). According to the Digital Democracy Survey (2015), buying decisions are influenced in 81% of cases by recommendations.

The next stage is called the 'Evaluation of alternatives', where the customer evaluates each option, they made during the information search stage to determine which one best meets their needs and preferences. Consumers frequently consider a variety of factors into account when evaluating each alternative throughout the stage of evaluating alternatives. Some examples of these factors are quality, price, and brand reputation. According to Stankevich (2017), marketers must ensure that a consumer recognises their brand during the evaluation process and, ideally, is aware of the attribute that the customer uses to make the purchase decision.

The "purchase decision" stage is the fourth in the traditional consumer decision-making process. The customer decides whether or not to buy the good or service they have chosen throughout the stage of evaluating their options at this point. The purchase stage is a critical part of the consumer decision-making process as it involves the actual acquisition of the product or service (Stankevich, 2017). This is going to be the most important element of this study.

The last stage is called the post-purchase stage, where the consumer evaluates the item or service that they bought as well as the whole purchasing process at this point (Stankevich, 2017). This stage is especially important as this is where the customer's satisfaction is being tested (Fauser, 2011).

2.6 Generation-Z and TikTok

The study examines the relationship between the effect of the type of user and the purchase intention, and to look from a TikTok is a recent social media platform, launched in the year of 2016 (Ahlse et. Al., 2020). TikTok has rapidly expanded into one of the largest social media sites worldwide in just two years, and its sizable user base has drawn the attention of marketers (Ahlse et. Al., 2020).

It is particularly essential to recognize the characteristics of Generation Z in order to understand their relationship with the platform. Generation Z is typically defined as individuals born between the mid 1990's and 2010 (Dagmei & Singh, 2016). It is the first generation that has always known the Internet and as a result, they are more comfortable with digital technology than any other generation. No wonder why they are the key users of the social media platform, TikTok. Muliadi (2020) discovered that more than 60% of TikTok users are members of Generation Z.

According to Augustinah et. al. (2022) Generation Z are a group of users that are especially sensitive to technological developments, mainly on social media. Moreover, they found out that people aged between 24-26 years are the main users of the platform, in addition, they use TikTok more than 10 times a day on average. They further discussed that the reason why this generation enjoys TikTok so much is due to its ease of usage (Augustinah et. al., 2022). Apart from the simple usage, the app has an outstanding user experience which creates a kind of dependency in users.

3. Hypotheses and Conceptual Model

In this section, the hypotheses and the conceptual model will be discussed. The hypothesis under investigation in this study is centered on the impact of the type of user, specifically distinguishing between influencers and regular individuals, who post videos on TikTok. The main objective of this research is to comprehend how this user classification affects Generation Z consumer purchasing intentions within the fashion industry. By researching the mediating role of the trustiness of the content and the moderating effect of gender, the research aims to contribute valuable insights into the dynamics of social media trends, more specifically influencer marketing and consumer-generated content and their effect on consumer behavior within the context of the Z Generation's preferences in the fashion industry.

3.1 Hypotheses development

The hypothesis being examined in this study centers on the influence of the user type, specifically identifying between influencers and common users who upload videos on TikTok. The paper will delve into how to successfully market for Gen-Z in the power of this knowledge. Therefore, we need to examine the influence of social media trends, such as user-generated content and influencer marketing. Given that a significant portion of the consumer base relies on social media platforms for inspiration and purchasing decisions, it is imperative to investigate how social media trends affect Generation Z's consumer behaviour in the fashion sector in the current digital era, with a particular emphasis on TikTok. Social media has grown fast in the recent years, and TikTok in particular, has become a significant source for fashion trends, styles, and product recommendations (Li, Que & Zeng, 2023). Fashion manufacturers and marketers must comprehend how social media trends affect Generation Z consumers' purchasing decisions. These factors are needed for businesses and fashion brands to gain awareness and increase revenues by implementing the right marketing strategy on popular social media platforms. Businesses may effectively customize their marketing strategies, create focused ad campaigns, and build meaningful relationships with Generation Z consumers by collecting insights on the tastes, behaviors, and motivations of this demographic.

Social media platforms have the power to affect people's views, opinions, and purchasing decisions (Sudirjo, 2021). Sudirjo (2021) asserts that social media has a significant impact on customer; yet, research on the ways in which emerging trends affect consumers' purchase decisions is limited. The same report shows that Generation Z customers are affected mostly. This generation tends to follow everything that is becoming trendy on TikTok because they feel pressured and FOMO (fear of missing out) (Sudirjo, 2021). Based on many observations, social media trends in social media greatly influences consumer purchasing behaviour. The study of Blackwell et al., (2012) shows that consumers must consider several things before they make a purchase. These factors include when to buy, what type of product to buy, where to buy, and how to pay.

The short-form video-sharing app provides individually customized content, which makes it easier to track reactions, likes and comments (Evans, et al., 2021). Trends appear at a much faster pace and then disappear weeks later. It not only results more personalized content but

also contributes to a better user experience. Due to TikTok's algorithm being far more advanced compared to Instagram, Facebook, and other social media platforms algorithms, it modifies the influence on the stages of the decision-making process differently (Evans, et al., 2021). For that reason, in this study, TikTok was chosen to be examined in more detail. This research aims to investigate the comparative impact of influencers and user-generated content on purchase intention among members of Generation Z within the fashion industry on the platform TikTok.

It is also crucial to acknowledge whether the number of likes and followers, representing previous engagement from other users, plays a significant influencing role. Some previous articles assume that the more followers and likes you have on social media, specifically on Instagram, the better, and that influencers indeed can have a positive effect on purchase intention (Benlafqih et al., 2019). This may be worth examining to determine whether people on TikTok have a similar impression. Determining the changing patterns of purchase intention among Generation Z customers in the fashion industry on TikTok requires an understanding of how these factors alter the impact of the content posted by regular people and influencers.

With this context in mind, it is reasonable to conclude that the type of individual posting on TikTok—an influencer or a regular user—has a significant impact on Generation Z customers' propensity to make purchases. Because of their credibility and ability to set trends, influencers—who often have big followings and many likes—are likely to have a greater impact on the purchases made by their audience (Benlafqih et al., 2019). Therefore, it is predicted that in the fashion industry, Generation Z consumers would be more likely to make a purchase when an influencer releases a video.

Based on the above-mentioned theory, the following hypothesis is tested.

H1: The type of user who is posting the video (influencer vs. regular) on TikTok, significantly affects the purchase intention of Generation-Z consumers in the fashion industry, such that when the video is posted by an influencer, then the purchase intention is higher.

The development of hypothesis two, which investigates the mediating role of perceived trust in the content in the context of user type (regular vs. influencer), and its influence on

purchase intention among Generation-Z consumers on TikTok, is supported by empirical data and theoretical insights.

Social media platforms, particularly TikTok, enable advertisers' effective audience-targeting options and help them to create long-term relationships with consumers. Since more and more users use TikTok to explore new products, it is effective to reach new consumers. Not only is it useful, but also a way cheaper option for advertising. The typical sponsored advertisements are creative and visually compelling, that are trending on TikTok. Users are able to engage with these contents and gain likes, comments, and views, but most importantly, increase their purchase intention towards fashion products (Chu, Deng & Mundel, 2022).

Trust is a key component, especially in social media advertising, and evaluating user trust scores on social media platforms is essential for several types of applications in advertising research and practice (Huh et. Al., 2017). According to Cho, Huh, & Faber (2014), an advertisement with a high degree of trust is more effective at increasing the attention of consumers and users. This theory is supported by research that emphasizes the crucial role that trust plays in customer behavior, especially in the context of influencer marketing (Qianyu & Chompu, 2022). Existing research has consistently demonstrated that customers' decisions to interact with and purchase products promoted by influencers are significantly influenced by their level of trust (Qianyu & Chompu, 2022). Trust is characterised as the buyer getting fascinated with the enthusiasm for fashion items on TikTok and feeling motivated to acquire the item. In this context, trust is based on the followers' perceptions of the influencer's reliability, sincerity, and subject-matter knowledge (Qianyu & Chompu, 2022).

