"How the role of influencer marketing drives participation amongst Generation Z in GAA in Ireland"

Dissertation by

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Tool Name	Brief Description	Link to tool
Instagram	Used Instagram for links to profiles	
Statista **Websites**	Used to gather statistics	

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Additional Evidence:

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Additional Evidence:

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Acknowledgement

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Contents

Abstract

In recent years a number of well-known GAA players has begun to post content and promoting brands on Instagram. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the role of Influencer Marketing in the GAA drives participation amongst Generation Z in the GAA. The use of qualitative research design was adopted with the data being collected using six semi-structured interviews in order to investigate the experience of people use of Instagram and experience with GAA Influencers. The participants for the study were chosen due to their involvement of the GAA and use of social media platforms. The subsequent findings for the study have proven to be interesting and prove to be a great beginning into the further research on the area.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Research background

Influencers and Influencer Marketing

An influencer is described by Aron Levin as being a individual who guides or inspires the actions of others (Levin 2020, p.20) he also defines Influencer Marketing "the practice of connecting influential individuals with the right target audience to help relevant brands to communicate their message and achieve their marketing objective" (Levin 2020a, p.153). (Bakshy et al. 2011) has defined an influencer as being someone that has a combination of desirable attributes whether personal or network attributes that allows them to influence a large amount of people Influencer Marketing is defined as "the practice of connecting influential individuals with the right target audience to help relevant brands communicate their message and achieve their marketing objectives" (Levin 2020, p.20). The growing popularity of social media has created a new channel for brands to communicate with customers more effectively. Social media influencers are independent external endorsers who influence an audience's attitudes via tweets, blogs, and the use of multiple social media channels (Glucksman 2008).

"Influencer Marketing is defined as a process in digital marketing where opinion leaders (Influencers) are identified and then integrated into a brands communication on social media platforms" (BAKKER 2018). The perception of influencer marketing can be explained as people who endorsed their knowledge and skills in a certain area and use social media to transfer communications to influence marketing goals of a specific brand. Influencer marketing is like word-of-mouth marketing and is often referred to as the digital version of word of mouth (BAKKER 2018).

1.1.2 The relevance of Gaelic Games in Ireland

The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) is Ireland largest sporting organisation. It is currently celebrated as one of the largest amateur sporting organisations in the world and plays an important role in Irish society that extends far beyond the basic needs of promoting Gaelic games (Croke Park 2024). The GAA was fist founded in 1884 in Thurles County Tipperary, since this time it has grown throughout the island of Ireland with over 2,200 GAA clubs across the 32 counties of Ireland (GAA History 2024). The association today promotes Gaelic games such as Hurling, Gaelic football,

Handball and Rounders and works with its sister organisation Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA) to promote Ladies football and Camogie. The GAA is also avid promoters of the Irish culture promoting Irish song, dance music and the Irish language (Croke Park 2024).

In 2020 GAA was name the most popular sport in Ireland for the 3rd year in a row. Mainly GAA positioned as top place for 24% of people with soccer and rugby 10% behind. In Ireland in 2020 the team of the year was said to be Dublin GAA following there 6 in a row win in the All-Ireland Football Final just edging out in front of the Limerick Hurlers with 1% difference (Sport for Business and Teneo 2021). This shows that for many majorities of Irish people GAA is top of mind and their number one sport (see figure 1).
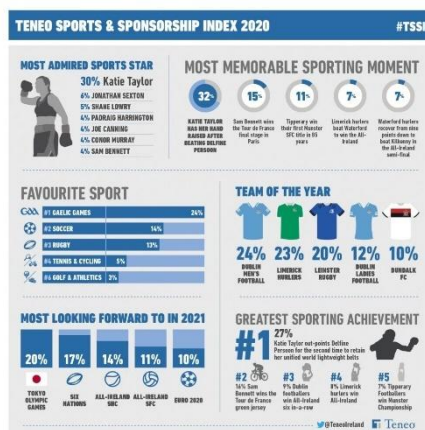
Figure 1: (Sport for Business and Teneo 2021) Sports and Sponsorship Index 2020

1.2 Research Gap

The research will examine the role of Gaelic Games Social Media Influencer Marketing to drive participation of Generation Z in GAA by the experiences of this generational group. The descriptions of the participants will relate to some social media marketing experience in terms of awareness, consideration and purchase to locate some marketing directly guided by those participants.

The overall research will aim to understand how this group of people, who are effective participants on social networking, and how it relates to influencing, a marketing approach that is gaining status amongst businesses. On the contrast the authenticity of influencers apparent by Generation Z will be another important point to discuss owning the position of analysing this strategy past celebrities since some influencers are seen as being more believable, credible and accessible than famous celebrities (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017). In the case of this research Instagram will be used to explore the role of Influencers on Generation Z due to the authority and significance of those on this social media platform.

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1.3 Academic Justification

Influencer marketing has received a large amount of attraction from academic researchers as the concept evolved and researchers began developing methods to provide structure and support to their research. must of the research on influencer marketing in sports focuses on professional sporting athletes, despite the popularity of GAA in Ireland and players use of social media platforms there is little research to date on this topic. The literature available has provided a footing and presents a sense of direction for researchers to follow. Yet there is no framework available to provide structure and support for research. In the existing literature there is very little reason given on influencer marketing in the GAA. Many of the features in this study varies significantly which leads to inconsistent, disreputable findings. The present literature on influencer marketing is clearly lacking research on its affect on the GAA. This paper hopes to provide clearer perceptive data on this topic area using secondary data on influencer marketing and Generation Z with primary data collected by the author. By showing research in the form of semi-structured interviews this analysis will provide complete findings.

1.4 Research Aims/objectives

The primary aim of this study is to understand and measure the role of Influencer Marketing on Instagram in driving participation in GAA amongst people from Generation Z. The performance in analysed in terms of authenticity, reach and engagement. It is the aim of the researcher to stay objective when collecting meaningful data on the select area. The following are five research objectives that have been created.

1. To examine which social media platform is most valuable for influencer marketing campaigns directed at the GAA and Generation Z.
2. To determine if the involvement of certain players in the GAA helps drive participation.
3. To investigate how Generation Z recognises the credibility and authenticity of influencer promoting GAA.
4. Investigate the knowledge of Gaelic Game social media influencer marketing for future improvement in a marketing environment.

1.5 Scope of Research

From analysing the secondary data for this research, a quantity of major gaps about influencer marketing in the GAA became obvious to the author which kept the purpose of the study. When planning on the research method both mixed methods and a mono approach were contemplated by the researcher. A mixed methods approach uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect the data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009). Due to the secondary data and academic findings that were accessible to the researcher there was a large volume of research to back the study. As a consequence of this the mixed method approach was rejected by the researcher a mono method approach was chosen (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009). The mono approach uses either a qualitative or quantitative approach to research to conduct the research for this project a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews was chose to acquire and examine the data on influencer marketing and the use of Instagram with people from Generation Z cohort. The semi structured interview approach was directed with six chose interviewees that each had some connection to the GAA and fell within the Generation Z cohort. Granted this study is restricted to a small sample size this has allowed for large gathering of the primary data to be collected which will expand on the current literature.

1.6 Overview of Research Structure

Chapter 1- Introduction

This chapter offers a short introduction into the selected research subject, addressing the gaps in the literature on Influencer Marketing in the GAA. It also directs the general aims and layout of the study.

Chapter 2- Literature Review

A detailed examination of current literature is carried out to advance a greater understanding of the topic. The leading literature on social media marketing is explored as well as the research on Influencer Marketing in the GAA. The use of influencer marketing in relation to Generation Z is conducted in this part of the study.

Chapter 3- Research Methodology

The methodology section displays the selected methodology while also contemplating the overall aims of the study. A specified insight into the chosen method to gather primary data is given in this chapter. A comprehensive check of the tools used to manage this research will also be considered in this chapter.

Chapter 4- Findings and Discussions

The findings and discussion chapter understands and defines the importance of the primary findings of this research while evaluating these findings to the secondary research gather in the literature review. Basic themes from the primary research will be emphasised and created with the secondary data increasing the necessary analysis from the research.

Chapter 5- Conclusion and Recommendations

This section provides a summary of all the research. recommendations for further academic research as well as any recommendations for practitioners is included.

2.0 Literature Review

The literature review is broken down into four main areas with subtopics being addressed in each of these areas. Section 1 will begin with speaking about social media marketing, which is identified as a broad topic, section 2 will then go on to speak about generation Z and social media, to gain an improved knowledge of how all these factor interconnect. The 3rd section will give a revision of social media marketing and social media influencer marketing in sports and the 4th section will speak about influencer marketing in non-profit organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association.

2.1) Social Media Marketing:

The internet and online social media have influenced the consumption habits of consumers by offering new ways of searching for, evaluating, and purchasing goods and services. In recent years social media has escalated to be successful as a pronounced and vital marketing factor in the victory of a product service or business. For many people and businesses in the 21st century social media has become the main zone of communication (Hassan et al. 2019). New web technologies such as social media have make it easier for people to create and post their own content (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi 2012). To most people they see social media as a platform that is used to share updates and pictures daily on social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook and X. However, in a more positive light social media has shown itself to be a low-cost platform used to exchange communication between people, businesses, consumers or any other being (Muddasir Ahamed and Kruthika N S 2023). Social media allows people to connect in a different way that was not possible in the past, it has also become a huge part of how firms and consumers use the platforms to influence each other.

