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Signature: Orla Deniyi Williams

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Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Orla Deniyi Williams

Student Number: 20376996

Degree for which thesis is submitted: BA(Hons) Business

Title of Thesis: Social Media Marketing: Online Influence and it's effect on Irish youth

Date: 7/7/2023

Material submitted for award

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Signature: Orla Deniyi Williams

Date: 7/7/2023

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Literature Review:

Today, technology, targeted marketing strategies and social media sites have taken the world by storm. After having no prior knowledge of the chosen topic, a personal evaluation was conducted to determine the facts desperately needed to be research following the duration of the investigation. The topic being evaluated has presented itself do to the modernisation and normalisation of the uses of social media, its benefits from traditional advertisement and promotion, and its new adaptability to creating new opportunities and ventures for the youth of today. With the introduction of these new innovations, society has seen a shift in the way technology is used when promoting businesses, spreading new information and propaganda, and the effects it has had on their influences and daily choices.

Several different generations have adapted to these advancements, the traditional structure of commerce and advertising has shifted with it, leaving there to me little room to fully adjust to this change. This can typically be shown with older generations, for example, “Boomers”, a generation of people aged between 59 and 77 and are divided into 2 groupings, have been around to see the invention and introduction of these new innovations. In their earlier years, this category of people was slowly introduced and familiarized themselves with technology but may have found it harder as the years went along, causing a minor culture shock or simply a disinterest in learning about these exhilarating innovations. Although this generation was introduced to the prospect of social media and technology, they found alternative methods of communication and stuck to the traditional methods of obtaining information and connecting with their peers and family members.

The premise of this section of the research assessment is to investigate a topic that was of personal genuine curiosity for and an interest in, as it has not been presented often by researchers and in the media. As a digital native myself, the true intention of this dissertation is to expand my knowledge on the importance and creation of social media and how it affects marketers, as this

topic has never been fully understood, and the transition and evolution of social media has not undergone personal evaluation before selecting the topic.

1. The definition of marketing and their types, how social media and the web have evolved over the last three decades:

Marketing

'What is marketing?'. According to oxford dictionary, their official definition of marketing is: **“The action or business of promoting and selling products or services, including market research and advertising.”** Oxford Dictionary. It involves scoping out new potential customers/clients to your company, interacting with their clients in a way that interests them in the company’s brand, and retaining their existing customers in order to expand the business. Its main focus is to target a particular group of people in order to achieve more exposure for an organisation, and a prime example of this would be illustrated with the use of motor vehicle billboards over motorways or food advert posters on bus stops.

Marketing is especially important and relevant to the younger generation as they are a main group of people who can be easily influenced by others and marketing towards them is amazingly simple when marketers know how their competitors are gaining a younger audience. The ways in which marketing was done in previous years was by marketers targeting a niche market or demographic, this can be done through following trends and understanding the necessities and desires of that niche market to expand to a desired target audience. As Irish Gen Z have the means to create an online community through a plethora of social media outlets, this creates a significantly smaller job for advertisers and marketing teams with the constant use of search engine algorithms. This critical tool enables the ability to increase engagement, focus on client retention and increase profits whilst decreasing costs for the organisation.

On the premise of marketing, an article written by Mail Chimp’s official website illustrates that there are 9 main types of marketing, however the focus of this section will be radio and television marketing (traditional forms), social media marketing, influencer marketing and search engine marketing.

- Radio and television marketing:

This type of marketing is commonly associated with a 'traditional' form of marketing. For decades, companies have used radio and television to reach a wide range of potential listeners, as radio and television marketing were widely used nation-wide back as far as the mid 1900's.

- Social media marketing:

This form of marketing involves content creation, it helps increase engagement with audiences. There are numerous ways to market on social media, depending on who your audience is that you are trying to attract.

- Influencer marketing:

This form of marketing is more commonly used by corporations who are targeting a younger audience who may be easily susceptible to directed ads. As mentioned previously, Gen Z are usually victims in terms of this style of marketing being utilised.

- Search engine marketing:

Commonly associated with the likes of Google and Bing, search engine marketing uses 'Pay-per-Click' strategies and targeted advertisement and ads to gain engagement with service users. This particular method has been utilised more frequently within the last decade by digital search engine providers. Advertising equivalent products or services that are being searched by users is a necessity when it comes to promotion. Marketing to younger generations, Irish Gen z in particular, as it allows for a corporation to create a positive brand and for the company to be able to align their values with like-minded buyers, Heliyon (2021).

Advertising

There are a plethora of various advertising styles and in accordance with an article written by the Indeed Editorial Team, there are 14 assorted styles of advertisement with the main styles, however the most relevant styles consisting of:

- PSA Advertising/ Podcast Advertising

PSA:

This is a rather abrupt form of advertising that is used to grab people's attention in order to relay an incredibly significant message of piece of information to a mass audience at one time.

Podcast:

This form of advertising is used to target an active listening audience in the middle of their episode in order to engage them with the brand being uplifted and promoted during the ad break. Doing this will enable the companies involved to ensure that their message is forcefully relayed, and this is usually done toward the middle of the podcast to keep the brand fresh in the listeners memory.

- Influencer advertising

Commonly known as “brand deals”, this particular mode of marketing allows an organisation to essentially hire a third-party source/influencer who has developed a system and fan base to gain the brand exposure and a new client reach, to express their (sometime) biased on a product or service in exchange for reduced or free merchandise or services.