Various aspects of a purchase have been found by researchers to influence consumers' intentions. These elements encompass a wide range of external and internal variables, which are made more prevalent by the existence of multiple social media websites (Kim & Jones, 2019). With the emergence of the new video-sharing app, that appeared in 2018, TikTok, has an algorithm that is superior to other social media platforms (Ahlse et. al., 2020). The potential of influencers in all areas of marketing and brand promotion stands prominently in today's digital landscape. The issue of trust is complex and is impacted by things like transparency and value alignment. While some people might regard influencers to be more reliable and objective, others might find average people to be more relatable. Because of this,

the decision to use influencers or regular people in marketing efforts depends on the precise objectives and tastes of the target market (Qianyu & Chompu, 2022).

Influencers are expected to be more trustworthy than regular individuals because of their established reputation, subject-matter expertise, and apparent authenticity, based on the research of Qianyu & Chompu, (2022). As a result, it is anticipated that consumers who come across content from influencers would be more inclined to trust the message and make a purchase.

The hypothesis suggests that perceived trust plays a role in influencing the purchase intention, depending on whether the video is posted by an influencer or a regular person.

H2: Perceived trust in the content mediates the relationship between the type of user (regular vs. influencer) and purchase intention among Gen-Z consumers on TikTok. Specifically, when the video is posted by influencers, higher perceived trust leads to increased purchase intention.

The third hypothesis of the research is associated with the moderating effect of gender. According to the research of Chika et. al. (2020) gender highly influences the buying behavior of the social media user's responses. The study revealed that the duration of engagement with social media differs significantly based on the individual's gender. The fact that males are motivated by product promise while women are motivated by product popularity was a further interesting finding (Chika et.al. 2020). This will play an important role in this research as well, as social media advertising and the spread of trends are all used to promote products. Men and women indeed respond to social media influencers differently; consequently, the research indicated that females have more engagement with influencers. This can be the reason of shared interests and similar motivations (Hudders & De Jans, 2021). The article supports the same idea that women are twice as much influenced by social media advertisements than men (Chika et.al. 2020). It is anticipated that the user type would have a bigger impact on females' purchase intention because, on average, women engage with influencers more and are more impacted by social media advertising. In contrast, because men interact with social media influencers less frequently than females do. Based on the above-mentioned theory, the following hypothesis is tested.

H3: The gender will moderate the effect of the type of user on the purchase intention of Gen-Z such that the effect in H1 is stronger for females than males.

3.2 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model developed for this study is based on the proposed hypotheses and analyses the impact of the type of user posting the video (influencer vs. regular) on the Z Generation's likelihood to purchase. In the research model, 'type of user (regular vs. influencer) (X) is the independent variable, the consumer purchase intention (Y) is the dependent variable, the relationship between X and Y is mediated by the trustiness of the content and moderated by the gender. The literature review led to the following conceptual model that is shown in Figure 1.

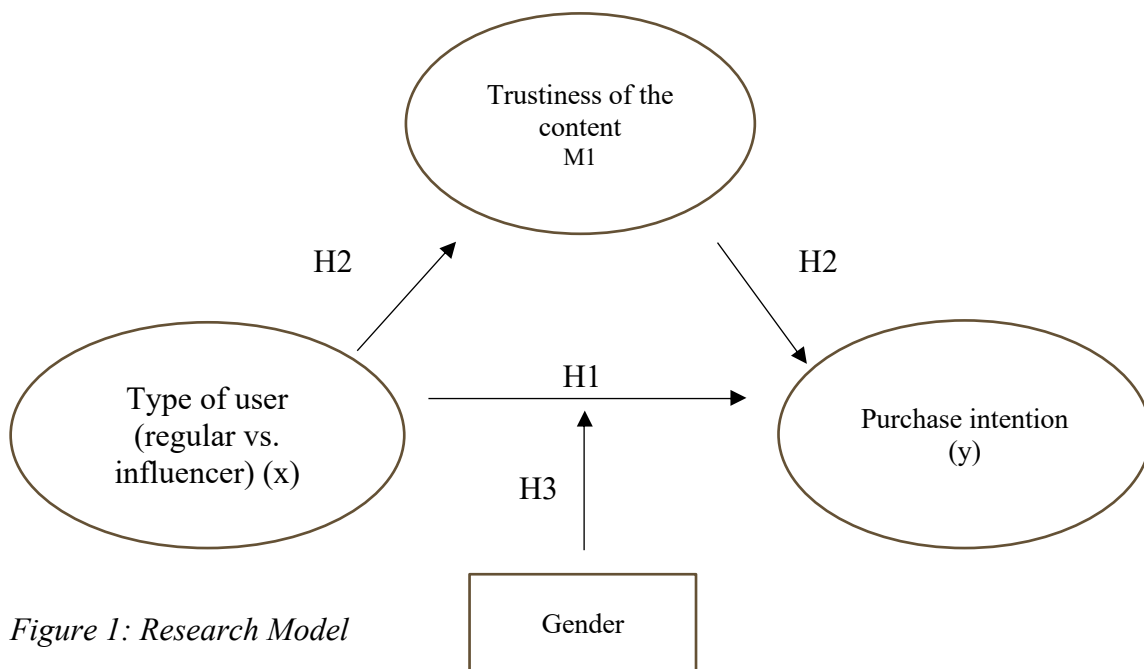


Figure 1: Research Model

Hypotheses:

H1: Depending on the type of the user who is posting the video (influencer vs. regular) on TikTok, significantly affects the purchase intention of Generation-Z consumers in the fashion industry, such that when the video is posted by an influencer, then the purchase intention is higher.

H2: Perceived trust in the content mediates the relationship between the type of user (regular vs. influencer) and purchase intention among Gen-Z consumers on TikTok. Specifically, when

the video is posted by an influencer, higher perceived trust leads to increased purchase intention.

H3: The gender will moderate the effect of the type of user on purchase intention of Gen-Z such that the effect in H1 is stronger for females than males.

4. Methodology

To be able to demonstrate how the various hypotheses were tested, the research methodologies will be further explained in this section. An explanation of the questionnaire's development begins in the chapter, then the experiment design and data collection will be presented. This study seeks to understand the connection between the type of user and the purchase intention. It will further research the mediating role of trust and the moderating role of gender.

4.1 Questionnaire development

In this research, an online experiment will be set up, by distributing an questionnaire to gain in-depth insights about the influence of user types, perceived trust towards the content, and possible differences between the two genders, female and male. The proposed method of the research question will collect meaningful data from the respondents about trends on social media, like influencer marketing and User-generated content. It will be further examined whether the number of likes and followers make a difference and how these trends influence their purchase decisions. Additionally, they will be tested at the five stages of the decision-making process regarding the influence of social media trends.

The survey will be carried out on Qualtrics, that is an online survey tool, which allows users to design surveys online. Since the survey's goal is to gather information regarding TikTok usage from Gen-Z participants, online surveys are a superior choice to reach a sample that is familiar with mobile apps. If the participant is part of the Z Generation (between the age of 18-26) and is from Europe, then they have the credentials to take part in the research.

The survey will include a variety of Likert scale questions to assess participants' level of agreement with statements concerning their buying behaviour after exposure to different social media trends, or paid advertisements on TikTok. The Likert scale will have a scale of 1

to 5, with 1 indicating "strongly agree" and 5 indicating "strongly disagree." The survey in this study contains 24 questions.

The questionnaire's first paragraph is an introduction tool that gives participants more background information on the subject of interest. A brief explanation will be given at the start, highlighting the voluntary nature of participation, the option for anonymity, and the expected 5-minute completion duration.