In recent years social media marketing has divided itself from social media to become tech strategists highly positive platforms for marketing purposes over conventional marketing. Many businesses can use social media marketing in a reactive way they can analyse and monitor conversations customers are having on social media to understand how they view the business and its actions (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch 2016). Social media marketing has been given many different definitions for authors it could be defined as being an area of digital marketing, encouraging customer communication (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016 p.33) it helps advertisers to realise the campaigns on multiple media platforms is necessary in order to have better effectiveness in the

message they aim to communicate to the target audience (Ford 2019). It has also been defined as the application of online platforms to communicate and provide valuable offers to an organisation and its stakeholders (Vinerean 2017). Social media marketing is used to carry out marketing strategies through digital channels, taking benefit from the large number of users as of April 2024 it was said that 67.1% of the word population is using the internet and of these 62.6% are social media users. The use of social media marketing is connected with advertising and its ability to drive business and carry out promotional activities to reach a specific target market (Petrosyan 2024). In order for businesses to grow its social media marketing the use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X and TikTok are important. In the mid 2000 platforms such as Facebook and Instagram began raising in popularity so too did a new approach that was mostly seen on Instagram and was used to reconstruct the brand narrative this being Influencer Marketing which will be analysed in greater detail in the next section (Ortiz-Ospina 2019).

2.2) Social Media Influencer Marketing

Social media influencers are described as being micro-celebrates with large followings on social media platforms who engage with consumers and hold the potential to promote customer-based relationships across many different product categories. Social media influencers have an existing relationship with consumers based on trust and consumers go to these influencers to find content created by them for advice and information (Delbaere, Michael and Phillips 2021). They regularly utilise products and services that fit their lifestyle and provide reviews on their social media accounts (Loeper, Steiner and Stewart 2014). They first appeared in the early 2000 and have progressed from being a hobby to full-time careers for people. In 2023 the global influencer market is said to be valued at 21.1 billion dollar which means it has tripled since 2019 (Dencheva 2023). Social media influencer marketing has received a lot of attention in recent years not only from different brands and companies but as a potential marketing opportunities but as an asset to whom they can collaborate with. Influencer marketing is the most important method to marketing in many years for those professionals at the leading approach of purchasing decision making. According to (Joshi et al. 2023) posts shared by influencers have two main purposes from marketing prospectives it should increase the purchase intention for followers and enhance their follower's attractiveness and knowledge to their product. It demonstrates that key decision makers in all key markets operate inside communities of influencers due to the fact that most important decisions are too complex to be made in isolation (Brown and Hayes 2008). Influencers are not a new concept in marketing as traditional marketing was using famous celebrities long before social media came around. People believe in well-known figures or famous people on social media as they are more trustworthy, relevant and caring than people directly employed by the company.

Due to the large growth of influencer marketing large challenges occur for marketers in how they are to assess the performance of influencer marketing. In previous literature done by researchers they looked at the engagement rate and how many likes, comments and shares they receive on post from certain influencers in order to determine the performance success (Chang and Wu 2024). However more up-to-date research has shown that volume-based metric only partly shows the performance of marketing campaigns. It has been said that it's important to keep track of the content of the comments section (content-based metrics) not only the number of likes and comments the post received. In times where companies use big influencers it's important to determine if the influencer may be doing more harm than good to the brand in that people are only paying attention to the influencer and not the product itself this can be assed using the comment section and reviewing what is being spoke about in the comments (Chang and Wu 2024).

2.2.1) Different types of social media influencers:

There are many different factors that determine the category of influencer people fall under. Such factors include the number of subscribers they have and the engagement rate they generate which is defined by (Dolan et al. 2022) "a customer's behavioural manifestations that have a social media focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers". The amount that these influencer change depends on their area of expertise and the skills they have. (Campbell and Farrell 2020) has identified four different categories of influencers which are identified depending on the size of their audience (see figure 2). The four categories are as following nano influencers, micro influencers, macro influencers and mega influencers. (Campbell and Farrell 2020) has described each of these types in detail. They have said Nano influencers are at the beginning of their influencer careers and their follows are mainly people they know. They are also said to individuals looking to become major players within the industry. These influencers are at the growing stages of their followers and have fewer than 10,000 subscribers currently. Micro influencers are successful enough to make a career out of being an influencer, but they are also relatively small their audience tends to be more dependent on their geographic location and most their incomes come from sponsorships or pay per post ads. Their following counts we fall between 10,000 and 100,000 followers. Macro influencers are yet to be known as celebrities nevertheless they are extremely successful with a following base between 100,000 and 1 million. Macro influencers have a strong following base and utilise this to achieve strong engagement and brand exposure. And lastly Mega influencers are individuals who have developed significant followers' growth on social media and have created a celebrity like status. The more subscribers an influencer has the more of an expert in the field they are seen as being. However, the large influencers are seen as being less accessible and maybe not as trusted due to them being seen as only doing it for the money. The type of influencer a company works with will be chosen based on the objectives of the campaign (Campbell and Farrell 2020).
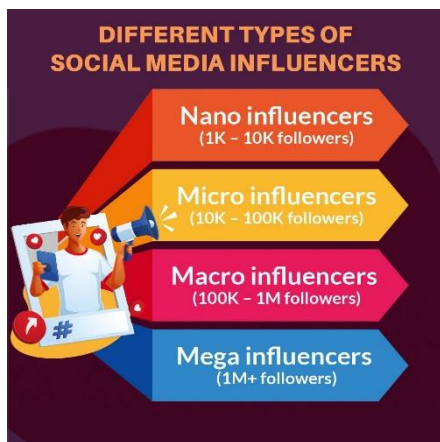
Figure 2: (Fancall 2023)- Different types of social media influencers (2023).

The most used platforms by marketers in 2024 are Instagram which is used by over 80%, Facebook with roughly 60.5% and YouTube with 45.6% of users (Dencheva 2024). In the next piece of literature Instagram will be looking at further as it's the leading platform by almost 20%.

2.3) Instagram Influencers Marketing

(Instagram 2022) defines there platform as being used to share photos and videos and is available on Android and iPhone. Photos and videos can be uploaded to be shared with followers or with a selected group of people. They are also able to comment, view and like post shared by people they are following on the platform (Instagram 2022). Many people view the platform based on its visual aesthetic and filtered images making it an ideal platform for the beauty industry, popularising certain body images, and promoting luxurious products and lifestyles (Jin, Muqaddam and Ryu 2018). In recent years more young people identify people who become famous from their social media accounts as celebrities rather than people in films, tv shows and music. The phenomenon of influencers on Instagram came about from reality tv stars which huge followings posting content on their accounts, when these new types of celebrities were studied it was identified that consumers have stronger connection to these people, as they are seen as being more authentic (Jin, Muqaddam and Ryu 2018). As Instagram grows so too does the people who are seen as becoming "Insta Famous" these are people who start out with small following and begin posting videos, photos and reels and over time they are acquired a large number of followers who see this person as being an idol or influence on them. As these influencers begin to grow brands and reach out to them and ask them to work with their company (Jin, Muqaddam and Ryu 2018). However, with this being said one of the most

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uncreditable and unauthentic industry that use influencers is the health and wellbeing industry, brands within this industry are well known for using influencers that has no qualification or knowledge of this sector and are only promoting products and brands for the money (Djafarova and Trofimenko 2019).

In 2024 Instagram currently have over 1 billion active users. It has been identified that people between the ages of 18-25 are the most active users and they make up over 31% of the current user base showing that it is a social media platform with the most effect on Millennials and Generation Z. Instagram is seen as being one of the most current ways for promoting and advertising products and services. Marketers in 2023 have said that 80% use Instagram to advertise their business.

As the GAA is an unprofessional sport they may not have as big of a following on their social media platform and most of the players with the GAA and the LGFA are identified as being Nano (1k-10k) or Micro (10k-50k) influencers. Due to the players not getting paid for the sports the "paid for posts" is becoming more popular. Payments for these players are usually made monetary, in the form of free gear, sports drinks or even cars (Donoghue 2021). Due to their careers in the GAA and their social media presences many players and ex-players have set up their own companies some in the sporting industry and some not such players are Michael Murphy from Donegal who has a business Michael Murphy Sports and Leisure, Benard Brogan who is part of Legacy Consultants a sponsorship and communications agency, as well as many other well respected players having businesses all throughout the world (Walsh 2018). In an article realised by the Irish times in 2021 (Donoghue 2021). Dublin player Dean Rock had 37,000 followers on Instagram, and he was charging €1,300 per Instagram post. Galway football Shane Walsh can charge nearly €665 for an Instagram post and a third of this price for an Instagram story. LGFA player Orla O'Dwyer from Tipperary has 24,000 followers and can charge anything up to €830 for one post. For companies when picking the players that there brand works with this will depend on many factors including engagement some companies will looking for a big presence and don't necessarily care that they are not daily active users, however other brands will want people who have a smaller presence but are active users daily (Donoghue 2021).