- Television Advertising

A less modern way to market, this style of advertising is known to be the longest used, spanning across 4 decades and counting. This method of advertising allowed companies and marketers to purchase a run time for their advert, between 20-60 seconds, and they would replay these ads for viewers watching at home, in hopes to reach a specific demographic.

- Paid Search advertising:

This technique is more commonly used when a company is trying to use Pay-Per-Click schemes to advertise their brand or product. The premise of this marketing style is to utilise the use of search engines, the likes of Google for example, and shortlist their niche and target audience with the key words they are searching for.

- Social Media Advertising

With advertising, there are a variety of techniques utilise in conjunction with the types mentioned above. A primary exhibit of this style of advertising is when toy companies would schedule their adverts to fall on the time where children would be home from school and parents may be present to influence their buying choices. With Social Media starting to become one of the most common forms of advertising known to the younger generations, platform developers such as Facebook and Instagram have now permitted their service users with the tools to advertise their campaigns and sponsored content to their specific audiences.

Social Media

Social networking sites have been around since the late 90's and started being popularized around the early 2000's with people engaging in sites such as Myspace, MSN, and Find-a-Friend. Technology was not as advanced today as it was 25 years ago, so these websites would take days to send messages and hours to upload posts to their feeds. As time went on, people transferred from using heavy laptops and corded landlines to communicate, to using the internet on platforms such as Facebook and Tumblr in the early 2000's to connect with people from around the world all at once.

In the section of a journal titled: "Social Media Definition," an extensive interpretation of how social media came to be. The author lists various global social media sites and apps, as well as when they originated. An accurate representation of this data is shown when the state that:

"...ever since its debut in 2004, Facebook has grown and developed to 1.4 billion active regular monthly members globally. As of 2015, 500 million posts and tweets a day were being posted by the 288 million monthly active users of Twitter, which launched in 2006. A deluge of projects aimed at developing new services around social media functions and integrating web 2.0 elements into existing web-based services are now most obvious in Facebook and Twitter." Obar (2015)

Through the course of the late 2000's and early 2010's, technology and mobile/hand-held devices shifted to smaller, more portable devices. This breakthrough has showed to be the start of the new digital age. A detailed description of how the digital space has revolutionised itself is provided by Transformation Marketing, when they illustrate that:

"Arguably, the last 10 years have seen the greatest technological growth ever. In 2009, the iPhone was two years old, Android was in its infancy, and Samsung's S9110 was the only smartwatch on the market. With many of these pieces of tech being so new, many consumers received marketing messages through offline mediums such as newspapers, magazines, and directories," Transformation Marketing (2019).

it is essential that a brand uses their resources to the best of its ability change with trends and use utilize as many touchpoints as possible with potential consumers.

Social media is free to use for its users, and customers on platforms are the lifeline/the only reason the platform is still run and its existence, we are producers, distributors, and consumers of and on the platform and this is due to the methods and strategies used by marketers and companies to gain traction and reach their targeted audience. Due to its cost effectiveness, companies may lead to social media more than traditional forms of advertisement and promotion as a result. The financialisation and monetization of social media has been a contributing factor for marketers to promote their brand, along with the narrative that the cost of advertising is cut down drastically to nothing, which leaves more capital to invest in other areas of the business. This has been a shift from moving from entertainment platforms like television and radio, which would be considered more traditional forms of advertisement, to social media like Facebook Marketplace, Instagram and TikTok.

Web 2.0

The phenomena known as 'Web2.0' slowly started to creep its way into mainstream internet during the production of social media and user generated content. Traditional media sources now refer to these social media platforms and similar ones as "Web 2.0." Web 2.0 refers to the growing emphasis on consumers content and interaction among people on the web as well as the development of digital resources to support that focus, not the current state of the web. During the early 2000's, websites started to introduce interweb communication and allowed for people to post to their own content. A prominent aspect that was integrated into this new web source is that Web 2.0 is completely user directed and personally generated. The 'web' made a shift from being completely static and uniform in their layout and function, to becoming a safe space for people's expression and a source of entertainment by the end of the millennia. With Web 1.0 being almost completely static, having a limit in the amount of engagement and interaction had by its users at the time, this new contrast has shown a massive development in the natural state of the internet, and it makes people of elder generations sometimes wonder what will be next for future generations. As blogging and wikis were on the rise, people began to openly express their thoughts, ideologies and personalities, social media started to become a place where people found comfort within themselves and each other.

The gradual transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 can be detailed and outlined in an article compiled by O'Reilly (2005), who drives an important topic of what it was that caused the traditional web to become what we know it as today. The author references that during a conference, the primary principles that were being set out revolving the trajectory of web 1.0 were brought up and discussed thoroughly, with the conclusion being that Web 2.0 will become the new initiative of how people will see and utilise the internet. This initiative allowed for marketers and advertisers to run ads on a wide variety of channels that will be visible to the public, and as well as this, it allowed for there to be a new level of depth and substance for its service users compared to the likes of search engine Netscape, which ran as a simple application that gave you a minimalistic result. In comparison to the top used present-day search engine, Google, there have been extreme development within the endless possibilities and results users can get, and as well as this, Google was the beginning of life for the digital native.

This progressive change between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 had caused general networking sites used by all generations to adapt and swiftly change their programming to suit this alteration. The most notable case of this shift would be with Facebook in the mid 2000's.

On August 15 2006, Facebook became one of the first platforms to incorporate third party developers that gave users details, gaining them access to create a platform which allows for networking made better than any other. During this era, the phrase "platform" had started to become the most defining concept attached to social networking sites at the time, according to Gillespie (2010).