The survey's first section, under "demographics," is dedicated to gathering demographic data like location, age, and gender. The sample respondents are asked to categorize themselves as male or female. The participants are asked to specify whether the age range (18-26 years old, 27-42 years old, 43-58 years old, or 59+) includes their current age in order to determine the age distribution of the sample. Out of the ordinary, the demographic section was placed at the beginning of the questionnaire, as age is a very important factor in this research. Since the consumer behavior of Generation Z is being surveyed, those who do not belong to this range will be excluded from the survey.

Two different scenarios (conditions) will be used in the survey, and participants will be given one at random. Respondents will see a TikTok profile with few likes, followers, and engagement in the first scenario, whereas the exact same profile will be shown in the second scenario with many followers, plenty of likes, and high engagement. A common user-generated content video example will be shown after each scenario, followed by a set of questions aimed at measuring participants' perceptions and responses to both the video and the earlier scenario alteration. The video was chosen carefully, so as not to influence the answers of either gender, the subject was a unisex shoe. This structured approach aims to gain valuable insights for the research.

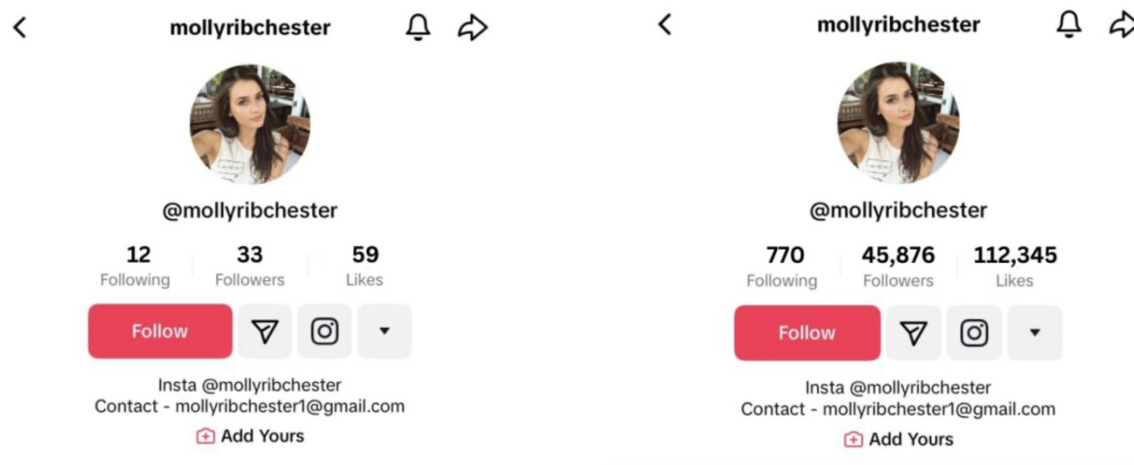


Figure 2: Non-Influencer and Influencer scenarios

The video is followed by questions connected to the purchase intention and the perceived trust. Next, a manipulation check question and then a number of questions about user-generated content. The following questions are about social media trends at different stages of the decision-making process. These questions are not part of the study’s conceptual model; however, it is an extra information that would add to the value of this thesis. Accordingly, the survey participants are asked to rate how much they agree with the corresponding survey statement. The responses of the survey members are converted into numbers to conduct the quantitative statistical analysis (Strongly Agree =1, Somewhat Agree =2, Neither agree nor disagree = 3, Somewhat Disagree = 4, and Strongly Disagree = 5).

Furthermore, the survey included a question asking how often respondents use TikTok to look up fashion-related content. Respondents can mark their responses as ‘Never’, ‘Rarely’ ‘Occasionally’ ‘Frequently’, and ‘Very frequently’. The purpose of the following demographic inquiry is to gather information regarding the sample members' total time spent on TikTok. Accordingly, the answer options for the respective question include ‘Never’ ‘between 1-3 hours’ ‘Between 3 and 4 hours’ and ‘Over 4 hours’. These will all be included as control variables in the regression model. The final question inquires about the respondents' use of TikTok fashion trends and whether they check them directly within the app, where they have four statements to pick from. At the very end of the survey, participants were thanked for participating.

The SPSS programme will examine the data once it has gathered a sufficient number of answers. To compare the means of the control and treatment groups, inferential statistics such

as linear regression, moderation, and mediation analyses will be used, and an additional analysis of the social media trend and their influence on the decision-making process. Additionally, descriptive statistics will be given for each category. In Appendix A, a summary of the questionnaire is provided.

4.2 Attention check

The survey contains one attention-check question to help prevent inaccurate responses that could produce useless and meaningless data. The data shouldn't be included in the results if the respondent doesn't provide an answer, as the attention check is reactive. Additionally, if a participant answers positively to one attention-check question, they might think that carefully considering the survey topic is crucial, which would make them feel that completing the survey is more significant (Xu et al., 2021).

4.3 Measurement of Purchase Intention

A frequently employed indicator for measuring the effectiveness of a marketing tactic is purchase intention, which may also be used to forecast sales and market share (Morwitz, 2014). In this research, purchase intention will be measured by several questions, for which participants can choose between 5 points on a Likert scale; this is a commonly used measurement for this variable (McRae & Wright, 2007).

4.4 Measurement of trustiness

Purchase intention is influenced by trustworthiness, and this study evaluates survey respondents' level of trust in content shared by ordinary people or influencers. Trust is an important term that has significance in a variety of social contexts, from personal relationships to business interactions. It has become a crucial factor in many other domains, such as marketing and social media (Alan & Tomoko, 2003). Most studies use a Likert scale to measure trust (Annuar et. Al. 2019, Alt et al. 2020, Irving et. Al. 2015). Consequently, this study will use the same technique.

4.5 Control variables

Gender, age and the location of the participants are the control variables for this study. The most important category is the age, as only data from participants who are members of Generation Z can be used in the survey. The participants will see a four-point scale with the following categories: 18-26 years old, 27-42 years old, 43-58 years old, and 59+. If someone's age does not fall into the first category, they will be informed at the end of the questionnaire that they do not qualify for this research. For the gender category they can choose from male – and – female. Their location is important as well, as I measure participants who are from Europe. Therefore, those who are not from Europe, are excluded from the survey.

Table 1: *Questionnaire items and sources*

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Reference</i>
<i>Type of user (influencer vs. regular)</i>	<p>I would only take notice of UGC when it is provided by regular and independent users. (i.e. with no involvement from fashion companies)</p> <p>I think UGC has limited use for me when I am looking for fashion tips/products.</p> <p>The video that I saw previously was posted by an influencer.</p>	Alt, Saplacan & Pop, (2020), Buultjens et. al. (2009)
<i>Purchase intention</i>	<p>This content convinced me to buy the product.</p> <p>I would choose this product over other similar products, after seeing this content.</p> <p>I would recommend this product to others, after seeing this content. Social media trends on TikTok have an essential role in changing my attitude toward my buying decisions.</p> <p>I use TikTok and look up for social media trends to identify needed products.</p> <p>I use TikTok and look up for social media trends to gather information to compare it with other products.</p> <p>I prefer using TikTok and checking the current social media trends to evaluate the risks when it comes to purchasing the product.</p> <p>I prefer using TikTok and checking the current social media trends to make a purchase decision.</p> <p>I prefer using TikTok to share my post-purchase satisfaction/dissatisfaction.</p>	Wang & Oh (2023) Dirir, (2022) Najib. 2019 Reijmerink, (2022) Garti & Eveli, 2022
<i>Perceived Trust</i>	<p>I find this content trustworthy.</p> <p>I find this content believable.</p>	Alt, Saplacan & Pop, (2020)

4.6 Sample

In order to evaluate the research's hypotheses in the context of Europeans and Generation Z participants, it is essential to consider the characteristics of the target sample. Insights from

participants with a range of demographics, including age, gender, origin, will lead to a clearer understanding of how social media trends affect purchase intention.

