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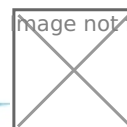


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**Digital day in life: Differences between generations X, Y and Z in the use of social media**

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## **Abstract**

Access to high-speed internet and constant change of technology made social media platforms one of the main sources of entertainment among generations. This paper profiled and compared three different social generations - X, Y and Z - in terms of their daily digital lives. The research was conducted through a diary method where participants of generation X, Y and Z were requested to record every social media activity for one day. The results of the research shown that generation Z is leading in every activity that is being performed on social media, from consumption to participation to production. Additionally, the results have shown that certain social media platform attract different generation. This paper suggests that this can be a beneficial information for business on where to attract certain generation target group and how segmentation of customers can help with creating specific marketing strategy.

*Keywords:* Social media, Social media platforms, Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z

## **Digital day in life: Differences between generations X, Y and Z in the use of social media**

Social media as we know it today is believed to originate from 1998 when Bruce Ableson founded The Open Diary, which allowed users to create anonymous online public diaries and interact with readers (Seminerio, 1998). Readers were able to search the content that suited them the most while creators maintain a healthy environment for others with careful following of rules implied. Today social media is referred as a digital tool which allows users to create and share content worldwide, in real time and efficiently (Hudson, 2020). The notion of social media can be described as a box full of mystery, or more appropriate in today's time Pandora's box (Dolmans et al., 2020).

As the years went by and the access to high-speed internet grew, the concept of social media became more attractive to the general public (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). The accessibility to high-speed internet sped the process of prosperity and popularity of social media platforms such as Myspace established in 2003, Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, Twitter in 2006, etc. The social media platforms allowed people to connect, share, escape, and network with the whole world, making it a new trend to be connected online. According to Hootsuite, the statistics for 2020 shows that 84% of people with access to the internet use social media, 50% of the global population is using social media, people aged 16–24 spend closer to 3 hours a day on social media, the average social media user has 8.3 different social accounts, video is the top media format having 90% of users watch at least one video a month on social media (Cooper, 2020).

### **Social media classification**

The general public usually thinks of social media in terms of the most popular social media networks such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and other similar platforms, but the notion of

social media does not stop there (Kakkar, 2018). In fairness, the complexity of social media is reaching levels that could have never been expected. Therefore, the differentiation of social media types is extremely important (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

In the past, social media platforms were divided in social networks such as LinkedIn, MySpace and HiT, company-sponsored social networks such as Authonomy, media sharing platforms like Photobucket, YouTube and Revver, social news and bookmarking platforms like Reddit and Digg, real time updates platforms like Twitter and Tumblr (Webdesigner Depot, 2009). The categorization of social media changed drastically over time and what was once seen as the standard has changed its shape and form because new features are added frequently onto the platforms (Foreman, 2017). Because of that the whole concept of dividing social media has become broader and more complex.

Thus, the new categorization follows next order: social networks, media sharing networks, bookmarking and content curation networks, collaborative projects, discussion networks, shopping networks, blogging networks, review networks, and 'sharing economy' networks (Foreman, 2017; Kaplan & Haenlien, 2010). Social networks, like Facebook, Twiter and LinkedIn, help people stay connected and are used to share content (Foreman, 2017). Media sharing networks like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and etc. serve as a place where people share their photos, videos, and live videos in line of creating audience engagement and relationships. Bookmarking and content curation networks like Pinterest, help people discover, have, and share content. Collaborative projects like Wikipedia and Scholarpedia enable content creation and edit by more than one user and represent one of the main sources of information of many people (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Discussion networks as Reddit and Quora provide place to share and generate opinions, ideas, and news (Foreman, 2017). Shopping networks like Zara, Mango, and ASOS serve for finding and

purchasing goods. Blogging networks like Tumblr are used for consuming and producing content online in a form of blog. Review networks like TripAdvisor and Yelp provide information about businesses and give customers a chance to express their opinion regarding quality of goods and services. Lastly, 'sharing economy' networks like AirBnB and Uber are used for advertising, finding, and purchasing goods and services.

The categorization of social media shows that there are different means and consequences while using social media which automatically conveys various motives and activities while engaging in social media (Heinonen, 2011).

### **Users' motivation for engaging on social media**

Motivation is described as desire to do a particular thing or enthusiasm for a particular thing ("Motivation – definition", n.d.). Motivation can be different for people based on their beliefs, perception, values, interest, and action (Mahdikhani, 2016). It is split in two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is driven by personal satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation is driven by outside factors that give people feeling of reinforcement.