2.4) Social Media and Generation Z:

The concept of Generation Z and who belongs to this group is broad. (Dimock 2019) classifies them as being people born between 1997 and 2012. Other studies then suggest that its people born between 1995 and 2010 (Francis and Hoefel 2018). (PrakashYadav and Rai 2017) however also state that Generation Z begins with people born after 1991 as they are the first group with access to internet, social networking sites and mobile systems. Noticeably there is no one definition of Generation Z. The developing nature of the digitalised world has made Generation Z more demanding, than generations before them, they value transactions that are easy and quick, and they enjoy testing their

relationships with brands and organisations (PrakashYadav and Rai 2017). They use social media for a multiple of different reasons such as communication, learning, online purchases and other areas that make their lives easier and less complex. Compared to Generation X and Y, Generation Ys' are seen as being people born between 1981 and 1997 they are the first generation to have spent their whole lives online, they actively share, contribute and search for content to consume online (Bolton et al. 2012). Generation X's are people born between 1965 and 1981 there were born during the reconstruction of Europe during the war. There lives have not been easy after a time of upheaval, they are seen as being work alcoholics (Iberdrola 2017). Generation X and Y place trust on company-generated content whereas Generation Z value user-generated content instead. A report developed by (Dencheva 2024a) showed that over half of Generation Z users globally use social media to look up information on brands. It has been said that generational cohorts develop certain attitudes and beliefs based on life experience that they share. As of September 2023, YouTube was the most popular Social media site amongst Gen Z with 96% of people surveyed saying they are users (Dixson 2024).

It can be clearly seen that there is no one definition of Generation Z and every author has different definition of what they feel is right. Young people are vast users of social media and are powerful force for change this is evident in social changes such as climate change, education, crime, and many other important areas. this is why more brands are turning to social media to get their build relationships and interact with them. However, critics have said that these attempts are failing and that younger generations trust in brands, businesses and organisations is falling. This trust is falling due to the fact that young people believe that brands need to pursuit more than economic gain and to have a higher purpose. Social media has now become the most used form of communication amongst Generation Z, it allows them to post photos, view profiles and communicate with friends and family all around the world (Jambulingam , Francis and Dorasamy 2018). With this being said however social media is said to have a serve impact on people's mental state due to informational overload. Generation Z addition to mobile phones is increasing with the rise of social media which has consequently their behavioural outcome has transformed completely. Nowadays behavioural issues amongst Generation Z such as fatigue, stress "fear of missing out" (FOMO), and anxiety are on the rise, and many say that social media has an impact on this (Sharma, Kaushul and Joshi 2023).

As this research is conducted in Ireland it is reported that 90% of people between the ages of 19-24 are users of social media (Taylor 2019). Instagram is the most used social media platform within this age group with almost 34% of global Instagram users falling in the Generation Z category (Dixon 2024). In relation to usage within Ireland 24.8% of users belong to the Generation Z category. And this image also shows that Instagram is more popular among females with 58.2% of women reporting that they are users (see figure 3).
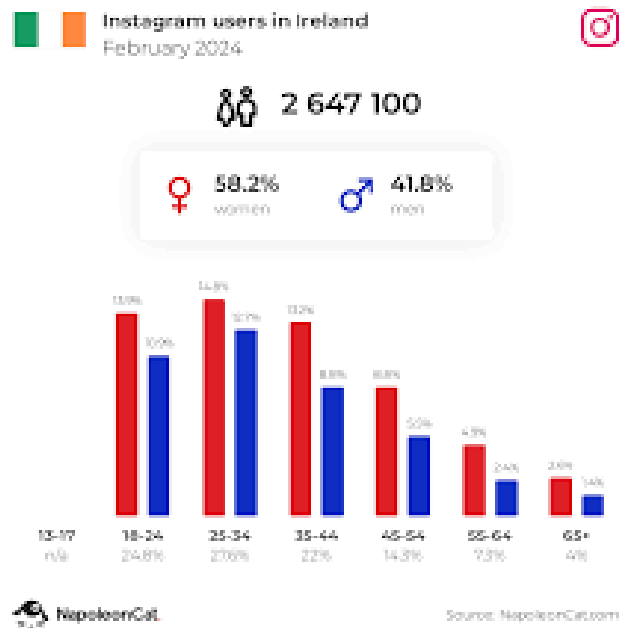
Figure 3:(NapoleonCat 2024)- Instagram Users in Ireland as of February 2024

The presence of social media on this generation has great relevance due to the increase and development of technologies it is used in every aspect of people's lives in research, solving problems and communicating with others. From all the information and stats gather above Instagram is one of the leading social media sites used by Gen Z people.

2.5) Social Media Influencer Marketing and Generation Z:

As address in the above piece of work social media is used by Generation Z for a variety of reasons such as online purchases, learning, communication, research and technological use that will benefit their lives. The presence of influencer amongst this generation is growing and developing at rapid speeds. Influencer marketing represents a new boundary of opportunity as it is seen as being the fastest growing tool for sourcing new online customers. However, there is still a need to examine influencers how they influence and lead people in certain generational cohorts. Generation Z in particular is said to be the target segment for most influencer marketing due to their digital skills and daily use of social media platforms (Nadanyiova and Sujanska 2023).

Amongst the Generation Z cohort 70% of them are following at least one influencer on networking platforms such as YouTube and Instagram (Pradhan et al. 2022). This is due to the fact that Generation Z treat these people are peers and deem them as being more credible and trustworthy than celebrities or business owners. (Pradhan et al. 2022) found that 44% of this cohort will make purchasing decisions based on recommendations made by influencers. Generation Z are aware of influencer marketing strategies implemented by brands; however, they also assume the brands and influencers should behave responsibly while sharing information. Generation Z are quick to unfollow, avoid or disconnect with endorsements, or promotions that they don't agree with as its promoting unsustainable, lifestyles, unrealistic promotions or misrepresentations. With influencer marketing there is many issues or reasons for it not working with selected influencers which in turn can cause backlash and bad press for the business. One such case of this is Pepsi working with Kendall Jenner, this ad showcased Jenner turning a worrying protect into a peace parade by just handing a Pepsi can to a police officer. This just didn't sit right with followers and the ad was pulled (Victor 2017). Despite issues like this arising brands still spend a lot of their marketing budget on influencer marketing as a way of increasing targeting amongst Generation Z. Statista has reported that this market is expected to be worth €32.5bn in 2024 (Statista 2024). As stated earlier in this work Generation Z personnel expect influencers to be trustworthy, reliable and engaging. Nevertheless, if this cohort of people perceived influencer as violating their trust as they have developed relationships with the brand and influencers. From this it is important that brands to understand how and when customers disapprove of these actions (Pradhan et al. 2022).

Although there are some other authors other than (Levin 2020), (Brown and Hayes 2008) that have knowledge of influencer marketing these three are the most well-known, amongst the others who are generating metrics and different concepts to evaluate these influencers those are not created on the observation of people from that generation. those are ideas of influencer marketing in the area of digital marketing. The lack of information on this area makes it hard to determine the relationship between influencer marketing and Generation Z.

Influencer marketing has become one of the most powerful tools in engaging with younger generations. This demographic relies heavily on the use of social media for research, communication, solving problems and learning. Influencer marketing is becoming prevalent in every industry now in recent years there has been a big use of influencers within the sports industry. This will be discussed in greater detail in the work below.

2.6) Social Media Marketing in Sports:

Sports marketing is defined by (Holland 2015) as being the societal and managerial processes by which fans, sports organisations and other companies related to sports create and exchange products and services through different digital marketing channels such as the internet and social media platforms. For many companies sport marketing typically has goals that involve engaging with fans as well as building interest and awareness. The internet, technologies and social media are transforming sport marketing. In the past decade the way off marketing sports has drastically changed from television being the main revenue source for elite sports teams (Holland 2015). Social media is now being used by professional, elite, amateur and club level sports as well as governing bodies, sports sponsorships and athletes themselves (Mohammadkazemi 2015, p.340).

This is now changing due to the internet evolving creating new ways of distributing and consuming sporting events. Social media is creating new ways for communication amongst fans, teams, sponsors and athletes. In order for better connections some sporting organisations have started to use social media as a way of communicating with fans. Mobile technology is also changing the way changing the way live sporting events is being consumed by fans (Holland 2015). However, it can still be challenging for sporting organisations to engage with fans and stakeholders on social media. Multiple conversations taking place in different platforms at the same time can led to substantial "noise". So, discussions started by either the sporting organisation or fans generating thousands of messages within hours. Engaging in noisy spaces can also prove difficult due to the network of users in a sport-based environment fluctuating considerably. As sports organisations continue to grow their social media presences portraying certain networks as a set of follower's segments can highlight certain communities that sports organisations can target for relationship building (Naraine 2019). (Achen 2017) has stated that in sports, social media marketing could have the capacity to connect fans and supporters due to the passion involved by the followers of these teams. For a lot of fans and supporters of specific sports it is associated with history, a family connection, or social identity. This makes it easier to use digital marketing to target the passions that the followers associate with the sport (Achen 2017). Through the use of Web 2.0 it has made it easier for marketers to use social media to increase fans association with the sport. Web 2.0 also known as the social web led to the rise of information sharing through the internet has systematically changed the distribution of information using Web 2.0 practices. With the announcement of social web, the making of content has progressed from the efforts of a proportional few in the media careers to a model that increases the involvement of the crowd (Rosandich 2011). Web 2.0 has resulted in the communication of fans and managers this in turn has led to the development of online communities. These online communities can prove useful and profitable for businesses. Higher involvement by fans and engagement in these online sporting

communities can offer a variety of benefits to marketers. From a sporting perspective game attendance of fans and the intent to purchase sponsored products are the most desired outcome to the overall success of that particular sporting event (Holland 2015).