A number of factors must be carefully considered while choosing the right sample size for this study in order to produce results that are significant. The reliable website [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) provided assistance with the sample size calculation. The survey aims to obtain data from people who are from Europe and are part of the Z Generation. In Europe, there are approximately 2.6 million people who were born between 1996-2010 (Clark, 2023). To show the required number of responders, two concepts—the confidence level and the confidence interval—were taken into account. The research results were highly reliable because the confidence level was set at 95%. The 7.5% confidence interval was chosen to allow for a significant degree of variation in the responses. An adequate number of samples would be 121, according to [Surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) (Surveymonkey, 2022).

However, two different conditions were taken into account, when deciding about the sample size, which slightly reduces the ideal sample size. Since one condition needs a minimum of 50 respondents, according to Simonsohn et. Al., (2011) and in this study we had two, it means that the minimum sample size has to reach 100.

4.7 Survey distribution

The sample needs to be diverse for any survey to be successful. However, the survey was shared mainly among university students, presuming that most students are from different countries and are part of Generation Z. It was distributed via social media, mostly on WhatsApp, LinkedIn and Facebook, in September 2023. Additionally, since the study aims to research the effect of social media trends, it was therefore only distributed on social media.

5. Results

In this chapter, the survey results will be reviewed. First, the data preparation will be discussed, which follows the descriptive statistics part, where the demographics and other samples will be further explained. Then a validation of the measures and a linear regression analysis will be carried out. After the hypotheses have been tested, the results will be discussed.

5.1 Data Preparation

An exclusion criterion was established during the data preparation procedure for this research in order to align the study's focus with its objectives. Participants were required to meet two criteria in order to explore the experiences and viewpoints of a specific demographic cohort within a specific geographical context: they had to be members of Generation Z (*Age: between 18-26*) and live in European countries. (*'Are you from a European country? Yes-no'*) Participants who did not fit these requirements were not included in the dataset, including non-Gen Z individuals and those living outside of Europe. By maintaining a precise and narrow research focus, this deliberate exclusion attempted to boost the internal validity of the research's findings while ensuring that the findings remained relevant to the chosen demographic cohort and geographic context.

In total of 148 completions were recorded, of which 108 usable responses remained after data cleaning. The data cleaning was performed as follows. Based on age, 20 responses did not meet the criteria, so 20 respondents were excluded from the 18-26 age group. Origin was the reason for the exclusion of only 2 responses. Moreover, there was an attention question in the questionnaire, for which if a respondent gave the wrong answer, his/her answers were also deleted, as this indicates that he/she did not complete the questionnaire attentively, and therefore the answers are not reliable for the credibility of the research. In addition to the criteria, 5 responses were also deleted for which there was nearly no completeness, so those responses were also excluded.

Finally, the manipulation check question also filtered out some answers. This question could be answered on a likert scale (Strongly agree, Somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree). If respondents did not understand and could not guess whether the content they saw as soon as possible was an influencer content or not, their answer was also deleted.

5.2 Demographics

The most significant demographic finding of this study is the distribution of genders within the sample. The distribution of the participants revealed that 58 (53,7%) of them identified as female and 50 (46,3%) as male, showing that both genders are equally represented in the study. To be more precise, considering the two conditions separately, 23 (39,7%) males and 35 (60,3%) females participated in the 'INFLUENCER' condition, while 26 (55,3%) males and 21 (44,7%) females were exposed to the 'REGULAR' condition. Additionally, a chi-square test was carried out to look at the participants' gender distribution within the two experimental treatments in more detail, it can be seen in Table: 7. There were no statistically significant differences for gender, at the significance level of 5%. Consequently, the randomization check showed that people were distributed evenly across the various conditions and assigned at random.

Table 2: Gender distribution within the two conditions

Gender			Male	Female	Total
VIDEO	Regular	Count	26	21	47
		% within type video	55,3%	44.7%	100.0%
	Influencer	Count	23	35	58
		% withing type video	39.7%	60.3%	100.0%
	Total	Count	49	56	105
		% within type video	46.7%	53.3%	100.0%

5.3 Descriptive statistics

In addition to the demographic questions, some other questions evaluated the usage of TikTok. The control variable questions provided more insights into the data and observed essential information to get a more accurate picture of the research. Descriptive statistics are used to determine the frequency of the sample members' fashion product research in addition to the amount of time they spent on the TikTok platform. The first question was the following: 'On an average, how long do you use TikTok per day?' The results revealed that the majority the people (51, 9%) use the application between 1 and 3 hours per day. 19,4%

answered that they ‘Never use it’, 21,3% said that they use it between 3-4 hours per day, and lastly only 6,5% answered ‘over 4 hours’. The next question was: ‘*How frequently do you use TikTok to explore fashion-related content?*’ Only 9% of the participants use it ‘Very frequently’, however 20% of the people answered ‘Never’.

5.4 Measurement validation

Well-structured, quality tests are necessary to evaluate the accuracy of the data presented in an examination or research study. When evaluating any questionnaire, reliability, and validity are essential in order to increase the precision of the questions. Arguably the most widely used objective dependability metrics is Cronbach's alpha. It is used to evaluate the reliability and internal consistency of measurement tools like surveys. It was developed by Lee Cronbach in 1951, and the application of which is still widespread and used today (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

After applying the Cronbach alpha, the findings indicated that the questions on trust and purchase intention are realistic and logical. As internal consistency yielded a good, plausible value, we can state that the questions are well constructed and are measured collectively. The findings demonstrated that the constructs of trust and purchase intention exceed the threshold of Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .70$) (Hussey et. Al, 2023). The results of the Cronbach alpha can be found in Table 2.

Table 3: Cronbach’s alpha results

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha
<i>Trust</i>	0.822
<i>Purchase Intention</i>	0.850

5.5 Analysis of variance

ANOVA will be carried out in order to investigate H1, whether the type of user who is posting the video (influencer vs. regular) on TikTok significantly influence the purchase intention of the Z Generation users. The dependent variable is the purchase intention and the dummy variable for the type of user is the independent variable.

$$\text{Purchase Intention} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Usertype} + \beta_2 \text{TikTokUsage} + \beta_3 \text{TikTokfashion} + \epsilon_i$$

where β_1 describes the coefficient that is used for estimating the dummy variable's impact, the Type of User on purchase intention. '*TikTok Usage*' indicates how often users use the application, this also became a binary variable in this regression. In case they chose '*Never*', it takes 0, and if they voted for: '*between 1-3 hours*', '*between 3-4 hours*', or '*over 4 hours*', then it takes the value of 1. The coefficient of '*TikTok fashion*' represents how frequently participants use TikTok to explore fashion-related content, '*Never*', '*Rarely*', '*Occasionally*', takes the value of 0 and '*Frequently*', or '*Very Frequently*', takes the value of 1, also as a binary variable. These have potential influence as control variables on the purchase intention.

The error term represents the variation in purchase intention that cannot be explained by the model's independent variables.

5.6 Hypothesis 1.

In this research, the first Hypothesis aimed to test, whether the type of user, who is posting the video (regular vs. influencer) affects the purchase intention. In order to test this effect, a linear regression was employed in this research. The following control variables were included in the regression analysis: User type, TikTok usage frequency and TikTok fashion.

The normal distribution, the equal sample sizes, the outliers and the homoscedasticity of the model's underlying assumptions were all examined. All the assumptions met the criteria. Due to the small number of the sample size, the Shapiro-Wilk test was applied, which shows that the residuals of the analysis is normally distributed across groups (*Regular*: $p=.246$, *Influencer*: $p=.076$) Another condition is equal sample sizes in each group- which is also fulfilled, and that there are no outliers, this can be checked with a box-plot, here it is also correct, which can be found in Appendix B. Last but not least, homogeneity of variance is an assumption of the ANOVA that assumes that all groups have the same or similar variance; this is checked by the Levene test, it also did not reach significance, so from this point of view it is justified to run ANOVA. ($F(1,891) = .173, p > .05$) It can be seen in Appendix B.