Botting:

A lot of the issues around Social Media Marketing include the use of bots and fake accounts, as well as using bots and copyright issues. There are a multitude of fake organizations who advertise other company's products as their own to generate a profit. A relevant example of this level of botting is with twitter being taken over by Elon Musk and him deleting most if not all bot accounts. This flaw creates a negative environment for people who may be vulnerable or easily manipulated to be engaging with, as people may try to enable capitalising on other people

with the use of misinformation, scams and malicious activity. In addition to this, many people over the last decade have been shifting from more traditional jobs and forms of work, to being completely reliant on social media as their source of income, and an issue arises with the increase of bots who have no purpose and pose as people online. It causes a decrease in the content creators engagement data and analytics, and this in turn brings down the persons

2. How social media relates to marketing strategies used by companies and influencers:

For decades, companies have used the ideologies of competition and tested various marketing strategies to curate a system that works best for their organisation. It is evident that within the last 20 years, the revolutionization of communication and advertisement have developed and evolved to a point of no return. Marketers and organisations have started to work together as a unit to change the way that they connect with their audiences, distribute facts and emerging information and drive a direction for the company.

The power and influence of social media platforms has been able to send wide-spread messages and propaganda across the nation. Across each platform, an audience of potential billions can be reached, so for companies to use the tools and algorithms already provided and engraved within these platforms, the cost of marketing and advertising can be cut tremendously. With the addition of influencers and public figures to a marketing campaign, marketers allow for increased mass exposure to a specific demographic of people, who rely on, and trust said influencer. As mentioned by Tchounwou (2022), “**...social media users can feel a connection with the influencer that they follow, which will enable influencers to ensure user’s loyalty in relation to promoting products.**”, and this will manifest in the various successful companies who have utilised third party individuals to promote their brand and establish the company further.

3. Who uses social media the most and Digital Nativity:

According to Zarella (2010), **“social media is more effective than traditional media.”**, although it has been used less and less over the years, as many companies can create a mass following, attract their target demographic, and influence and persuade them to get involved and interact with their brand. This has been evident as there have been numerous apps and platforms that are a prime market for advertisers to reach and target their main demographic and audience.

“Various studies have attempted to determine the precise justifications for social networking sites use by businesses. According to the research, social media is much more than just a tool for marketing for organizations. Building relationships with clients and consumers, sharing information, promoting new goods, seeing new market prospects, channelling, and boosting traffic to their various websites, and overall attempting to promote their brands are just a few of the main reasons why companies use social media (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2017).” Katrodia, A. (2022).

Platforms like Instagram, for example, have become the new ‘norm’ for this type of marketing, meaning that companies are able to change with the times and become more modernised and stick to what is trending. Influencers can engage with larger audiences to prompt them to buy from the business. In a majority of cases, Small-Medium Enterprises who cannot afford to hire and produce traditional methods of promotion, tend to lean towards social media for a way to gain retention and increase their overall growth, whilst using minimal funding to keep expenditure low. A specific illustration of this strategy working to make Small-Medium Enterprises's more profitable was displayed in a study done by Roberts and Webb (2016), where multiple Small-Medium Enterprises were introduced and analysed by their profitability, consumer reach, expenses and brand loyalty after using marketing through social media. The conclusion of that study reflects that smaller businesses were able to use their platform to their advantage and expanded their reach and consumer engagement.

“A ‘Digital native’ is a member of the younger generation who grew up in the cyber age.”

Wang (2019). The topic of digital nativity in terms of social media marketing has become incredibly important, as brands and marketers alike must persistently develop new and creative ways to engage with younger people. Digital natives or Gen Z are and can be heavily influenced by the media and content they observe on a day-to-day basis.

A technique used to attract people to a brand, company or product subconsciously can be done in many ways, and an example of this is shown in a video by Derren Brown, where he conducted an experiment to see if he can keep a particular song in the test subjects mind subconsciously. Some techniques that were used were getting people to hum the song and having the song play in the background. The same concept can apply when it comes to social media. Methods such as sponsorships and product placement promotions allow businesses to leave an impression to their viewers without standing out too much, and because.

The more popular social media sites to date are frequently used for people between the ages of 10-35, depending on the platform. Personal research was conducted to investigate and analyse the several types of data that come up when searching the target demographics for the top 5 most used social media sites, Georgiev (2022).

A journal article written by Rai and Prakashyadav’ discusses how gen z uses social media and for how long, the introduce a detailed and lengthy classification who gen z are and what they represent as an age group, it illustrates generational gaps within social media, and they identify the key differences between gen z and millennials. Through the course of this investigation, this reference has been used to highlight the ideologies that have been found similar to myself. The viewpoint and information provided within this literature extensively document a magnitude of beliefs and theories which are proven true within their investigation. An interesting take that was personally attained when researching for this text was the phrase “black view” and power ‘influencers’ may have over gen z, what effect it has on an organisation.

At the full length of research and investigation, statistics have shown that some of the top 5 most used social media sites are actively being used by people in the younger generation, Gen Z, and some Millennial groupings. This is some statistics for the top 3 most used social media platforms of 2021 worldwide:

TikTok:

- Number of monthly active users: [1 billion](#)
- Largest age group: [10-19 \(25%\)](#)
- Gender: [61% female, 39% male](#) (no data on other genders)
- Time spent per day: [89 minutes per day](#) (On average)

Instagram:

- Number of monthly active users: 2 billion
- Largest age group: 25-34 (31.2%), with 18-24 close behind at 31%
- Gender: 48.4% female, 51.8% male (no data on other genders)
- Time spent per day: 29 minutes

Facebook:

- Number of monthly active users: 2.91 billion
- Largest age group: 25-34 (31.5%)
- Gender: 43% female, 57% male (no data on other genders)
- Time spent per day: 33 minutes

During the covid pandemic, these platforms increased their growth exponentially, as it became a new source of entertainment for many people, Gen Z. in the chart below, a survey was conducted to test the level of growth many platforms had between 2022 and 2021, which consisted of adults

18 years and older in the US.