Some sporting organisations will take the information/data gathered on fans to connect them with messages tailored to them with related accounts such as the Premier League or a specific sporting team (Naraine 2019). In contrast social media marketing is also used by association to promote sporting events, important information through posts, this information can be given through videos, photos, or an alternative piece of content that is accessible and interactive with that audience (Trivedi, Soni and Kishore 2020).

More and more sports organisations are engaging with the fans through social media. For example, England's professional sporting league, the Premier League has roughly 74.6 million followers on Instagram (Premier League 2024). Premiership Rugby has a huge following throughout the world and has 393 thousand followers (Premiership Rugby 2024).

Sports organisations throughout Ireland are connected to the world of marketing and social media. The GAA is one of these organisations that follows the example with their huge following on their official social media platforms especially Instagram with a following off 376 thousand people (Official GAA 2020). Not only does the GAA have an official account each county in Ireland also has their own specific social media account for their team and supporters to interact. For example, Donegal GAA have 19.6 thousand followers on the Instagram (Official Donegal GAA 2024). Dublin GAA have 114 thousand followers (dubgaaofficial 2024), and Kerry GAA have 44.3 thousand followers (kerrygaa_offical 2024). These pages are used by each county to post fixtures, teams, interact with supporters and other important information.

2.7) Influencer Marketing in Sports:

Influencer marketing is developing and evolving in the sports industry. From a communicational and commercial view, influencer marketing symbolises a contribution to the improvement of team brands in order to gain new followers to the team or organisation in which they are marketing to (Achen, 2017). Sports influencer marketing is starting to gain attention from consumers, businesses and advertisers. On social media sites these influencers are able to communicate closely with their followers and fans and produce branded content for them. There are a number of factors that determine the effectiveness of sports influencer marketing these include the identification with certain teams, purchase intentions and the ad content. It's also key to evaluate the creditability and trustworthiness of certain sports influencers (Lee 2021).Even though sports influencers are the perfect fit for sports, fitness and athletic brand, players in team sports tend to be classed as influencers as they promote brands and products and are often given cars as sponsorships from well-known car firms,

they influencers will boost sales for the businesses due to their large following and loyal supporters (Lee 2021).

Social Media influencers are described as being those who have gained a large social media following and are deemed by their followers as being role models and expects in their field. As stated in the earlier piece of work influencers rage from being nano to mega influencers this will depend on the number of followers they have on their platforms (Lee 2021). An example of a mega influencer would be Cristiano Ronaldo who is one of the most famous professional footballers in the world. He is active on social media with 628 million followers on Instagram as of 2024 making him the most followed person in the world on the platform (see figure 4). The Portuguese player has also got a one-billion-dollar contract with Nike to promote the brands products as he is deemed to be one of the most marketable people in the world.
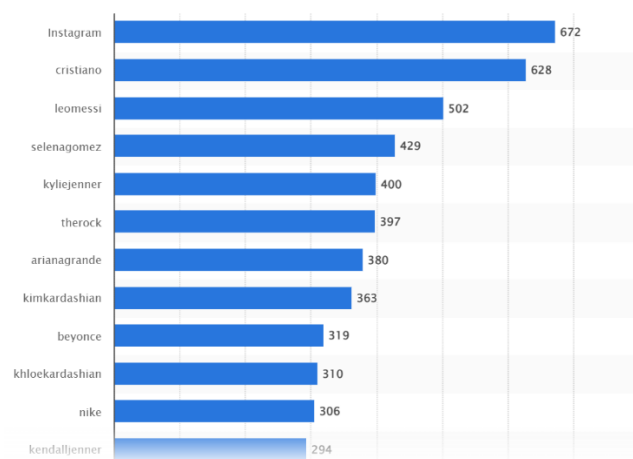
Figure 4: Instagram account with most followers worldwide (2024) Source: (Clement, 2019).

Successful influencer marketing starts with creating ads that are valuable and useful to the consumer. Based on the outcome associated with advertising value sports influencers are able to build brand awareness, authority, strengthen the engagement with consumers and develop trust. (Ducoffe and Curlo 2000) has defined advertising value as being a "subjective evaluation of the relative worth or utility of advertising to consumers". Vast research has been conducted on content value of ads in influencer marketing. It has been found that quality of information, entertainment value and the trustworthiness of influencers affects the credibility of influencers and the purchase intentions (Lee 2021). Since these sports influencers already have a respected reputation in the world of sports endorsements are the best way to promote brand recognition and their products. In the United

Kingdom more than 45% of young people between the ages of 16-24 have said they are inspired by some sport person (Statista Research Department 2024).

2.8) Influencer Marketing in the GAA and Non-Profit Sports Associations:

In contrast to other sporting organisations such as the Premier League, Rugby, and NFL. The Gaelic Games (GAA) are a non-profit and amateur organisation, they not only promote Gaelic sports but also the Irish culture, language, dance and music. According to GAA annual report the 2023 revenue 112million, most of this money was generated from the sale of tickets for both championship and league campaigns and there sponsorship with big Irish brands such as SuperValu, Centra, Allianz, AIB ,Eir and Bord Gais Energy (Gaa.ie 2024).

It Is estimated that around 1.5million people attend the GAA Championship from the months of May to September, with many games being broadcasted on tv or online platforms to be viewed around the world (GAA.ie 2024). From a marketing and communications perspective, the 2023-2026 GAA Communication Strategy has addressed a plan for their communications, they hope to modernise media engagement, have more strategic and proactive communications, better communicate with GAA members and communities (GAA.ie 2024b).

The sensation of Influencer marketing in sports that was analysed in the previous work is not as popular in the GAA. Many GAA players are active social media influencers, who share different posts, like, photos, videos, images and stories related to the GAA and personal life. A report done by the Irish Sun shows that in 2023 there were two GAA players named amongst the 10 most high earning sports stars on Instagram in Ireland these being Kilkenny hurler TJ Reid and Dublin footballer Brian Fenton who are charging between €260 and €220 per sponsored post (Maguire , 2023). GAA influencers are also widely used by other organisations on their social media accounts to promote the products the offer and the GAA.

They GAA players are used by many organisations in the sporting field in Ireland due to the loyalty of supporters in the GAA. Unlike other sports the GAA has an extremely loyal supporters base, people from specific counties in Ireland will sport that team, for many businesses this loyalty and passion for their team may generate sales for the brands/companies they work with (O'Keeffe and Zawadzka 2010). An example of this would be if someone is from Galway they will sport the Galway team only wear their specific county colours and see players on this team as being role models, influencers and trustworthy as they live, work and play for their county so are well known to people in that area. Many GAA supporters would describe themselves as being die hard loyal fans making them easier for players and businesses to influence when it comes to buying certain products (Gallagher, O'Connor and Gilmore 2015). The respect for players as influencers for many comes from the fact that GAA is a voluntary sport, so the players are not getting paid to participate in the hours of commitment put in

meaning that when a player is sponsored or becomes brand ambassador for a company people are more willing to work with that company (Uidhir 2018).

From analysing and looking at many social media accounts of GAA players both men and women, it was identified that their largest following base is on Instagram. Many of these players fall between Micro influencers (10k-50k) and Mid-Tier (50k-500k) due to the number of followers they currently have (Campbell and Farrell 2020). As a result of this analysis the following GAA players were organised in terms of the number of followers they have in 2024. Micro: Shane Walsh, Dean Rock, Ryan McHugh, Patrick McBrearty, Orla O'Dwyer and Ciaran Kilkenny. Mid-Tier: Sarah Rowe, Aidan O'Shea and one ex player Paul Galvin (Starngage 2024). The prospect for these players to attract is related on high levels of engagement which if over 5% is considered great (Roach 2019). All the players mentioned above have an engagement rate of over 5%. This in turn leads to greater credibility, visibility and brand affiliation (Sprout Social 2024).

There is little research conducted to present on influencer marketing in non-profit sporting organisations, however research done by (Naraine 2019) looks at the relevance of social media in 10 different sporting organisations. One of the results from this among the organisations from the application of social media was mirrored in communication which is trying to be established amongst young people. The same research says that to maintain credibility with stakeholder's social media should be used as the first point of communication (Naraine 2019).

As addressed previously Gaelic Games Influencer Marketing on social media as part of social media marketing different tools could create a potential to attract people from Generation Z, the large engagement of the players of GAA on Instagram, the commitment that this generation has to the platform, and the status the GAA has throughout the world brings new opportunities to boost marketing. However little marketing research on the GAA is unknown compared with other sporting organisations. Yet, there is research on influencer marketing and its impact on Generation Z, but more transparency is needed to understand the extent of these groups in relation to influencer marketing strategy. For this reason, exploring the role of influencer marketing to drive participation among Generation Z could attract a new target audience for the GAA. Many factors can determine higher results of marketing these include engagement, reach, authenticity and credibility. The work research above helps the GAA to establish the use of social media influencer marketing will have in driving the participation of this generation to the GAA.

2.9 Key Insights of literature review.

The modification of the literature review emphasises the presences of influencer marketing in the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). Additionally, the importance of social media around the world in terms of consumer and communication channels explained the growth of social media and influencer marketing as a whole.