In the sample, there was a difference in the average of the two groups, in favour of influencer videos. (regular=3.1742, influencer=3.2319) However, the ANOVA did not confirm this

difference for the whole population, i.e. in general, as it did not reach significance. ($F=.078$, $p=.781$ $p > .05$)

As reported by the Table X, since the coefficient is not statistically significant, demonstrated by the p-value of 0.781 at a significance level of 5%. Consequently, the type of user (regular vs. influencer) does not have a significant effect on the purchase intention. Therefore, H1 is not supported.

Table 4: Report

PI

Tip_2	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Regular	3.1742	44	.85511
Influencer	3.2319	46	1.08382
total	3.2037	90	.97368

Table 5: ANOVA

PI

	Sum of Sq.	df	Mean sq.	f	Sig.
Between Groups	.075	1	.075	.078	.781
Within Groups	84.302	88	.958		
Total	84.377	89			

5.7 Hypothesis 2.

In order to test Hypothesis 2, a mediation analysis is required. The bootstrapping method will be used, which is a frequently employed mediation analysis, proposed by Hayes (2013), additionally, when bootstrapping is used, the estimates of indirect effects and their confidence intervals are more accurate than with other methods. (Hayes, 2013). For the investigation of the mediation analysis, the SPSS extension Macro PROCESS, Version 4.2 was used. The

software programme is used to examine at how one or more mediating or moderating variables affect the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Abu-Bader & Jones, 2021).

The mediating role of "Trustiness of the Content" between the independent variable "type of user" and the dependent variable "Purchase Intention" was examined.

Figure 3 presents a visual overview of the test's findings:

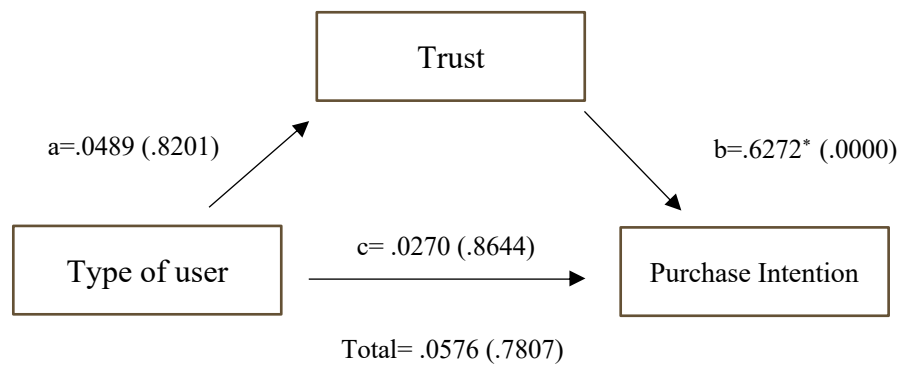


Figure 3: Mediation effect of Hypothesis 2

Firstly, the direct effect was examined between the X (=Type of user) and the Y (=PI) variables; however, this effect was not yet mediated by the third variable. The figure above shows no significant effect. ($t=0,1712, p=.8644, p>.05$). The total effect has an insignificant result as well ($t=.1712, p=.8644$). The mediation effect can nevertheless occur even in the absence of a direct effect between the dependent and independent variables. Instead, significant relationships should exist between the independent variable (X=Type of user) and the mediation variable (M=Trust), as well as between the mediation variable (M=Trust) and the dependent variable (Y=PI).

Next, the mediating effect was considered. The figure depicts that there is no significant effect between X and M (path a: $\beta=0,0489, t=0,2280, p>.05$), but there is a significant effect between M and Y (path b: $\beta=0,6272^* t=8,0163, p>.05$). So, the figure suggests that trust has a significant effect on purchase intention, but the type of user has no significant effect on trust. Consequently, the conditions for a mediation effect were not established.

Lastly, the total effect of the model was examined. This is the total direct and indirect effects of the entire model. It comes from the indirect effects ($a*b$) and direct (c) effects (Abu-Bader

& Jones, 2021). The total effect was .0576, with a t-value of .1712, and a $p = .8644$, $p > .05$, thus it is insignificant

Overall, it was determined that the type of user had no significant impact on purchase intention through trust, either direct or indirect. Additionally, the combined effect of the direct and indirect effects was insignificant. H2 is, therefore, not supported.

Table 6: Mediation Analysis TRUST

<i>Variable /Effect</i>					<i>95% confidence interval</i>	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Lower Bound</i>	<i>Upper Bounds</i>
Type of User						
→PI	.0270	.1575	.1712	.8644	-.2860	.3400
Type of user → Trust						
Trust → PI	.6272	.0782	8.0163	.000*	.4717	.2827
Total effect						
Total	.0576	.2064	.2793	.7807	-.3525	.4678
Effects						
Total	.0576	.2064	.2793	.7807	-.3525	.4678
Direct	.0270	.1575	.1712	.8644	-.2860	.3400
Indirect	.0307	.1351			-.2484	.2908

Based on 5000 bootstraps samples

5.8 Hypothesis 3.

The last Hypothesis of this research examines the moderating role of gender. In order to determine whether the effect on purchase intention differs between genders, a moderation

analysis was carried out. Regression analysis PROCESS Macro by Hayes was used to determine whether gender affects the relationship's direction (Hayes, 2013). With a bootstrapping of 5000 and 90% confidence intervals.

In Table 4, .0472 is what shows the effect of gender on Purchase Intention, which is indeed insignificant ($p=.8741$). Based on the findings, the result is not significant, meaning that gender does not moderate the relationship between the Type of user and the Purchase Intention. ($b=.0472$, $t=.1590$, $p=.8741$).

Table 7: Moderation Analysis

Variable/Effect

	b	SE	t	p	95% confidence interval	
					Upper Bound	Lower Bound
Constant	3.1056	.4567	6.7999	.0000	-2.1977	4.0135
Tip_2	-.4532	.6685	-.6779	.4997	-1.7821	.8758
Q2 (gender)	.0472	.2971	.1590	.8741	-.5433	.6378
Int_1	.3179	.4178	.7610	.4487	-.5126	1.1484

Product terms key:

Int_1: tip_2 x Q2

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s)

	R2-chng	F	Df1	Df2	p
X * W	.0006	.5791	1.0000	86.0000	.4487

Level of confidence for all intervals in output: 95.000

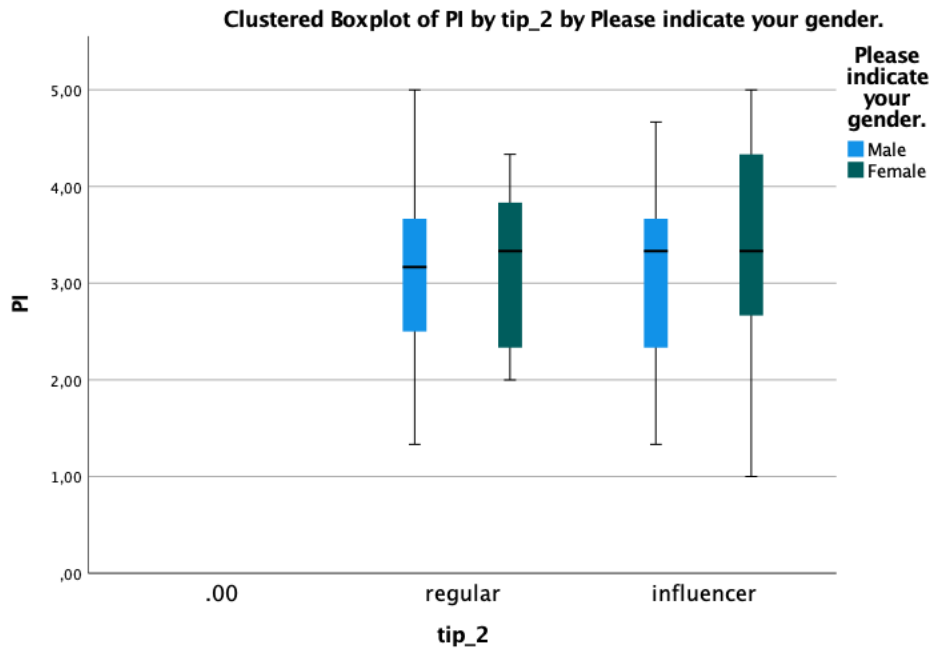


Figure 4: Boxplot for gender differences

As shown in the figure above, the purchase intention increases for women, regardless of the fact that the result is not significant, suggesting that the phenomenon may exist. In general, the hypothesis was rejected, but in this figure, it can be observed that for influencers, the two genders are more separated, with higher purchase intention for women than for men.