US Social Network User Growth, by Platform, 2020 & 2021
% change

	2020	2021
TikTok	87.1%	18.3%
Reddit*	25.9%	14.4%
Pinterest	7.8%	3.1%
LinkedIn**	6.2%	4.2%
Instagram	6.2%	3.7%
Snapchat***	4.0%	2.6%
Twitter	4.0%	0.2%
Facebook	3.3%	0.8%

*Note: internet users of any age who access their account via any device at least once per month; *logged-in users; **internet users 18+ who access their LinkedIn account via any device at least once per month; ***mobile phone users of any age who access their Snapchat account via mobile phone app at least once per month*
Source: eMarketer, April 2021

266084 eMarketer | InsiderIntelligence.com

This infographic illustrates the levels of social media usage on the highest ranked social media platform according to 2020 and 2022 statistics for youth in the US

4. Algorithms and data protection:

Algorithms:

Algorithms are a key tool marketing company's and brands rely on heavily when producing and promoting a product because they allow for the automation and optimization of marketing campaigns. With algorithms, marketers can analyse enormous amounts of data, identify patterns and trends in their chosen marketing field, and make decisions in real-time to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their marketing efforts.

One method in which algorithms are used in marketing is targeted advertising. By analysing consumer data, algorithms can help identify the most relevant audience for a given product or service and deliver targeted ads to that audience. This can be done through a variety of channels, including social media, search engines, and email marketing. Targeted advertising allows marketers to reach the right people at the right time, increasing the chances of conversion and driving more value from their marketing efforts.

Another important use of algorithms in marketing is in the optimization of campaigns. By analysing data on consumer behaviour and campaign performance, algorithms can help marketers make informed decisions about which tactics and strategies are most effective. This can include things like identifying the most successful ad creatives, determining the optimal frequency of ad delivery, and identifying the most effective targeting criteria. By using algorithms to optimize campaigns, marketers can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their marketing efforts, leading to better results and higher returns on investment.

An article written in Brandignity reflects on using search engines are used by businesses and are used as a source of advertisement, social media has been a direct source of information when it comes to getting specific details and information about a company, technological developments have caused marketing management departments to become more creative with the type of media they put out for the organisation, tech companies are constantly forced to develop and explore different types of technology to keep the future of technology alive, the amount of people that marketers and corporations are able to reach has reached a new level as it is easier than ever to gain access to the audience, marketing has changed to the point where people have shortened attention spans:

“In a recent survey, only nine percent of digital marketers could say with confidence that their marketing efforts were working. Their confidence is being shaken because the rules of the game change every year.”

Data Protection:

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is the strictest privacy and security regulation in existence. The law becomes effective on May 25, 2018, and it has been put into place to help corporations have solid procedures in place for managing and preserving personally identifiable information to protect everybody's confidential data. The entire purpose and reasoning behind data protection is to prevent the exploitation of people's personal data, which is crucial in marketing because it is not hard to leak people's data if the marketing company's database is not safe and secure. “Initial agreement marketing/Consent-Based Marketing is the

method of only getting in direct contact with clients who have already expressed permission to receive such communications. The initial objective is to limit who enters your funnel to "active prospects," and for those who have actively signalled that they would like to hear from you." Data protection is a prominent issue in Europe, as it is a fundamental right of individuals to have their personal data protected and processed in a fair and transparent manner. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into effect in 2018, is the main legal framework that regulates data protection in Europe. It sets out several rights for individuals, including the right to access their personal data, the right to have their personal data erased, and the right to object to the processing of their personal data.

One of the main reasons for the importance of data protection in Europe is the sensitivity of personal data. Personal data can include information such as an individual's name, address, phone number, and financial details, and the misuse of this information can have profound consequences for the individual concerned. For example, if an individual's financial details are compromised or leaked, they may suffer monetary loss or identity theft. Similarly, if an individual's personal data is used for marketing purposes without their consent, this can be a violation of their privacy.

In addition to the protection of personal data, data protection is also important in Europe because it helps to promote trust between individuals and organizations. When individuals trust that their personal data will be handled in a responsible and transparent manner, they are more likely to engage with organizations and share their personal data. This is especially important in the digital age, where the collection and processing of personal data is an essential part of many online services and interactions.

It helps to support the growth of the digital economy. The digital economy is a key driver of economic growth and innovation in Europe, and it relies on the trust of individuals and organizations in the handling of personal data. If individuals do not trust that their personal data will be protected, they may be less likely to engage with digital services, which could have a negative impact on the digital economy.

Data protection is a principal issue in Europe that needs to tackle because it helps to protect the personal data of individuals, promotes trust between individuals and organizations, supports the growth of the digital economy, and promotes the free flow of data within the EU. The GDPR is

the main legal framework that regulates data protection in Europe, and it sets out several rights for individuals in relation to the processing of their personal data.