The literature review also helps to recognise the use of influencer marketing on Instagram, which is the most used platform to develop marketing strategy. Critically the literature examined allows to understand how to identify reliability, credibility, and quality in an influencer connected to GAA by looking at their engagement and the number of followers they currently have. An example of of influencer marketing in sports that was identified in the above piece of work is Cristiano Ronaldo they are prime example of the strategy to enhance branding aspects. The use of social media marketing in sports organisations also have an advantage of communication in terms of the engagement it gives them with their audiences.

In relation to Generation Z the relevance they have with social media marketing is demonstrated with the high level of engagement of this group with social media platforms and technology. However, there is little analysis on the impact that influencer have on people from Generation Z, even though research by some authors claims that young people tend to follow influencers (Balaban and Iancu, 2020) or they have made purchases based of the word of influencers.

To date there is little information about influencer marketing in the field of GAA even though they are daily users of social media, and their players do sponsorships with other brands.

2.10 Conclusion

The literature review conducted on the "Role of influencer marketing in driving participation amongst Generation Z in the GAA in Ireland" focuses numerous key insights. The research conducted on influencer marketing has proven to be a powerful tool in connecting with a generation that is so digital savvy. The reviewed research showed that Generation Z is greatly respective to influencer marketing, especially if these influencers are credible, authentic and relatable and their presence on social media platforms used by this generation is high.

The literature review also identifies gaps in the current literature that have yet to be fully analysed.

Research Questions:

In acknowledgement to the gaps identified in the literature of this work and in order to develop interview questions the following research questions were developed.

1. How does the role of influencer marketing drive participation amongst Generation Z in Gaelic Games in Ireland.
2. What is the most used social media platform for influencer marketing in promoting Gaelic Games.
3. What type of considerations and potential challenges can be identified in using influencer marketing to promote the GAA.
4. How do the values and media consumptions behaviour of Generation Z impact the success of influencer marketing strategies for GAA.

The following primary research method was applied in order to answer these research questions.

Methodology

3.1) Introduction:

The literature review demonstrated a wide range of ideas regarding social media marketing and its relation to individuals from Generation Z. First, because of their regular consumption of social media, individuals in this generational group can be engaged through social media marketing. In addition, Influencer Marketing was discovered as an alternative strategy for achieving marketing objectives; the use of Influencers might additionally enhance brand concepts such as value and engagement according to the examples given. However, the need to thoroughly understand the relationship between Influencer Marketing and Generation Z on GAA creates the opportunity to develop research design based on a qualitative strategy to carry out the investigation. Hence, the knowledge of young people would be able to give thoughts of the function of influencers in the studied field.

3.2) Research Design:

This study will use Saunders research 'onion' as a guide to organise the qualitative research that will be carried out to find the answers to the research objectives identified above. (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009) designed the research onion (see figure 5). The idea contains three main layers the inner outer and central layer, addressing the analysis producer, data collection techniques and a number of other stages that are vital in the researchers work. When using the research onion, it is said to approach it from outer layer and work step by step to the inner layer. As stated, before the central layer consists of data analysis and collection while the inner layer comprises of several techniques, strategies and research methods for the researcher to study. In evaluation the outer layer of the onion contains the phyllophytes and the advances to theory development. The research philosophy forms the basis for the research process and identifies the technique used for the research approach (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009). The next two steps of the research process are to select a research strategy and to establish a time scope. The final step allows the researcher to select what technique to use and method to follow prior to the data being collected and analysed. The research onion is flexible to practically any form of research.
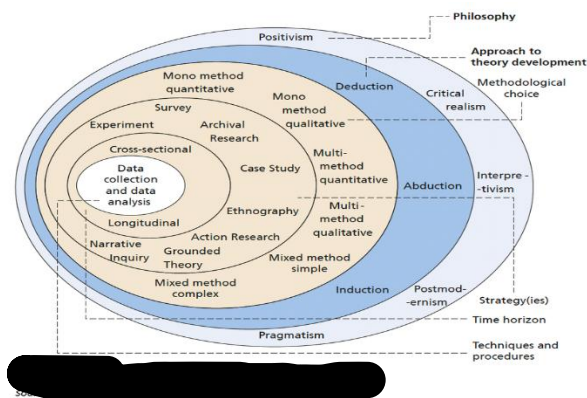
Figure 5: Saunder Research Onion: Source (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

3.3) Research philosophy:

The first layer of Saunder research onion forces the researcher to align the research question with a definitive philosophy. (Wilson 2014) says that an individual's research philosophy is connected with their views on the growth of information, and this will then have an effect on how they conduct research. During each point of the research process the researcher will make numerous expectations whether they are conscious of it or not. Research philosophy is essential in how the research process will be considered. There are three reasons why having a compact understanding of research philosophy is significant to researchers. To begin with it gives the researcher with a clear design. Having a solid familiarity of philosophy will allow the research to decide what design suits best. Finally understanding of philosophy allows the researcher to alter the research design to suit several structures or subject areas. (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009) has designed three primary research theories in order to distinguish research philosophies axiology, ontology and epistemology.

3.3.1) Axiology, Ontology and Epistemology

As the research being gather is exploratory and consists of an open-ended study it is extremely important that the 'why' 'what' and 'how' questions involved in the research are answered. To make sure this happens the epidemiology method was selected. Epistemology is identified as "the nature of knowledge which means how we conceive our surroundings" (Wilson 2014). The other two methods had also been considered by the author, the choice to go with epistemology was made as it places a big importance on correct knowledge as well as the assumption that establish acceptable, legitimate and valuable knowledge (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009). A big benefit of epistemology is that it provides the researcher with a variety of methods. (Wilson 2014) states that ontology is concerned with "the nature of reality and asks how we perceive the social world". Ontology as a method is more theoretical than epistemology and as a consequence is less significant to the research process

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(Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009). "Axiology is concerned with the nature of value" and emphases on how the researcher values has a meaningful impact on the whole research process (Wilson 2014). A vital factor of this philosophy is that the researcher "must choose to which extent they wish to view the impact of their own values and beliefs on their research as a positive thing (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009).

3.3.2 Interpretivist vs positivism

Interpretivism was the philosophy used in this research to recognise various understandings of the role of influencer marketing in the GAA under the beliefs and cultural experiences of individuals from Generation Z. It is seen as being similar to positivism in its historical roots in anthropology. Yet, it is a competitor to positivism, so it is identified as anti-positivism. Interpretivism is more worried with in depth reasons and variables related to a situation it judges how humans are unalike from physical phenomena as they value meaning and that humans cannot be studied in comparable way to physical phenomena (Alharahsheh and Pius 2020).Therefore, this philosophy is suggested by social science analysis and the role of influencer marketing in GAA on Generation Z could be understood for the expansion of statement in social media and the ability of the technology to generate two-way communication (Hassan et al. 2019).

The knowledge by interpretivism is subjective in this area people from Generation Z have different experiences lets them make their own viewpoints of Social Media Influencer Marketing in Instagram and GAA and thus the making of numerous truths (Ryan 2018). Although interpretivism is the most used philosophy other such as realism was used to display the reality of Gaelic players as influencers in the age of social media. The phenomenon of Influencer Marketing in GAA occurs, alone depending on how people think, see or feel regarding them. The aim of realism is reality and is produced over time by these principles (Ryan 2018). In this construct the influencer has developed a new existence in social media marketing promoting new strategies in accordance with the popularity of Instagram and the commitment of this generation with social media and new technologies.

3.4) Research approach

According to the philosophies examined above the method engaged with in this research is inductive. The potential of an inductive approach allows designing new ideas and building patterns by the point of view of people (Creswell et al. 2018). This approach is used to simplify viewpoints and experience from individuals from this generation with GAA Social Media Influencer Marketing on Instagram and linking these ideas with the theories explained in the literature review.

Connections have been made between Generation Z and Influencer Marketing one of the targets of this research is to examine how these factors work together in the GAA environment. It has been identified that one of the main elements of an inductive approach is exhibited in the presentation of flexibility to carry out ideas that are new (Liu 2016), and it presented a representation to recognise how young people from Generation Z feel with those GAA Social Media Influencer Marketing on Instagram.

In this situation this research goal is to use two different research strategies. The first being the phenomenological technique this will help to recognise the understanding young people have with the phenomenon of GAA Social Media Influencer Marketing (Knaack 1984). The second strategy is a narrative method which will be used to deliver narratives about the life of individuals from Generation Z in accordance with Influencer Marketing and Social Media Marketing in GAA (Creswell et al. 2018). As suggested by (Creswell et al. 2018) the study of personnel is mainly guided by narrative and phenomenological designs. Subsequently the fundamental aim of this research is to examine the role of Influencer Marketing on Instagram by the knowledge of Generation Z cohort to drive participation in GAA.

As a result, the use of philosophies as interpretivism and realism, in adding to the inductive approach and the use of phenomenological and narrative method brought about the qualitative research method.

3.5) Research Strategy:

A research strategy is simply a usual direction to guide research and can be divided into qualitative and quantitative methods. The most noticeable difference linking these research methods are that quantitative requires measurements and qualitative does not. (Bryman and Bell 2011) has said that "many writers have suggested that the differences are deeper than the superficial issue of the presences or absences of quantification" and remains to say that quantitative and qualitative methods have diverse epistemic foundations.