By understanding what motivation means one needs to understand their motives for engaging in social media (Heinonen, 2011). There are four motives as to why users' use social media: information seeking, entertainment, socialization, and identity-status seeking (Park et al., 2009). For instance, information seeking is used to generate information or to self-educate on social media (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Entertainment is defined as usage of social media that provides enjoyment and relaxation for users. Socialization is defined as usage of social media which helps users to connect, communicate and interact with others. While identity-status seeking is about the process in which one individual may seek status because of economic and social advantage or

psychological and emotional motives (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007). Economic and social advantage defines ones need to seek status because it provides them with better social standing. Whereas psychological and emotional motives feed ones' ego by gathering the admiration from others.

Ultimately, the motivation for engaging in social media affects one's activity on social media (Heinonen, 2011). The activity on social media is divided in three groups: consumption, participation, and production (Shao, 2009).

### **Consumption.**

Consumption refers to the content that users consumed on social media (Shao, 2009, p.9). This means that users who consume certain data on social media only observe, read, watch, etc. but do not participate. As one of the main components of consumption is information seeking, it is highly important to know that information seeking is driven by user's determination to acquire new knowledge about themselves and the world. The second main component of consumption is entertainment. Social media in that matter serves as a limited distraction, meaning that users will spend limited time on social media to either avoid situation in real life, fill in spare time, relax, feel emotions, etc. (Shao, 2009, p.10-12).

### **Participation.**

Participation refers to the content in which users participated on social media (Shao, 2009, p.9). It includes two types of interaction: user-to-user and user-to-content. User-to-user interaction defines the interaction that happens between two users on social media via e-mail, chat, direct messages, and etc. While user-to-content interaction defines instances where users share, like, comment or rate other people content. The differentiation between these two types is that user-to-user interactions are private e.g., emails, direct messages, exchange of content, etc., and user-to-

content interactions are public e.g., posting comments, liking, rating content, etc. Participation establishes social interactions and formation of virtual communities (Shao, 2009, p.12-13).

### **Production.**

Production refers to the content that users produced on social media (Shao, 2009, p.9). It includes the process of creation and publication of various types of content e.g., photos, texts, videos, etc. Factors that influence such use of social media are self-expression and self-actualization. Self-expression is explained as ones need for expressing their identity e.g., thoughts, personal opinions, political views, photos, videos, etc. With self-expression users get the feeling that they can affect other people's opinion of them (Dominick, 1999; Jones & Pittman, 1982, as cited by Shao, 2009, p.14). Self-actualization is about seeking recognition from others, gaining fame or personal value (Bughin, 2007; Kollcok, 1999; Rheingold, 1993, as cited by Shao, 2009, p.14). Production can benefit other users by providing them reviews on products, sharing experiences, inspiring, rating, and many more (Shao, 2009, p.16).

The correlation between consumption, participation and production is explained through barriers (Shao, 2009, p.15). Users begin their journey through observation and consumption content on social media. The barrier between consumption and production is broken once the user starts participating with consumed content. As mentioned earlier, participation established social interactions and formation of virtual communities. Lastly, some users may start producing their own content on social media. As explained, the need for such actions is imbedded in self-expression and self-actualization.

When examining users' motivation for engaging in social media, one needs to be aware of the differentiation in generations, meaning that generations differ in motivation towards engaging



in social media and ways in which they do it (Fietkiewicz et al., 2016). Thus, each generation has a different cohort. Generational cohorts define people who were born in the same period of time, share similar social environments and circumstances that make them think alike, and have similar habits and behaviors (Story, 2014).

### **Defining generations**

Generational cohorts' names help individuals with self-identification (Kasasa, 2021). The breakdown by generations that this research paper is focused on is generation X, Y and Z. Generation X refers to people born between 1965 and 1980; generation Y refers to people born between 1981 and 1996; and generation Z refers to people born between 1997 and 2015 (Kasasa, 2021). Previous research has found that generations motives for engaging in social media differ, for instance 39% of generation X uses social media to stay up to date with events and news in the world, 30% of generation Y uses social media to express their opinion, and 45% of generation Z uses social media to find entertaining content (GlobalWebIndex, 2020, as cited by Cooper, 2020).