5.9 Additional Analysis

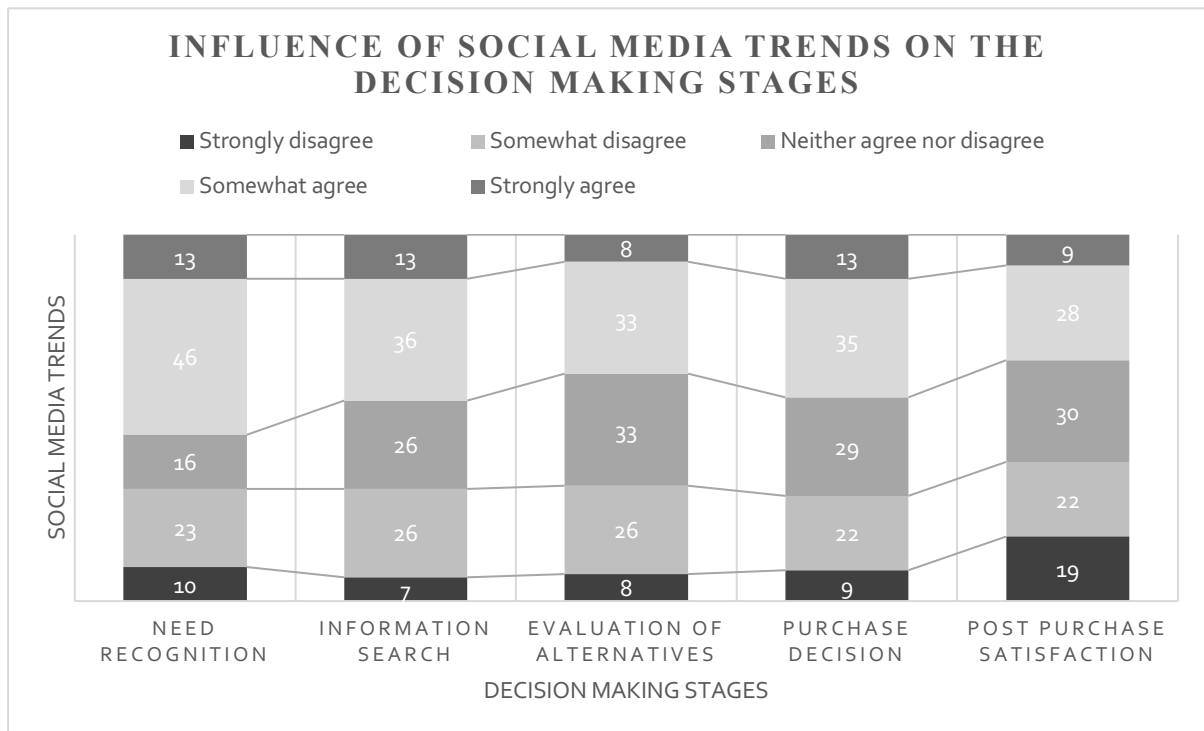


Figure 5: The influence of social media trends on the decision making process

To identify other patterns within the data, apart from the above-explained three Hypotheses, the effect of social media trends, in general, was examined in the 5 decision-making stages. The graph above shows that nearly half of the survey respondents voted strongly agree at the need recognition stage. In addition, during information search and purchase decision, people almost universally voted that they are influenced by social media trends at these stages. For the remaining two stages, evaluation of alternatives and post purchase decision, vast majority of people also voted that they are influenced by trends. The graph demonstrates that social media trends can possibly influence participants' decision-making process.

When examining carefully at these findings carefully, it's fascinating to see how different consumer journey stages show variable degrees of openness to social media trends. This emphasises the need for an in-depth approach when examining how trends affect consumer behaviour. These findings highlight the importance of exploring this topic further, even by establishing study hypotheses. Businesses and marketers aiming to connect with their target audience in an ever-changing digital landscape can gain significant insights from an

understanding of the complex relationship between social media trends and consumer decision-making.

Table 8: Summary of Hypotheses

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Result</i>
H1: Depending on the type of the user who is posting the video (influencer vs. regular) on TikTok, significantly affects the purchase intention of Generation-Z consumers in the fashion industry, such that when the video is posted by an influencer, then the purchase intention is higher.	Not supported
H2: Perceived trust in the content mediates the relationship between the type of user (regular vs. influencer) and purchase intention among Gen-Z consumers on TikTok. Specifically, when the video is posted by an influencer, higher perceived trust leads to increased purchase intention.	Not supported
H3: The gender will moderate the effect of the type of user on purchase intention of Gen-Z such that the effect in H1 is stronger for females than males.	Not supported

6. General Discussion

This last section will provide an explanation and comparison of the findings of this research. The chapter will go into further detail on the theoretical and managerial implications, as well as the limitations and recommendations for future research.

6.1 The effect of the type of user on purchase intention

The main focus of the study was to investigate the influence of social media trends, such as influencer marketing and User-generated content, on buying behaviour. Precisely, to research the relationship between the type of user who is posting a fashion-related video on TikTok, on the purchase intention of the Z Generation. It was expected that the type of user, whether

an influencer or a regular person, who is posting a video will have an effect on the purchase intention, such that it increases when an influencer with more likes, followers and engagement is creating content. This assumption was based on earlier researches that has proved that there is indeed a positive effect of the number of likes and followers on purchase intention, when it comes to influencer marketing on social media sites (Chetioui et. Al., 2019). Furthermore, research by Chetioui et. Al. (2019) and other studies have demonstrated that the perceived level of trust influences consumer purchasing behaviour positively. However, the findings of this research proved the opposite and found no significant impact of the type of user on the purchase intention. There are plenty of reasons that could lead to these results. Given that this study's focus was specifically on fashion, the characteristics of the product category might have had a significant impact on how consumers responded. Fashion products, which are influenced by a variety of tastes and preferences, may respond to influencer material differently than other product categories. Additionally, there were some answers from the survey where survey respondents did not use TikTok actively despite being shown an example video and being asked for their comments after seeing it. The results of the study may have been impacted by their responses due to their unfamiliarity with the platform. Effectively analysing the impact of user type and influencer material may requires an understanding of the platform and its dynamics (Hutter et. Al., 2013).

6.2 The effect of perceived trust

As has been stated multiple times in this study, the mediating role of perceived trust was examined to see if it influences the connection between Generation Z's purchase intention and user type. These outcomes are consistent with past research, which predicted that trust can have a significant impact on purchasing behavior, as observed by Qianyu and Chompu in 2022. According to Huh et.al, (2017) trust is a key factor in social media advertising as users reach out and interact with influencers when they find them reliable and sincere. With a higher degree of trust, people tend to be influenced and catch their attention easier. This may entail establishing strong relationships with influencers who can persuasively express trust, upholding brand authenticity and transparency, and ensuring reliable, constant contact with customers (Lou, 2022). The hypothesis was formed in light of facts that that influencers have the potential to shape customers' purchase motivations (Vrontis et. Al., 2021). The findings, on the other hand, were insignificant; according to this research, perceived trust does not mediate the relationship between the above-mentioned two variables.

In conclusion, trust continues to be an important component with a demonstrated influence on customer behaviour, even if it did not function as a mediating factor in this study. Businesses aiming for ways to reach Generation Z and influence their purchase preferences might benefit greatly from identifying and employing this phenomenon.