Qualitative research is used for many different reasons such as investigating and understanding social problems (Creswell et al. 2018). This investigation sought to get information about the role of GAA Social Media Influencer Marketing by the capabilities of people from Generation Z. According to

(Gill and Baillie 2018) qualitative research focuses on discovering, exploring and clarifying feeling, beliefs, behaviours and situations of the group. This investigation was taken in order to gather Generation Z's viewpoint about influencer marketing and evaluate its accountability in the GAA environment to promote the organisation through social media marketing.

3.6 Data collection method: Semi-Structured Interviews

Based on the research question, design and objectives of the study a qualitative approach was used consisting of semi-structured interviews. The most used forms of interviews are structured or semi-structured and is used as a method of conducting intensive interviews with a specific group of respondents to learn about their perspectives of a specific topic, programme, or situation. In this case, it was to explore the role of influencer marketing and how it drives participation of Generation Z in Gaelic Games (Adams & Cox 2008). Interviews allow having a deep discussion with the aim to obtain specific information or to evaluate detailed tasks giving the most straightforward and direct way to get information and details concerning a specific occurrence (Barrett and Twycross 2018). Semi-structured interviews are frequently labelled as being conversations, or conversations with an intent. However, an interview is worth nothing if it stands alone, they only hold value when multiple interviews take place (McIntosh and Morse 2015). As such interviews replicates a central process through the understanding of the social world and is assembled through normal human interactions. Interviews are often said to be open-ended discovery-oriented methods that enable the interviewer to explore deeper the respondents' feelings and perceptions on a matter. However, there are a few distinctions between a semi-structured interview and a normal conversation practically regarding the goals and responsibilities of the respondents and the researcher. A good semi-structured interview looks straightforward, but it exhibits little resemblance to an everyday conversation (Showkat 2017). A semi-structured interview presents an alternative for researcher it has the flexibility of unstructured method and the rigid structure of the structured one. This research suggests semi-structured due to the adaptable and variable features of this technique that allows people from Generation Z to convey themselves in relation to central values of Influencer Marketing (Barrett and Twycross 2018). Hence, creating questions on the key areas linked to the topic such as Social Media Marketing and Instagram, the semi-structured technique will allow personality, perspectives and experience about Influencer Marketing in the GAA. The semi-structured interview was chosen over focus group letting participants respond to the questions however they want helps the respondent feel more relaxed and comfortable answering questions as they are not in a group of people and allows for more probing on certain answers brought up during the interview. The interview is one of the most used methods in qualitative research.

3.6.1) Carrying out the Semi-structured Interview:

Before the interviews were carried out each participant received a consent form which includes information about confidentiality, the nature of the interview, the length of the interview as well as stating they can withdraw from the study at any time (Mack et al. 2005, pp.31–33) (see appendix 1 for consent form). As well as the consent form participants were also given information sheets which stated what the study was about, why the data is need and their rights in order to ensure they receive all necessary information about the study before agreeing to take part (Mack et al. 2005, pp.31–33) (see appendix 2 for information sheet). The interviewer/researcher conducted the interviews by asking several detailed questions known as the "interview guide". Such as it is a semi-structured interview format the interviewee can answer the questions with a deal of flexibility. This means the interview will be more relaxed allowing the interviewer to conduct themes in a conversational style. It is essential that these questions are open-ended and "formulated to elicit unstructured responses and generate discussion" (McIntosh and Morse 2015). It is the job of the interviewer to use probs to ask for more explanations in areas if needed such probs could be "tell me more" "could you explain this more" "why do you believe this" about the topic studied. These probs allow for the generation of powerful exploratory data. Its vital that the interview includes a small number of close-ended questions as these operate as great opportunity for open-ended probing. The interview guided created from the semi-structured interviews is noticeably less detailed than that of a structured interview. The guide was created by focusing on four overall sections.

Firstly, basic information such as date and place and about the interviewer and interviewee, secondly an overview into the purpose of the study and overall construction of the interview, thirdly initial questions about the interviewee role within the GAA and Gaelic Games in social media and Instagram, and finally content questions to recognise the knowledge of Generation Z with Influencer Marketing in GAA and with the complete topic. Once the interview guide was completed an unofficial pilot study was carried out a small group of people to eliminate any issues with the questions such as not understanding the question or wording the question wrong (McIntosh and Morse 2015). The pilot test gives important advice on issues such as how long the interview will last it also gives the researcher an idea if the questions were being asked in the correct order and gives the interviewer more confidence when conducting the official interviews (Dikko 2016).

The interviewers were conducted one-to-one online through Microsoft Teams. This allowed for the possibility to record each interview and avail of the build in transcription feature however some manual tweaks were needed to ensure all answers were picked up correctly. Being able to record the interviews makes it easier to come back to certain interviews to review the respondents' answers to questions. An extra recorder Otter AI was used in case of any issues that were not noticed at time of the original interview. Doing the interview online allowed for more accessibility and convenience for

the respondents as are able to pick times that work around their schedules, and it also means that they can do the interview anywhere that is easiest for them. Before the interview took place the purpose of the research and the interview format was discussed. The interviews all lasted between 30-40 minutes as to ensure the participant felt they had enough time to respond to each of the questions.

3.7 Population Sampling:

The researcher considered a wide range of factors during the sampling selection process to acquire the most appropriate information for this study. While there is a vast amount of research on Influencer Marketing, the research on Influencer Marketing amongst Generation Z in GAA remains little to date. Evidently most of the research carried out on the topic of Influencer Marketing in sports is done through professional or elite sports. They are carried out using quantitative research measuring a larger sample size meaning the results gather have been largely numerical and representative of a larger population. From quantitative research people's feelings and views on certain subjects can't be identified so it leads to less flexibility (Stokes and Bergin 2006). In parallel to this a smaller sample size can offer the researcher with stronger data and more exact results as considerably more time can be spent on each interview (Hogan, Dolan and Donnelly 2009). As a result of this the researcher chose to interview six people from the ages of 18-27 who fall into the Generation Z demographic, they will also be fans/supporters or local club players of the GAA as well as being users of Instagram. In terms of location the sample took place in Donegal Ireland in the year 2024. The researcher used convenience sampling to recruit these participants. Convenience sampling is also known as "accidental sampling" is a form of nonprobability sampling where "members of the target population meet certain practical criteria such as geographic proximity, availability at the given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the proposed study" (Etikan 2016). Information on participants below.

Information on interview participants:

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Impact on the GAA
Interviewee 1	Female	19	Red Hughs GAA
Interviewee 2	Female	26	Fan
Interviewee 3	Female	23	Fan
Interviewee 4	Male	23	Red Hughs GAA
Interviewee 5	Male	18	Robert Emmets GAA
Interviewee 6	Female	24	Sean Mac Cumhaill GAA

3.8) Data analysis method: Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis is defined as being the difficult process of findings, organising and decide patterns of important "themes" throughout the data collection (Braun and Clarke 2012). This method enables researchers to acknowledge and appreciate shared or mutual perceptions and feelings by focusing on interpretation within a data collection. The main purpose of thematic analysis is to identify patterns involving the way subject is treated or stated contrasted to just showing distinctive or sizable scales within the dataset (Braun and Clarke 2012). This method seeks to understand these relationships by highlighting common themes instead of focusing only on particular findings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009).

The first step in any qualitative analysis is to read the transcripts multiple times to ensure that the author was completely familiar with the full data set. Following this the interviews were coded in order to reduce the large amount of data into smaller chunks (Maguire and Delahurt 2017). Open coding was used in order to further develop and change codes as the process continued. This process included working through the transcripts and highlighting codes that align with each section and add to the aims and objectives.

Once this section is complete, themes throughout the data will be identified. (Maguire and Delahurt 2017) has stated that "a theme is a pattern that captures something significant or interesting the data and/or research question". Once these themes were identified they were then reviewed and modified if needed. The data was then read again in order to establish if these themes support the data. The themes that were arrived at will be discussed in the following chapters.

3.9) Ethical Code of Conduct:

When carrying out this research the ethical matters of the participant were took into consideration. When conducting the research, it is of great importance that ethical guidelines are pursued to ensure the safety of the interviewee. To ensure that all the participants that take part in the interviews are treated with an ethical manner an "Ethics Review Form" has been completed prior to the research being conducted and submitted to National College of Ireland by the author. In qualitative research the confidentiality concept aims to protect the identity of participants (Kaiser 2009). As the interviews were recorded this was disclosed to the participant in the information sheet given to them prior to the interview however to reduce any potential risk the interview recording was all deleted after the researcher received their grade. The participant was also made aware that no personal information other than their age would be gathered and that they can withdraw from the study at any time.

3.10) Research Limitations:

Due to the relatively small sample size for the study consisting of only six participants it is realistic to believe that the findings may not be certain. A visible limitation due to the sample size is the possibility for bias swaying the participants throughout the interviewing process. With this approach the interview questions were carefully devised to restrict as much bias and subjectively as possible. However, it is evident that a small amount of primary data will be bias. In a lot of cases at least one of the participants may perceive a question in a certain way and the answer might not be of any benefit to your research. this can be difficult as it may not align with any of the themes identified so will either must not be used or analysed differently. If the author had a bigger timeframe more interviews could have been conducted with a wider population and the results might have been more representative.