5. How does this directly affect Gen Z:

Throughout the last decade, Gen Z have been shown by many sources to be the most frequent users of Social Media sites, search engines etc. Not only are they the most profitable group to target when looking to promote, they also often use SM as a form of escapism, and a lot of these can and have used this element to alter their strategies to accommodate to these people. The most recent example of this is with the Vaping epidemic with younger generations. According to Guiry, they explain that a study in 2018 shows that: **‘1 in 5 children are reoccurring vapers with the majority being male students claiming that they have at least tried it by the year 2019.’ Guiry (2023).** As the vast majority of Gen Z are easily influenced by the media, companies can use this to their advantage when establishing their brand and company beliefs.

Gen Z have been shown not only in the media, but in scientific articles and studies that relate to their self-esteem, public image and opinions from others are extremely valuable to them. Ideologies perpetuated through the media make them more susceptible to believing what they see and hear, which will in turn potentially affect their view of the world and of themselves. In an article transcribed by Jan et al.,’ (2017), a direct reference aligns the importance of how:

“Teenagers use online platforms, such as Facebook, to make connections, interact with people across the world, exchange knowledge and attain information, develop stronger traits, and lead more fulfilling social lives (Boyd, 2007).” Jan et al.,’ (2017). They then go on to illustrate their hypothesis by referencing:

“Numerous investigations have drawn the conclusion that frequent use of Facebook contributes to sadness and lower levels of wealth in people (Feinstein et al., 2013). The majority of individuals do not use Facebook to express their feelings or moods; rather, they use it to combat loneliness, which only makes them feel dissatisfied about the way they live (Kross et al., 2013).” Jan et al.,’ (2017).

Coming back to the original claim presented in the introduction, international enterprises are now more than ever able to easily target their audiences from third party applications, algorithms developed within these apps, a software/technology.

Methodologies

Intro:

The research that has been presented is interpretative in nature. The primary position of this case study is to argue that there is a generational difference between various age groups and the way that they are actively using their social resources. Identifying the importance of how people of the Z generation have been targeted by marketing campaigns will be visible in the findings section n of this document, as well as illustrating the variety of ways social media has been utilised by people in separate generations to gain a genuine representation of their age group.

Philosophical Assumptions:

Social Media Marketing has been a new and upcoming topic as of the last 2 decades. There has been a drastic shift in marketing with the merging of social media platforms and traditional marketing techniques. This is due to the evolution of the internet, a new introduction of social media usage and a shift from traditional methods of commercial marketing. Quantitative research methods will be investigated through personal primary and secondary methods, for example, a survey of done by Shannon (2021) that describes the increase in childhood vaping due to social media exposure and peer influence as a result, and this will be the type of research design approach used throughout this section. The research question presented ‘How does Social Media affect Gen Z in Ireland’ can be split into three separate points:

1. What are the generational differences presented in relation to influence and marketing notoriety.
2. How has this distinctive marketing tactic allowed generations to be more engaged in the products and brands that interest them.
3. How will this have a direct effect on people of younger generations, and how has targeted marketing increased their influence.

These elements allow a hypothesis of:

‘Social media has affected the lives of people with their decision making and how they are influenced by marketers online.’

And

‘In terms of marketing, Social media has been the most affective in terms of reaching a desired target audience.’

Methods:

This study is quantitative in nature as a series of survey questions were carried out with individuals who are best suited for this field study. After conducting personal background checks

and research, there were found to be minimal investigative findings in the topic of social media marketing for Gen Z, leaving room for a quantitative solution when suggested with either interviews or surveys.

Research Design:

As a quantitative study, surveys were conducted to determine the hypothesis of the chosen field study.

After analysing an academic book by Vogt et al. (2012), the authors allow for a detailed analogy of the entire purpose and expression of the multiple methods that an individual may use throughout researcher's investigation. Extensive detail from the authors revealed that written surveys are utilised to **“analyse a smaller part of a population”**. There is emphasis on the importance of understanding the research results an investigator will hope to acquire by the end of their findings. The importance of inhibiting wise research design choices is highlighted by the writers and there is a plethora of beneficial suggestions given for future researchers such as asking questions like: **“are the data best obtained directly for the individuals you are studying”** and **“can you expect respondents to give you reliable information?”**

To reach a comprehensive response and maximise engagement, a series of survey questions were set and distributed on multiple platforms including WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat and via SMS to allow for a wider reach of potential candidates/participants. These survey dilemmas were collected, and the analytics were calculated and produced via Google Forms.

The survey consists of 12 questions, 6 longer and 6 general and succinct questions, allowing participants to stay engaged throughout the duration of the survey. The first 2 questions (***‘how old are you’ and ‘what is your gender’***) allowed participants to give details that will affirm their generational status and show the different responses between each gender, the latter allowed candidates to express their true opinion and feelings, and these were in the form of: ***‘who is your biggest inspiration?’*** and ***‘who are some influencers that you follow, and what do they do for***

work??. These types of questions will allow me to gain a deeper understanding of the person's interests, hobbies and the generational differences between the candidates.