6.3 Moderating effect of gender

The last hypothesis in this study is based on a study by Chika et al. (2020), which found that social media users' purchasing decisions are significantly influenced by their gender.

According to Hudders & De Jans (2021) men and women have different reactions to social media influencers. In fact, the results of this research showed higher post-engagement and a more positive brand attitude among the female participants due to a larger perceived likeness (Hudders & De Jans, 2021). The findings of this research however indicated that the effect between the type of user and the purchase intention is not moderated by the gender.

6.4 Theoretical Implications

This research adds to the collection of theoretical knowledge currently available in the area of social media trends and how they affect consumer behaviour, focusing on user-generated content and influencer marketing. Even though the study's findings indicate that there is no meaningful relationship between a user's purchase intention and whether they are an influencer or a regular user on TikTok, it is nevertheless important to take these results into account in the context of a larger theoretical framework. Previous studies have researched the effect of social media trends, such as influencer marketing or user-generated content, and the subject has been approached from many different angles, as these trends can be measured in many ways (Blazheska, 2020). In this study, the number of likes and followers distinguished influencers from regular posters. This research further expands the current developing framework of social media trends and influencer marketing (Jin et. Al.,2019, Taylor, 2020, Haenlein et. Al., 2020). It contributes to the knowledge of how to market for the Z Generation and how trends influence their buying behaviour. It highlights the importance of trust when it comes to fashion influencers or user-generated content.

Additionally, this research contributes to the information of how perceived trust mediates the relationship between the type of user and the purchased intention. While some articles

claimed that trust has a positive effect on social media, the outcomes of this research study indicated that perceived trust does not mediate the relationship between the two variables (Zafar et. Al., 2021). The complexity of the mediating effect of trust on purchase intention suggests that further research is needed.

Finally, the study delved into the moderating effect of gender. Some research papers have shown that gender moderates the effect of purchase intention, and other claimed that the impact of influencers in social media are stronger on females than males (Shao et. Al., 2004, Sun et. Al., 2021). However, this paper did not find gender as a moderator significant.

6.5 Managerial Implications

Despite the fact, that the outcomes of this study are limited in terms of the relationship between type of user and purchase intention, no concrete conclusions have been drawn, but useful information for marketers and managers may be found in this reading.

It is important to recognize that perceived trust is necessary if we want to increase purchase intention by consumers (Hajli, 2017). Even though the mediation analysis was insignificant in this study, the results suggest that trust can be an essential factor in increasing purchase intention. Understanding the value of trust and developing strategies that increase consumer confidence in their products or services can work wonders for boosting purchase intentions. This could include tactics like transparency, consistent brand messaging, quality control, and excellent customer service, all of which can increase trust and, as a result, purchase intentions (Hajli, 2017). This information serves as a helpful guide for marketers and fashion firms while navigating the complex landscape of consumer behaviour.

The study also emphasises the necessity of future research into the complex relationships between user type and purchase intention on TikTok, as well as those connections' implications on gender and different generation.

6.6 Limitations and recommendations for future research

In this section, the possible limitations will be discussed that could potentially influence the outcome of this research. Furthermore, more detailed recommendations will be presented to direct future research efforts towards greater depth and impact.

First and foremost, paid and organic influencers were not distinguished and defined in this study, it used an average real-world influencer as an example, where participants may presume that the influencer is being paid. It is possible that it was not clear to the participants whether, in the influencer scenario, they were paid content or not. This could have significantly influenced the outcome of this research. As there was only a difference in the number of followers and likes, this could have confused respondents. In the future, it may be worthwhile to include a study of paid influencers and make it clear which are organic and which are not. This could have been another important factor when investigating this topic.

The questionnaire applied a scenario-based method, where the participants were exposed to two different conditions randomly, with content presented by either an influencer or a regular person on TikTok. It is possible that it was not enough to differentiate only in the number of likes and followers, but that more factors should have been highlighted to distinguish between influencer and regular content creators. For example, engagement under posts, comments, and reviews should be highlighted and presented. The number of likes and followers may not have been salient enough for the participants. For future research, more factors should be taken into account, with more examples to illustrate the two scenarios, so that it is clear to the respondents whether they are influencers or just ordinary regular individuals on social media.

Next, the sample size of the questionnaire should be enhanced. The sample consisted only of participants between the ages of 18 and 26, which contributed to a relatively smaller sample size. It would have been interesting to research the same topic but involve more generations and look at the differences between them. Although the topic itself and the researched platform usually target the Z Generation, it would have been fascinating to add more age groups to the sample target. Many answers were excluded from the data because of the age, origin, attention check, and the manipulation question. Overall, a larger sample size would most definitely have aided the findings. The results show some smaller differences between the type of user, genders and trust indeed plays a role in the decision-making process. Some, however, were just short of the level of significance. Consequently, a significant difference might have been established through the application of an increased sample size.

Future research could focus on other moderators and mediators, which may have a more notable effect on how the user type and buy intention relate to one another. An interesting

mediator could be the emotional response toward the content to investigate whether the influencer content generates more emotional responses. The level of engagement could be another influential mediator. Influencers may generate more shares, comments, and likes, which may affect consumers' intent to make purchases. As another moderator, future research could involve different user demographics, apart from gender, taking age into consideration could be an interesting factor. A new type of product that is being promoted could be a moderator as well, as some other products are might better be influenced by influencers. Apart from fashion products, for example, skincare products or makeup would be worthwhile to analyse, to understand how it changes the participants opinion towards influencer marketing.

7. Conclusion

This study's main goal was to comprehend how social media trends affect consumer behaviour. Specifically, it looked into the connection between Generation Z's purchase intentions in the fashion industry and the type of user—influencers vs regular users. The research, therefore, hypothesized that influencer postings on TikTok would increase the purchase intention of Generation Z. Although most research papers have concluded that an increase in the number of likes and followers is associated with an increase in purchase intention, this was not confirmed in this study, the result was found to be insignificant. This can be because of many reasons,

The mediating role of perceived trust in the relationship between user type and purchase intention was examined, but the results were inconsistent with the mediation theory. The relationship between the two variables was also moderated by gender, assuming that the effect is stronger for females. Nonetheless, the outcomes of the analysis yielded no statistically significant findings again. These results further confirmed the need for additional research to fully understand the factors.

Despite of the insignificant results, it is important to emphasise that trust continues to remain an important factor, especially in the context of platforms like TikTok.

It is therefore important to recognise and understand that this study is not without its shortcomings. However, if these limitations are taken into account in future study, insightful conclusions might be reached. Among other things, the small sample, the fact that only one generation was considered, the lack of differentiation between organic and paid influencer

material and the somewhat inaccurate representation of the two scenarios probably led to these results. The use of a larger sample, including more generations, the introduction of an additional moderator and mediator, and the inclusion of a paid influencer contingent could change the results considerably.

Despite the above-mentioned facts, the whole research could potentially contribute to the expertise of the effect social media trends and influencer marketing on purchase intention. The contradictory results underscore how complicated and ever-changing consumer behaviour is in the digital media age. Future research initiatives should focus on addressing these drawbacks, expanding the analysis's focus, and delving deeper into the complicated topic of trust, social media trends, and how these affect consumer decisions. By doing this, we may acquire a more thorough understanding of these elements and how they affect marketing strategies and consumer engagement in the rapidly changing world of digital media.

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9. Appendices

Appendix A. Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

My name is Blanka Kovács, and I am conducting a survey for my master thesis in Marketing @ Erasmus School of Economics. An example video will be shown to you, and you will be asked to answer some questions. You will be able to go back and forth. It is of high importance that you read every piece of information given in this survey carefully before moving to the next step. This survey should not take longer than 5 minutes. The data will be processed strictly anonymously, and all data will be treated confidentially. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers, only your own opinion matters! The purpose of this survey is to understand how social media trends on TikTok influence the decision-making process of Generation-Z consumers in the fashion industry. Since only the Z-Generation will be researched, the answers from people who are older than 26 will be not taken into consideration.