4.0) Findings and Discussions

4.1) Introduction

In this chapter the finding of the six in-depth interviews carried out in July 2024 will be analysed. The finding originating from a thematic analysis interview therefore have been divided into eight major themes to support the research question "How does the role of influencer marketing drives participation amongst Generation Z in GAA in Ireland". Ten main questions were asked with further questions asked in some areas to gain more details, quotes from each of the interview participants will be used throughout the analysis of each theme to exemplify each point revealed throughout the data. The discussion section will also be carried out in this piece of work, this section has the aim of repeating the aim of deliberating the results against the literature review and research objectives. Likewise, the analysis of the data gather by participants in this chapter will be simultaneous with literature in chapter 2 to support prior ideas. As mentioned in the previously themes have been extracted from the six interviews and the data analysed under each of these themes.

4.2 Research objective 1.

To examine which social media platform is most valuable for influencer marketing campaigns directed at the GAA and Generation Z.

Interview Themes:
- Instagram most used platform
- Instagram used for social interaction.
- Instagram useful for updates on GAA

The first area of the interviews analysed the opening research objective. During this part of the interview participants were asked about what social media platform they use most and why they use it. And how it benefits them in terms of the GAA. Focusing on these topics allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding into which social media platform has the most impact on people from Generation Z cohort and why they use this platform the most.

4.2.1 Instagram most used social media platform:

A major theme that emerged for all the interviews was that Instagram is the most used platform amongst Generation Z. This aligns which the previous literature identified in Chapter 2 shows that people between the ages of 18-25 are the most active users of Instagram and make up over 31% of the current active user base (Dixon 2024). Research also shows that within Ireland 24.8% of users belong with the Generation Z cohort and is most popular with woman as 58.2% report they are users of the

platform (Dixon, 2024). This is evident in that four of the interviewees were female and lived in Ireland showing that the research is accurate. One participant stated that:

"I would use Instagram the most I think especially amongst our generation it seems to be the most popular". (Interviewee 2- Female)

Another participant gives a very similar answer:

"Instagram is that platform I would use most I would be on it at least every hour if I can". (Interviewee 6- Female)

As it emerged from these Interviews all (6) the participants stated that Instagram was the most used platform for them, and this is evident in the literature around Instagram and social media marketing to generation Z.

4.2.2 Instagram used for social interaction

Participants were questioned on there reasons for using Instagram to gather a deeper insight into the platform and how Generation Z are using it.80% of those interviewed said they use it for social reasons/ interactions. This would be in the form of interacting with friends and family, keep up to date on their lives and those of influencer in which they follow on the platform. They also stated that they use it to upload photos, reels and videos of their own lives. The response to this question aligns with what Instagram defines there platform as being as they state it can be used to share photos, videos and reels on the platform (Instagram 2022). It also addresses that from the growth of Instagram it makes it easier to become "Insta Famous" as these people start from the bottom posting videos and pictures and over time more people begin to show interest in them and see them as role models or idols (Jin, Muqaddam and Ryu 2018).

Participants stated that:

"I really enjoy using Instagram I mostly use it to keep up to date of the lives of my friends and family". (Interviewee 3)

Another participant gives a similar answer:

"Instagram is a really enjoyable app it has many different features I most use it for social interaction like connecting with friends and family and for updates on my favourite influencers that I look up to". (Interviewee 4).

Interviewee 1 give a slightly different answer:

"I really enjoy social media and I mostly use Instagram to post photos, reel and videos of my life and other interesting things, I hope to get more involved in this area in the next year".

4.2.3 Instagram useful for GAA updates

As the last section of this area of the interview participants were asked about how they are utilising Instagram to update them about the GAA and its activities. Five of those interviews stated that they positive interaction. Following accounts related to the GAA such as their official GAA Instagram page which has 376 thousand followers to date (Official GAA 2020) this page gives information on GAA around the world allowing people to stay connected as they share videos, pictures and reels of supporters, players and management as well as interviews with members of the teams. As well as this page each county in Ireland has their own Instagram page dedicated to the GAA where they update followers on specific things that happening in their county alone in the GAA front such as fixtures, interaction with supporters and information on other important matters some of these accounts are - (Official Donegal GAA 2024), and (dubgaaofficial 2024). One of the respondents give a more negative portray A lot of sporting organisations at certain levels find it hard to maintain conversation and engagement with their audience due to the fact that there is multiple conversations taking place on different platform leading the noise and annoyance for followers and users (Naraine 2019). The responses to this question are as follows:

"I follow accounts related to the GAA such as their official page and pages from specific counties such as Donegal and Dublin as I find them useful for updates on matches and fixtures for the games". (Interviewee 2).

Another respondent gives a very similar response:

"I use Instagram when it comes to the GAA for updates on matches, photos from the games and interviewees with the player and management as I like to see what they say about the game" (Interviewee 3).

Respondent 1 give a more negative response:

"I sometimes feel like there is an overboard I feel there is multiple conversations going on with the GAA on different platform and it leaves like an annoyance for me as I know just skip by their content".

4.3 Research Objective 2

To determine if the involvement of certain players in the GAA helps drive participation.

Interview Themes:

- Identify Influencer as GAA players
- Sponsorships and own businesses
- Perception of GAA players

In this area of the interview the participants were asked questions around the area of how certain GAA players helps to drive participation in the sports. Respondents were asked questions on GAA players that they identify as being influencers and why the role these players have as influencers and the perception of these players.

4.3.1 Identify influencers as GAA players

As the interview progressed respondents were asked what GAA players that they follow that they identify as being influencers. All of the respondents (6) give at least two players from counties in Ireland they follow some of which fall into the category of Micro influencers such as Shane Walsh, Ryan Mc Hugh and Orla O'Dwyer, Mid-tier influencers such as Aidan O'Shea, and Lee Chin (Starngage 2024). All of the GAA players given by the respondents fall into both of these categories due to the fact that they are well known in Ireland but not throughout the world so have a limited follower base however their content includes things about their personal lives as well as the GAA. A article conducted by (Maguire 2023) shows that some GAA players and charging a high amount of money for the posts by them. The first response to this question is:

"I follow a lot of GAA players on Instagram from Donegal I would follow Ryan McHugh and then for other counties players like Shane Walsh and Aidan O'Shea" (Interviewee 1).

Another similar response was:

"I follow a good few players like Orla O'Dwyer who played for Tipperary, and few others but I mostly follow the players from my own county Donegal as I'm most interested in them" (Interviewee 6).

4.3.2 Sponsorship and Own businesses of GAA players

In all the interviews the participants spoke about GAA players that they follow being sponsored by certain brands or setting their own business and how their following has helped with this. Brands usually offer players that they work with sports gear, car sponsorship or other items, brands usually

work with players depending on how well they have played that seasons or engagement rates on social media this depends on the company and what they want (Donoghue 2021). Many of the respondents spoke about players like Michael Murphy and Ryan McHugh, who off the back of their successful careers with Donegal GAA were able to set up their own businesses with the help of their well-known name and social media presence (Walsh 2018). Literature on this topic shows a vast range of businesses in which GAA players are involved in. The responses to this question are as follows:

"I know Michael Murphy has set up his own sports clothing shop in Letterkenny, it seems to be doing very well probably with the help of how well known his name is in the sports industry in Ireland" (Interviewee 2).

Another response was:

"I know Benard Brogan set up a business I can't remember what it was though and then as well Philly McMahon from Dublin own that company fit foods that I have seen all over Instagram and shops" (Interviewee 1).

4.3.3 Perception of GAA players

One of the main objectives identified in this work was to identify what the role of influencer marketing was in relation to the GAA. According to the responses from the interviewees there is many different perceptions of GAA players. People perceive the players as being trustworthy, transparent and loyal to the team and supporters (Gallagher, O'Connor and Gilmore 2015). Several of the respondents stated that they feel that the players are themselves both on and off the field. A few spoke about how their positive presence in the GAA can help with their role as influencers. However critically influencer marketing in the GAA is seen as being companies giving them free stuff like cars or sportwear (Donoghue 2021). Response to this question:

"I would perceive the players as being trustworthy due to the fact that these players are well known in their line of sports, and I also think they loyal to their teams" (Interviewee 4).

Another similar response was:

"For me I perceive GAA players as being transparent for knowing a number of them local to me I can say that they are the same both on and off the pitch" (Interviewee 6).

On the contrast of things was a different response:

"I perceive the role of GAA players in Influencer Marketing as just being about getting free things or trying to sell items which I don't really blame them it's there only way of making money" (Interviewee 1).

4.4 Research Objective 3

To investigate how Generation Z recognises the credibility and authenticity of influencer promoting GAA.

Interview Themes:

- **Authenticity and credibility**
- **Positivity to the GAA**

In this part of the interview participants were asked questions about the authenticity and credibility of GAA players and how they determine this. They also identified why having a positive impact on social media is good for the GAA.

4.4.1 Authenticity and credibility

All of the participants in the interviews spoke about how they feel that influencers are more credible than celebrities in that they provide more information and advice about the goods/service in which they are promoting (Delbaere, Michael and Phillips 2021) and a lot of the things they promote will fit in with their lifestyle (Loeper, Steiner and Stewart 2014). Influencer marketing has not only become popular as a marketing tool but also as collaboration potential for businesses. When examining authenticity and credibility of influencers people speak about how trustworthy and honest the person is in the GAA this is evident due to the fact that many of the influencers are well-known, loyal or even family of people in a certain area making them more believable (Lee 2021). The following are the responses to the question:

"I feel that GAA influencers are very credible due to the fact that they are well-known figures in the sports industry and local communities" (Interviewee 2)

Another respondent stated:

"In influencer marketing credibility is really important I think its easier within the GAA through for example for me I have players in my local club that also play county level I am more likely to believe them than other influencers" (Interviewee 4)

A similar response was:

"I think trustworthiness is the most important thing when it comes to influencer marketing and in the GAA, I feel that all the well-known players that are influencers are trustworthy due to the fact they know they have to be as people all over their county looks up to them and is loyal to them" (Interviewee 5).