Sampling

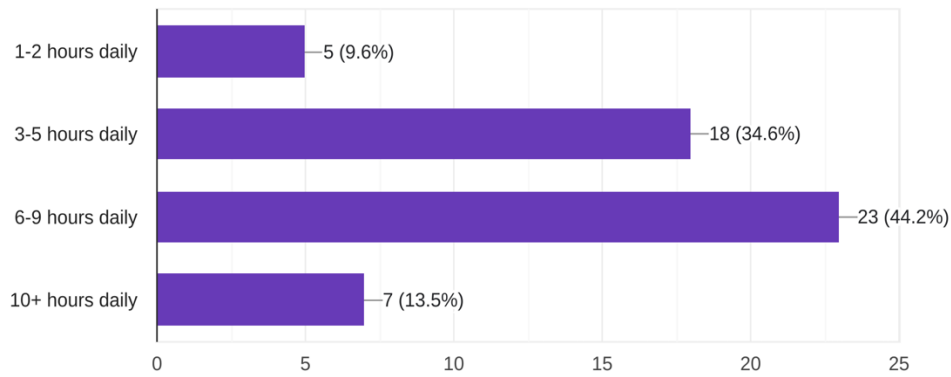
The research design throughout the field study process, the survey in question, after being posted through various social media platforms, and sent to colleagues, relative and acquaintances, which resulted in receiving 52 responses during the duration of its release. A brief sampling of the questionnaire was conducted by 3 individuals whose results will be included in the analysis. Whilst conducting this sample, errors and technicalities were established and highlighted by the volunteers, which was then quickly corrected before releasing the final draft of the survey.

The objective for the questionnaire was for people who may or may not be active social media users to attain the opportunity to think about how they may be directly or subconsciously influenced by social media and trends. It is of utmost importance that the questions asked within the survey are easy to follow, direct and allow for a clear analysis for the hypothesis. The questions that were compiled posed a great deal for the trajectory of the investigation and every aspect was greatly considered. The importance of sampling predominantly Gen Z's for this portion of the assessment is so that the analysis will not only relate to the topic of interest, but it can also be used to compare similarities, differences and ideologies of the members more efficiently.

Data Analysis

Throughout the investigation, review and analysis of the research, vital pieces of data were collected in order to test the hypothesis. The survey/questionnaire that was distributed determined that a vast majority of the people being questioned (Gen Z) found that:

1. Usage and content engagement:

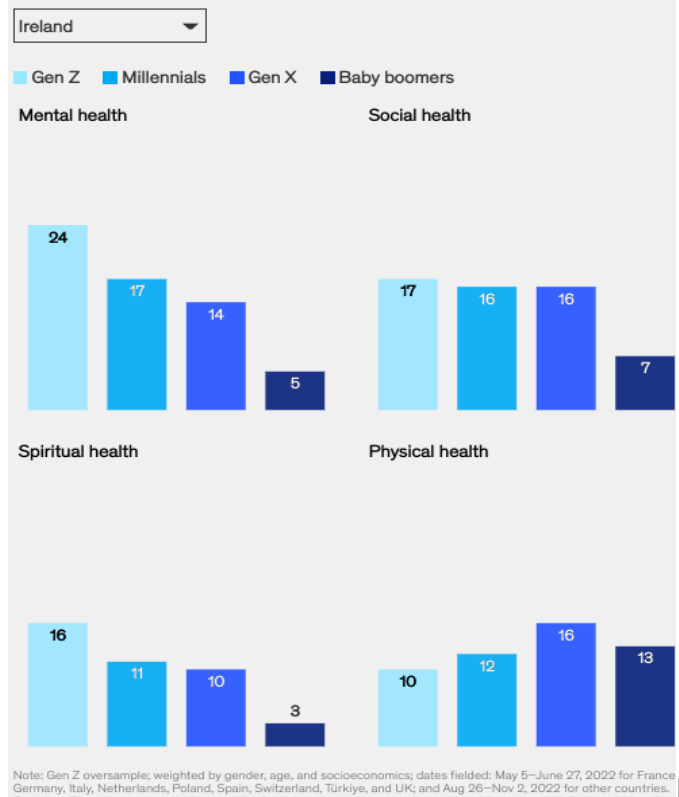


By asking

‘How often do you use Social Media?’, this demographic spent a good portion of their everyday lives, just interacting and engaging with social networking apps. 44.2% of people claim to use social media sites for over 6-9 hours per day as recorded in 2023, however according to Ceci (2022), **“Social media usage was estimated to be two hours per day, compared to more than three hours and 20 minutes of viewing media and shows via streaming services per day among the surveyed internet users in the nation.”**..

In most surveyed countries, a higher share of Gen Z survey respondents report poor mental, social, and spiritual health compared with other generations.

Respondents who report their health as poor or very poor, by dimension of health, % of respondents

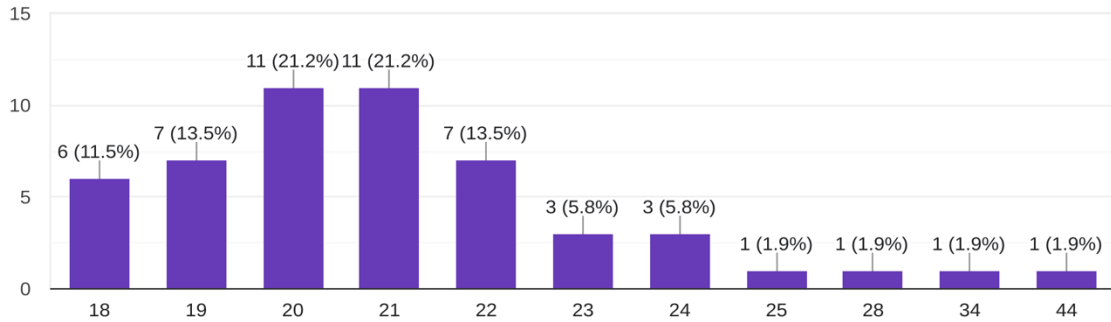


This reference shows that young adults have spent less time was spent in this study overall. In comparison to the study being conducted at hand, and as well as this, both in a separate study shown in an article written by Coe et al (2023), shows that many people surveyed are Gen Z people who go to social media to better their mental health and/or wellbeing

2. Age as a factor:

The age of these individuals surveyed was of utmost importance considering the basis of this research assessment, it was decided that the main age range for this analysis should be people who fall under the age of Gen Z who are of the legal age of consent (18). In addition to this, contributing to this survey were individuals from the Millennial age group and Gen X age group that will allow for a comparative analysis when overviewing the results.