Thank you for your participation in my master thesis survey.

Sincerely,

Blanka Kovács

Question 1: What is your age?

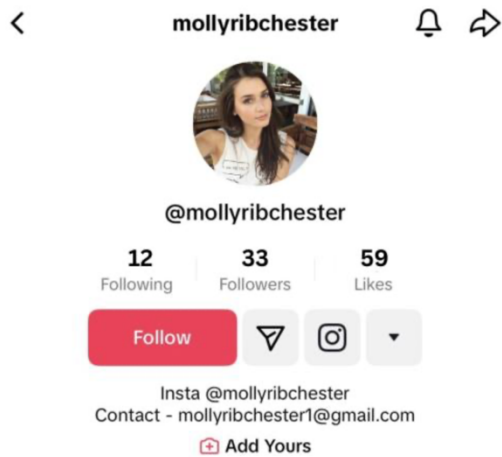
- 18-26
- 27-42
- 43-58
- 59+

Question 2: Please indicate your gender.

- Female
- Male

On the next page you will see a screenshot of a profile from TikTok. Please look at it carefully. After the picture, there will be a short video which was posted on TikTok by the person you see in the profile. Please watch the video, then answer the questions below.

Scenario 1: Non-Influencer



Please look at this video and indicate your answers below.

- *Video being displayed-*

Question 3:

This content convinced me to buy the product.

I would choose this product over other similar products, after seeing this content.

I would recommend this product to others, after seeing this content.

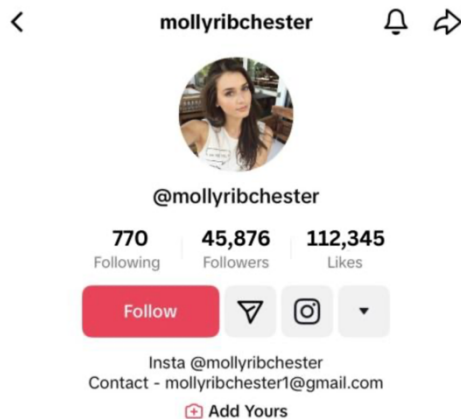
I find this content trustworthy.

I find this content believable.

I find this content engaging.

- *Strongly disagree*
- *Somewhat disagree*
- *Neither agree nor disagree*
- *Somewhat agree*
- *Strongly agree*

Scenario 2: Infleuncer



Please look at this video and indicate your answers below.

- Video being displayed-

Question 4:

This content convinced me to buy the product.

I would choose this product over other similar products, after seeing this content.

I would recommend this product to others, after seeing this content.

I find this content trustworthy.

I find this content believable.

I find this content engaging.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Question 5: *The video that I saw previously was posted by an influencer.*

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Question 6: *Please select 'Strongly agree', to indicate that you are paying attention.*

- Strongly disagree

- *Somewhat disagree*
- *Neither agree nor disagree*
- *Somewhat agree*
- *Strongly agree*

Question 7: I think UGC (User-Generated content: brand-related content that is created by customers or brand advocates) has limited use for me when I am looking for fashion tips/products on TikTok.

- *Strongly disagree*
- *Somewhat disagree*
- *Neither agree nor disagree*
- *Somewhat agree*
- *Strongly agree*

Question 8: Please indicate your opinion.

Social media trends on TikTok have an essential role in changing my attitude toward my buying decision.

I use TikTok and look up for social media trends to gather information to compare it with other products.

I prefer using TikTok and checking the current social media trends to evaluate the risks when it comes to purchasing the product.

I prefer using TikTok and checking the current social media trends to make a purchase decision.

I prefer using TikTok to share my post-purchase satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

- *Strongly disagree*
- *Somewhat disagree*
- *Neither agree nor disagree*
- *Somewhat agree*
- *Strongly agree*

Question 9: I would only take notice of UGC (User-Generated Content: brand-related content that is created by customers or brand advocates) on TikTok when it is provided by regular and independent users. (i.e. with no involvement from fashion companies)

- *Strongly disagree*
- *Somewhat disagree*
- *Neither agree nor disagree*
- *Somewhat agree*

- *Strongly agree*

Question 10:

On an average, how long do you use TikTok per day?

- *I never use it*
- *Between 1-3 hours*
- *Between 3-4 hours*
- *Over 4 hours*

Question 11:

How frequently do you use TikTok to explore fashion-related content?

- *Never*
- *Rarely*
- *Occasionally*
- *Frequently*
- *Very frequently*

Which of the following statements best describes your attitude towards TikTok fashion trends?

- *I actively seek out and follow the latest fashion trends on TikTok.*
- *I occasionally come across fashion trends on TikTok but don't actively follow them.*
- *I am aware of fashion trends on TikTok but don't pay much attention to them.*
- *I am not interested in following fashion trends on TikTok.*

End of survey.

Appendix B: Tables

Table 9: Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (1- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2,559	1	0,110		
Continuity Correction	1,969	1	0,161		
Likelihood Ratio	2,567	1	0,109		
Fisher's exact test				0,120	0,080
Linear-by-Linear Association	2,535	1	0,111		
N of Valid Cases	105				

- a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 21,93
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 10: Test of Normality

Tip_2	Kolgomorov - Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
PI Regular	,119	44	,127	,969	44	,246
Influencer	,146	46	,015	,955	46	,076

- a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 11: Multicollinearity Test Tolerance and VIF

Variables	Tolerance	VIF
Tip_2	.976	1,025
Gender	.940	1.064
Trust	.961	1.041
Q14_2kat	.883	1.132
Q15_2kat	.895	1.118

a. Dependent variable: PI

Figure 6: Scatterplot of Homoscedasticity

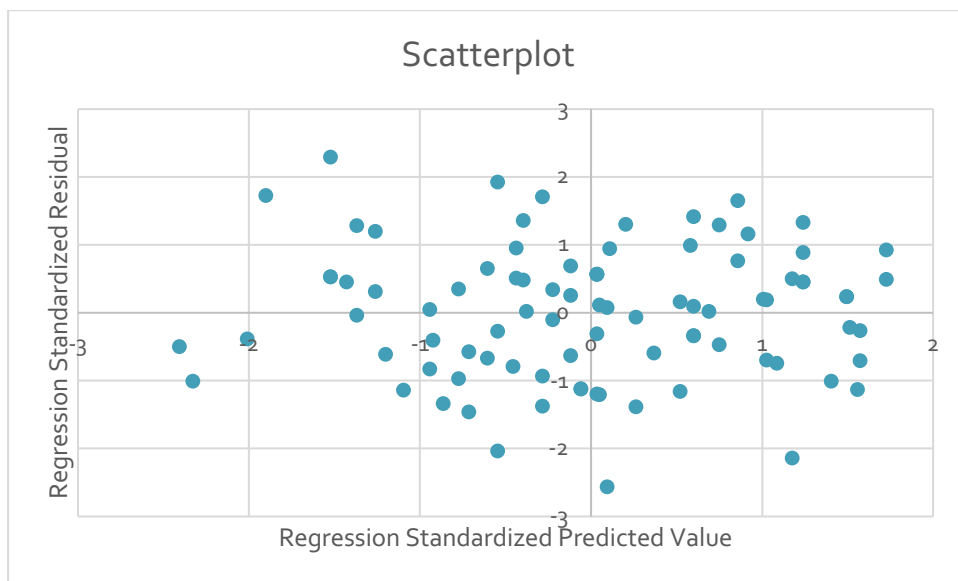


Table 12: Test of homogeneity of variances

		Levene statistics	Df1	Df2	Sig.
PI	Based on Mean	1.892	1	88	.173
	Based on median	1.474	1	88	.228
	Based on median and with adjusted df	1.474	1	81.905	.228
	Based on trimmed mean	1.794	1	88	.184

Figure 7: Boxplot of outliers