#### **Generation X.**

Generation X is frequently referred as a “forgotten generation” or “neglected middle child” (Woo, 2018; Taylor & Gao, 2014). They are the generation which witnessed great shifts in the world from first ATMs to internet becoming part of their everyday life (Woo, 2018). They were also the most ethnically diverse generation prior to generations Y and Z (Betz, 2019). Generation X is usually described as the independent and ambitious generation, who values freedom and responsibilities (Indeed Career Guide, 2020).

#### **Generation Y.**

Generation Y is also known as the Millennial generation. Contrary to generation X, Millennials were exposed to internet from their early childhood (Betz, 2019). Having internet being present from their upbringing influenced their attitudes, behavior, and way of thinking for using technology. Some of the characteristics that define this generation are that they are tech-savvy, family oriented, ambitious, and job oriented (Kane, 2019).

### **Generation Z.**

Generation Z or also known as “digital natives” who were born in the greatest expansion of technology and internet (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021). They are the most diverse generation when it comes to their race, sexual orientation, and gender. They are financially conscious, openminded, politically progressive, independent, value stability, and understand their role responsibility for the future. However, generation Z is also known as the loneliest generations, resulting in many of them to isolate from the world and suffer from depression.

## **Method**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research was to profile and compare three different social generations - X, Y and Z - in terms of their daily digital lives, i.e., their daily social media activities. Furthermore, to understand the dynamics of social media content consumption and production, more precisely the type of content consumed and generated on social media sites, and motifs guiding such use of social media. Additionally, this research examined what activities generation X, Y and Z perform the most while engaging on social media platforms i.e., consumption, participation, and production.

## **Materials and procedure**

The research was conducted through a diary method inspired by Heinonen (2011). The diary method is described as a method that captures life as it is lived where respondents are asked to report on daily events and experiences (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli, 2003, as cited by Heinonen, 2011). It focuses on users natural and spontaneous responses and feelings. The diary method followed event-contingent responding method, where participants were requested to record every social media activity for one day (see Appendix). It was divided in two parts; where the first part of the diary was a questionnaire which required participants to provide basic information about themselves i.e., gender, year of birth, relationship status, level of education, and employment status. Whereas the second part of the diary required participants to observe and record information for every activity they performed e.g., date, time, length of visit, social media platform(s) used, activities performed, content type, relevance of content to them, feelings associated to the activity performed, and whether the content was followed by an ad. There were additional things tracked like time spent awake, time spent on social media, and how many times each activity was performed.

## **Participants**

The research study was composed of 55 participants in total. Generation X consisted of 13 participants from which 11(84.6%) were female and 2(15.4%) were male. Generation Y consisted of 21 participants from which 13(61.9%) were female and 8(38.1%) were male. Generation Z consisted of 21 participants from which 19(90.5%) were female and 2(9.5%) were male.

The diary was distributed using snowball sampling technique; the participants were recruited electronically i.e., via email, Twitter, and Instagram. Several participants results were

excluded from the research due to incomplete results. To ensure anonymity and conditionality, participants were not required to provide sensitive information such as name, education facility, company name, and etc.

## Results

As noted, the purpose of this research study was to profile and compare three different social generations - X, Y and Z - in terms of their daily digital lives, i.e., their daily social media activities. Therefore, the results were split in three categories, generation X, generation Y and finally generation Z. Lastly, the research presented relevant differences between generations.

### Generation X

As mentioned, generation X consisted of 13 participants from which 11(84.6%) were female and 2(15.4%) were male (Table 1). Out of 13 participants 12(92.3%) were married and 1(7.7%) was dating. In terms of level of education out of 13 participants 8(81.5%) had master's degree, 3(23.1%) had high school degree, and 2(15.4%) had Ph.D. As for the employment status, out of 13 participants 12(92.3%) were employed full-time and 1(7.7%) was unemployed.

The results show that generation X approximately spends 16 hours (calculated in minutes  $M=960$ ,  $SD=73.5$ ) awake and out of those 16 hours they spend 1 hours 43 minutes ( $M=103.5$ ,  $SD=65.5$ ) on social media platforms (Table 2). In other words, 10.8 percent of the awake time spent on social media.

In order to profile the generations, the research tried to first determine which social media platforms were used the most by each generation. The results have shown that generation X used Facebook and YouTube (84.6%) the most (Table 3).