4.4.2 Positivity to the GAA

Following on from this questions respondent stated that the presence of GAA players on social media can have a positive impact on the GAA and sports overall. Influencer marketing allows influencers to create ads that are valuable and useful for the consumers which in turn increases brand awareness strengthens the engagement with the consumers and develops trust (Ducoffe and Curlo 2000). The GAA have a huge following on social media especially Instagram with a following of roughly 376 thousand people (Official GAA 2020). Bigger GAA influencers like Shane Walsh who are charging over €600 for an Instagram post will have a positive impact on the GAA due to the large audience he will be able to reach. The following are the responses to the questions:

"I think influencer marketing has a positive impact on the GAA as it creates engagement with the target audience throughout the world" (Interviewee 3).

A similar response was:

"I personally think that influencer marketing in the GAA is a very positive thing due to the players with larger audiences being able to reach people interested in the GAA throughout the world" (Interviewee 6).

Another response was:

"Influencer marketing the GAA can be a positive due to the level of engagement and awareness of the organisation they will gain from these influencers" (Interviewee 2).

4.5 Research Objective 4

Investigate the knowledge of Gaelic Game social media influencer marketing for future improvement in a marketing environment.

Interview Themes:

- **Social media popularity**
- **Advertising**

In the final part of the interview's respondents were asked questions on how they feel social media influencer marketing could improve in a marketing environment in the future. They spoke about the popularity of social media.

4.5.1 Social media popularity

Respondents stated the popularity of social media would help improve the marketing environment in the future. The internet and social media have played a part in influencing the consumption habits of consumers by offering new ways to search for, evaluate and purchase goods and services. In the 21st century for many businesses and people social media has become the main zone of communication (Hassan et al. 2019). In a positive light social media is shown to be a low-cost platform used to the exchange communication between businesses, people consumers and other beings (Muddasir Ahamed and Kruthika N S 2023). Using social media, it allows people to connect in different ways that were not possible in the past, it has also been important part of how firms and consumers use platforms to influence each other. The following were the respondents' answers:

"I feel that the popularity of social media could improve the marketing environment due to how easy the platform is to use and the amount of people it allows you to communicate with" (Interviewee 4).

Another response was:

"Social media being popular in this generation allows for communication between businesses, organisations and consumers that is easy and low-cost" (Interviewee 2).

A similar response was:

"In the 21st century social media is so popular and important for businesses to use it allows people to connect in a way that was not possible years ago while also making it easier to search for goods and services" (Interviewee 1).

5.0 Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore the role of Influencer Marketing in GAA to drive participation in the sport. The researcher studied the present literature and its limitations and set the primary objective to explore how the respondents in the study are influenced by Influencer Marketing in the GAA. From locating gaps in the literature, it was the aim of the author to investigate the gaps that require further analysis. Due to this the research objectives and themes that were developed from these objectives looked at collecting definite data to emphasise the purpose of the research question.

From the qualitative and inductive method of primary research in this study it gives the author an in-dept understanding of Influencer Marketing and the role it plays within the Generation Z cohort in the GAA. This was achieved by exploring the opinions and experiences of the interview participants and by examining their own opinion in relation to the topic area. The data collected on this topic shows a lack of literature on Influencer Marketing relating to the GAA.

After the analysis of current research, it has become clear that are many flaws in Influencer Marketing in relation to the GAA. A failing of the studies is that Generation Z are an online generation, and the GAA have yet to completely identify that this is the best way to engage with that specific cohort of people. The author decided to examine Generation Z as part of this study as they are the first generation to be considered internet savvy and informed about Influencer Marketing. based on the analysis of the interviews its evident that Generation Z have a deep understanding of Influencer Marketing and the GAA and the specific loyalties they have to individual players or teams.

A recurring notion mentioned by the participants was the authenticity, and credibility are the most important factors to consider. In the literature in Chapter 2 it stated that young people know see people who are famous as being individuals who are real and authentic rather than celebrities, they also state that people who are credible, local and known to them are more believable than those with largest followings (Ducoffe and Curlo 2000). During the interviews the participants spoke about other areas such as the social media platform they use the most, the reason for using this social media platform, players that they identify with as being influencers, sponsorship of GAA players, the perception of these players to the respondents, benefits of social media to the GAA.

Exploring the GAA outside of the sport allows for more people to get involved as well as shared positive association with the GAA games and the Irish culture. This study helped to look at this theory outside of the game on the field at look at it through the lens of 21st century Influencer Marketing.

5.2 Recommendations for future research

The current study has identified and discussed different topics where further research is required. The author feels that this study has been a successful due to the fact the conclusion of the study has added to the qualitative data on Influencer Marketing in the GAA. However, the research has only touched on a number of subjects which in turn could call for a more widespread investigation into the topic. Due to the lack of time and recourses available the research was unable to carry out survey/questionnaires for the study which would have involved both quantitative and qualitative research. future research on this area should look to correct this to require a greater population and gain more complex data. Due to the time nature of this study the researcher was only able to involve participants from one small geographic location. It is recommended by the author that in future research a larger geographic location is used to have a more representative data. The author also recommends the use of quantitative research also as it would be beneficial to gain opinions and views from a wider audience and more respondents.

5.2.1 Recommendations for practitioners

The primary aim of this study was to investigate how the role of influencer marketing drives participation of Generation Z in the GAA. Based on the results from the research it can be concluded that influencer marketing has a role in the participation of Generation Z in the GAA. As such this study can say that that are major factors that affect Influencer Marketing. Nonetheless, despite the numerous recommendations which are made on future research on the subject of influencer marketing this study cannot yet provide practitioners with final recommendations.

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7.0 Appendix

Appendix 1

Consent Form to participants in Research

- I …………………… of my own according agree to participate in this research.
- I understand that even if I agree now I can withdraw at any time or not respond to questions without any consequences.
- The purpose and nature of this research has been explained to me and the chance to ask questions has been given.
- I understand that my participation in this research expects me to take part in an interview lasting 30-45 minutes.
- I consent to the recording for the interview.
- I understand that all the information gathered in the interview will remain confidential.
- I understand that my identity will remain anonymous, changing my name and concealing any identifiable information other than my age as its important to the study.
- I understand that some citations of my interview may be cited in the findings of the research carried out.
- I understand that any information provided to the researchers that could acquire harm to myself or others must be reported to the pertinent authorities by the researcher.
- I understand that a copy of the interview recording, transcript and consent form will keep in a password protected folder in which only the researcher has access to.
- I understand that a copy of the recording, transcript and consent form will be kept until the results of the research have been issued.
- I understand that all the information provided by me will be available to access.
- I understand that I can contact any of the parties involved in conducting the research for further clarification if required.

Leona McGlinchey (Researcher)

Tel: 0868644367 x22187685@student.ncirl.ie

Desmond Gibney (Supervisor)

Signature of research participant:

Appendix 2

Information Sheet for Participants

Project Title: [Exploring the role of Gaelic Games Social Media Influencer Marketing on Instagram to drive participation in Gaelic Games on Generation Z".]

You are being asked to take part on a research study on ….

This research will try to explore the role of Gaelic Games Influencer Marketing to drive participation in people from Generation Z to analyse the performance of them by the experience of individuals belong to this generational group on Instagram. This study is conducted by Leona McGlinchey student of master's degree in marketing at National College of Ireland. And the research is supervised by Desmond Gibney.

What Will Happen

In this study you will be asked to tell you experience with Gaelic Games Social Media Influencer and other topics related to social media marketing. The researcher will aim to get insight in concordance with use of Influencer marketing strategy to achieve marketing goals. The interview will be conducted through Microsoft teams. The researcher will record the interview in two different ways firstly through the recording feature on Teams and secondly with the use of there mobile phone to have a backup in case of any inconvenience.

Time Commitment

These types of interviews usually take between 30-45 minutes. It could be extended if both the interviewer and participant agree in terms. The time will vary depending on the conversation and how the fluidly between parts go.

Participants Rights

You can decide to stop being part of the research study at any time without an explanation. You have the right to ask that the data supplied by you be withdrawn/destroyed. You have the right to refuse to answer certain questions that are being asked to you. You have right to have any questions asked about the procedure to be answered. If you have any questions for the researcher after reading this information sheet they should be asked before the study begins.

Confidentiality/ Anonymity

The data that I will collect from you will not have any personal information about you other than your age and you experience with social media marketing, Influencer Marketing in the GAA, and general questions about social media marketing usage. The use of your data will be part in dissertation of master's degree in marketing in National College of Ireland, with the propose of explore the role of famous players of Gaelic Games who are active on Instagram as Influencer Marketing. this study will only be used to convey your answers, using certain phrases to link idea with the main topic of the study. You can either opt for your face to be shown or not shown on Teams as the interview will be recorded, however the data will later be deleted.