Age chart:



*This diagram illustrates the different ages that were analysed. as this research paper marginally effects and is used to analyse Gen Z’s influences and shopping patterns, one member from the millennial generation and from Generation X were surveyed to use as a comparison.

Understanding this, it has shown that different age groups had varying results from each other through the process of the survey, and although these results may not be equal in terms of the quantity, it gives an insight into how people of that age group may view social media, societal roles, status and notoriety and the environment around them. The three participants that are referenced will be referred to by their appropriate age group with their age in brackets. Some examples of these results are as follows:

1. Testing for Social Media usage

Generation	Question	Response:
Gen Z		6-9 hours
Millennial (34)	“How Often do you use Social Media (daily)?”	3-5 hours
Gen X (44)		1-2 hours

2. Testing for online Engagement

Generation	Question	Response:
Gen Z		'Makeup artists - Keileigh MUA*, neuroscientist- Andrew Hibernian, psychologist- Jordan Peterson'
Millennial	"Who are some of the influencers that you support/follow, and what do they do for work?"	'Businesswomen and businessmen, successful startups, celebrities, many types'
Gen X		'Mostly South African influencers that own businesses'

MUA is an abbreviation often used to describe a makeup artist

3. Testing for influence or patterns of influence

Generation	Question	Response:
Gen Z		'To learn more about myself psychologically and to also know what is trending in clothing'
Millennial (34)	"In what ways have you been influenced by other people on social media?"	'Eating healthier'
Gen X (44)		'None'

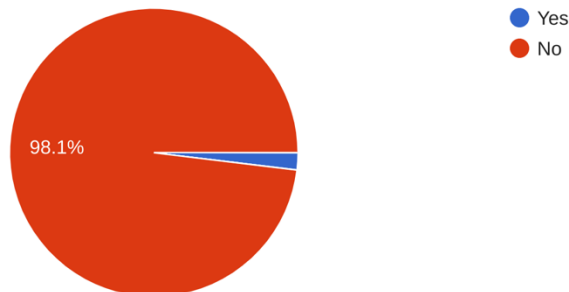
4. Testing for knowledge of up-to-date news

Generation	Question	Response:
Gen Z		'Not sure' 'True Crime* on TikTok'
Millennial (34)	"What is the last piece of news that you remember or that you have been keeping up with?"	'A murder case in newspaper, I used it to teach my daughter a lesson'
Gen X (44)		'African politics on LGBT+ rights'

True Crime is nonfiction crime stories that are narrated by third parties on media sites like YouTube and TikTok

The results presented for Gen Z throughout this section have been compiled and briefly altered to allow for a mixture of responses to be included.

3. How often do people read physical newspapers as a main source of news:



As shown above, over 98% of people surveyed stated that they do not use physical newspapers as their main source of news, with the person in the 1 percentile being a person in the Gen X group. There have been studies done that have shown results of a decline in the number of newspapers being used but people of all generations, particularly in Gen z. for instance, an author by the name Slattery representing the Irish times reported that:

“Although there is a total decrease in the amount of traditional news consumption by younger generations, podcasting is still on the rise and is becoming increasingly more popular by the year according to their study. 40% of people say that they have listened to at least 1 podcast in the last week, with over 70% of those people being aged 18-24. It is also reported that the statistics for people over 65 has dropped to as low as 16%” Slattery (2020).

The author has suggested that due to the high usage and exposure social media has, this may be the best cause for this increase, as podcasters can market themselves, spread news and promote their brand and topics online to engage potential listeners. This marketing tactic has shown itself to be more successful within younger generations as Gen Z have been shown to respond positively to ads, marketing campaigns and sponsorships that they view online over any other source. An article produced by Pavia describes the benefits that Irish Gen Z have seen from being reliant on social media influencer reviews when making purchasing decisions. They state that 81% of online consumers are based solely on social me

This article describes how younger Irish gens respond to social media ads and sponsorships when they want to make a purchase:

The finding from this portion of the assessment from all the results have concluded that Irish Gen Z are more likely to spend a portion of their day on social media platforms, younger people are more prone to buying items and services from other’s influence when it comes to buying online, older generations are less influenced by influencers and focus their attention on world topics and news in comparison to Gen Z who use influencers as a method to become more decisive.

Limitations:

This Investigation proved to be difficult and complex in terms of data collection and distributing the survey. Many people who the survey was sent to came back and reported that they did not feel entirely comfortable submitting their response, as they did not want to get scammed. Other problems arose when the survey was submitted to over 200 people, and responses from more than 75% of people were not complete or answered accordingly and therefore had to be dismissed.

Ethics:

During this Capstone Project, National College of Ireland's (NCI) ethical guidelines and procedures have been adhered to. A consent form has been established for any participants who wanted to contribute to the project, and only applicants who answered all the survey questions accordingly will be considered as a candidate for the project. Upon completion of this assessment, a copy of the final submitted document will be sent to any willing participants who requested them on the survey.

As per the National College of Ireland's (NCI) guidelines, all consent forms, survey answers, interview recordings will be stored on a safe file with a password encryption for the required amount of time, before being deleted.