Furthermore, the results have shown that when it comes to the number of activities performed on social media platform, generation X is the most active on YouTube ( $M=1.85$ ,  $SD=2.609$ ) and Facebook ( $M=1.85$ ,  $SD=1.519$ ) (Table 4).

When it comes to the activities that generation X performed consumption was the leading activity ( $M=5.31$ ,  $SD=3.119$ ), participation was second ( $M=1.08$ ,  $SD=1.320$ ), and lastly production ( $M=.54$ ,  $SD=1.198$ ) (Table 5)

Considering that the content that users can generate on social media platforms, generation X results show that they prefer public content ( $M=4.69$ ,  $SD=3.301$ ) over private content ( $M=1.62$ ,  $SD=1.325$ ). When it comes to relevancy of the content that each generation consumes, participants of generation X reported that content that they consume is relevant ( $M=4.77$ ,  $SD=3.586$ ) to either of them personally, group of their belonging, their culture and etc.

Generation X participants expressed the most interest in generating content in form of text ( $M=3$ ,  $SD=1.826$ ), video was next ( $M=2.85$ ,  $SD=2.824$ ), then photo ( $M=2$ ,  $SD=1.780$ ) (Table 6).

While generating social media content participants performed several activities, ranging from texting to listening to music. Generation X spent the most time on watching videos ( $M=2.46$ ,  $SD=2.537$ ) and reading ( $M=2.23$ ,  $SD=1.641$ ) (Table 7).

Some of the most frequent motifs that generation X had while consuming content on social media was for entertainment ( $M=1.69$ ,  $SD=2.016$ ), socializing ( $M=1.46$ ,  $SD=2.106$ ), music ( $M=1$ ,  $SD=2.739$ ).

There was a pattern of emotions that participants from generation X displayed while using social media. Some of the most frequent was happiness ( $M=1.92$ ,  $SD=1.801$ ).

## Generation Y

Generation Y consisted of 21 participants from which 13(61.9%) were female and 8(38.1%) were male (Table 8). When it comes to relationship status, out of 21 participants 6(28.6%) were single, 9(42.9%) were dating, and 6(28.6%) were married. Furthermore, the level of education for generation Y consisted of 14(66.7%) participants who had bachelor's degree, 5(23.8%) had master's degree, and 2(9.5%) had Ph.D. The employment status showed a more diverse standing where out of 21 participants 15(71.4%) were employed full-time, 3(14.3%) were students, 2(9.5%) were unemployed, and 1(4.8%) was employed part-time.

The results have shown that generation Y spends approximately 16 hours and 21 minutes (calculated in minutes  $M=981.2$ ,  $SD=59.9$ ) awake and out of those 16 hours and 21 minutes, they spend 3 hours and 36 minutes ( $M=216.9$ ,  $SD=139.8$ ) on social media platforms (Table 9). In other words, 20 percent of the awake time spent on social media.

The list of social media platforms used by generation Y paints a slightly different picture from generation X. The most used social media platform was Instagram, where 18(85.7%) out of 21 participants chooses Instagram as a way to engage in the online world (Table 10). YouTube holds second place with 15(71.4) participants. Then the slight drop is recorded where 10(47.6%) out of 21 participants use Facebook. Google+ is used by 8(38.1%) participants. Twitter and TikTok are both used by 7(33.3%) participants.

Moreover, the results have shown that when it comes to the number of activities performed on social media platform, generation Y is the most active on Instagram ( $M=2.76$ ,  $SD=2.343$ ) and YouTube ( $M=1.29$ ,  $SD=1.231$ ) (Table 11).

As for the activities that generation Y performed consumption was first ( $M=5.67$ ,  $SD=2.436$ ), participation second ( $M=2.52$ ,  $SD=2.52$ ), and production third ( $M=.76$ ,  $SD=1.179$ ) (Table 12).

Similarly, to generation X, generation Y prefers consuming public content ( $M=4.52$ ,  $SD=1.861$ ) over private content ( $M=2.48$ ,  $SD=2.228$ ). Participants of generation Y reported that content that they consume is in fact relevant ( $M=4.52$ ,  $SD=1.965$ ) to either of them personally, group of their belonging, their culture and etc.

Generation Y participants generated content in form of video ( $M=3.71$ ,  $SD=1.736$ ) the most, following with text ( $M=3.38$ ,  $SD=1.554$ ), and photo ( $M=3.10$ ,  $SD=1.300$ ) (Table 13).