Discussion:

The primary objective of this study that was being analysed was to discover the generational properties in relation to influence, social media usage when interacting with marketers and brands and how the power of social media has changed their perception of brands and notoriety. As mentioned throughout the Literature Review section, technology is starting to develop and the systems that have been embedded into society have evolved into something one may only imagine. Programmes are consistently developing and the transformative nature that social media and websites have gone through in the last 20 years has been an active representation of the extremity of common research and innovation that society has been presented with.

The digital era has created a rift between elder generations, as the principles held by Gen X and Millennials in this case do not align with people in their youthful stage of life. For Gen Z, social

media and the internet have become the main centre of their lives, from researching topics on blog sites, to sharing their thoughts and opinions online about serious world issues on platforms such as TikTok, digital natives have adapted to a lifestyle of constantly being surrounded with new developing information and innovations with technology. For Gen Z, the opinions and ideals of others is of utmost importance, with the self-image of females in general being targeted as a result. Studies done in 2017 have shown that social media has influenced people's relationships, personality and a negative effect on their overall self-esteem, introverts reportedly find it harder to face challenges head on and high usage of Facebook has caused a spike in depression, Muqaddas et al, (2017). As a factor of elevated sensitivity in adolescence, the methods in which they adapt when learning about social interactions and personal wellbeing may skew as an effect of over-exposure to social media, Grunewald, K. et al. (2022)

Active engagement with the internet and social media can cause alterations in how young people are able to perceive reality and the world around them and with the unrestricted access to information, this can lead to corruption and negative exposure for children in many cases. Along with 'Fear of Missing Out' (FOMO), Irish Gen Z have a constant pressure to be persistently fed with latest information, encouraging them to stay online and consequently making them lose out on learning more about the world around them. This aspect also has a more impactful effect on people in their late teens, as mentioned by Penney (2018), **“young people may feel that social media may try to alter and manipulate their views in politics, or maybe even go to the extremes of imposing no impact on their views on the changing world”**. This author gives a riveting account of how some younger people feel that the online media can be lacklustre and not worthwhile, as it is exploitative and catered to manipulate exceptionally vulnerable minds. As mentioned before, the topic relating to digital media and marketing have posed a unique challenge as it is constantly changing and constantly undergoing developments, commonly adapted by younger people, leaving older generations stranded consequently.

In relation to marketing, a variety of organisations can utilise the generational aspect of young people not relying on traditional forms of media consumption as a form of influence when merchandising, that they now tend to rely more on reviews and internet hauls (influencer marketing) to know where to consider a company trustworthy and deserving of their loyalty.

Amongst other things, marketing teams have used this to their greatest advantage, making social media influencers and public figures the face of their organisation to intrigue several audiences. Along with this, algorithms have worked as a personification of the internet, allowing people to full emersed themselves in the materials best suited to them. This has shown to be cause a crucial increase in the amount of Small- Medium Enterprises who have taken it upon themselves to gain an online following, spread information and their company values publicly, and update themselves on what is relevant to consumers on a day-to-day basis. This practice has caused several businesses with exceptional marketing teams to flourish in the eyes of Gen Z, however with algorithms, there can be severe risks to people privacy and Data Protection. As detailed above, the salient nature of Data Protection in relation to protecting the likes of Gen Z comes into action. These laws were put into effect to protect the people who utilise online platform and prevent them from exploitation and information leakages.

To conclude this section, the subject matter involved within this dissertation is of the essence as the relation between Irish Gen Z and social media Marketing has not been vocalised in the mainstream media. Gen Z rely heavily on feeling connected to people and this is something that operations are using to the best of their advantage. Notably the most prevailing evidence of this, as mentioned previously, is with the remodelling of e cigarettes to vapes, in order to reach a wider audience, although Gen Z are made to believe that vaping is healthier than traditional forms of tobacco smoking, Shannon (2021). It is plausible that this measure has been initiated to keep up sales for tobacco manufacturers, however this may have resulted in a far more severe addiction crisis as a result.

Overall, major organisations have proven to use the developed innovation and technological advances created by individuals and other firms to their superiority. There is no telling where the future of technology, the internet and social media will evolve, so there is no doubt that marketers will create remedies to best cater to these changes for the sake of the organisation.

Conclusion:

With the knowledge gained from this assessment, the most appropriate decisions were made when discussing and planning the research design. After taking this information into account, the topics discussed within this assessment covered all of the perimeters that were hoped to be analysed.

The hypothesis for this Capstone Project have led to the conclusion that Gen Z youth have become almost completely reliant on social media and the internet to guide them when making purchasing decisions, Irish Gen Z also tend to use Social Media as a means of escapism, and the influences that are attained by youth through these media outlets greatly determine the characteristics that the person chooses to adopt. Mental health topics, self-esteem and self-image are also important topics that were discussed throughout this dissertation. Gen Z have notably been extremely hard on themselves as the people and influencers they see online have all of the attributes and characteristics that they would admire if it were them, however due to their sense of vulnerability and immaturity, their mental health deteriorates as a result of poor self-esteem.

As well as this, companies have found many ways to capitalise from young people in this era. Their methods may not always be the most practical or ethical, however there have been an increasing number of sales for these organisations, as well as an increase in notoriety, brand and marketing power, increased advertising skills, and complete brand exposure from utilising influencers online.

To conclude this study, after taking into consideration all the foreseeable limitations, ethics and responsibilities that align with this research topic, a personal evaluation determines that this Capstone Project has been beneficial to the overall investigatory experience. Developing the

techniques to becoming a well-endowed researcher and this research paper has been a privilege to compile.

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