As mentioned, while participants generated social media content, they performed several activities. Generation Y spent the most time on watching videos ( $M=3.67$ ,  $SD=1.770$ ) and scrolling ( $M=3.19$ ,  $SD=1.692$ ) (Table 14).

The most frequent motifs that generation Y had while consuming content on social media was for socializing ( $M=2.29$ ,  $SD=2.053$ ), and entertainment ( $M=1.38$ ,  $SD=1.499$ ).

The emotion that generation Y showed the most while using social media platforms was happiness ( $M=2.48$ ,  $SD=1.504$ ).

## **Generation Z**

Generation Z also consisted of 21 participants out of which 19(90.5%) were female and 2(9.5%) were male (Table 15). The relationship status of generation Z showed that out of 21 participants 12(57.1%) were single and 9(42.9%) were dating. When it comes to the level of

education out of 21 participants 16(66.7%) had high school degree and 5(28.8%) had bachelor's degree. The employment status showed that out of 21 participants 16(71.4%) were students, 3(14.3%) were employed full-time, and 2(9.5%) were employed part-time.

Generation Z results have shown that they spend approximately 15 hours and 57 minutes (calculated in minutes  $M=957$ ,  $SD=94.09$ ) awake and out of those 16 hours and 21 minutes, they spend 3 hours and 36 minutes ( $M=296.3$ ,  $SD=151.5$ ) on social media platforms (Table 16). In other words, 30 percent of the awake time spent on social media.

When it comes to generation Z most used social media platform, YouTube holds the first place with 19(90.5%) out of 21 participants (Table 17). Instagram is used the second most with 18(85.7%) participants, then Facebook with 14(66.7%). TikTok is used by 7(33.3%) out of 21 participants, and Google+ by 6(28.6%) participants. Last but not least, Zara is used by 5(23.8%) participants.

Additionally, the results show that when it comes to the number of activities performed on social media platform, generation Z is the most active on Instagram ( $M=4.95$ ,  $SD=3.956$ ) and YouTube ( $M=2.10$ ,  $SD=1.261$ ) (Table 18).

Overall, generation Z performed consumption the most ( $M=7.76$ ,  $SD=3.576$ ) which was the highest among three generations, participation was second most performed activity ( $M=3.43$ ,  $SD=2.204$ ) (Table 19).

Generation Z showed the same behavior towards generating public content more ( $M=6.29$ ,  $SD=4.101$ ) over the private content ( $M=2.48$ ,  $SD=2.159$ ) on social media platforms. When it comes to relevancy of the content that generation Z consumes, majority of participants reported that content that they consume is relevant ( $M=4.57$ ,  $SD=2.891$ ) to either of them personally, group of



their belonging, their culture and etc. However, a strong number of participants reported that the majority of consumed content is irrelevant to them ( $M=3.38$ ,  $SD=3.528$ ).

The most generated content was in form of video ( $M=5.24$ ,  $SD=2.508$ ), following next was photo ( $M=4.71$ ,  $SD=3.364$ ), then text ( $M=3.48$ ,  $SD=2.250$ ) (Table 20).

The activities that generation Z performed while generating content on social media the most was watching videos ( $M=5.38$ ,  $SD=2.729$ ) and photos ( $M=4.57$ ,  $SD=3.340$ ), texting ( $M=2.62$ ,  $SD=1.717$ ), and scrolling ( $M=4.52$ ,  $SD=3.010$ ) (Table 21).

Some of the reoccurring motifs that generation Z had while consuming content on social media was for entertainment ( $M=2.86$ ,  $SD=1.905$ ), socializing ( $M=2.24$ ,  $SD=1.947$ ), education ( $M=1.19$ ,  $SD=1.209$ ), and fashion ( $M=1.14$ ,  $SD=2.393$ ).

Along with generation X and Y, generation Z showed emotions of happiness ( $M=2.62$ ,  $SD=1.962$ ), indifference ( $M=2$ ,  $SD=3.619$ ).

### **Differences between generations**

The results show that there is a significant differentiation between generations and the amount of time they spend on social media showing that generation Z (calculated in minutes generation X:  $M=960$ ,  $SD=73.5$ , generation Y:  $M=981.2$ ,  $SD=59.9$ , generation Z:  $M=957$ ,  $SD=94.09$ ) spent more time on social media platforms comparing to generation X and Y,  $F(2) = 8.622$ ,  $p = .001$  (Table 22). This can confirm why generation Z is referred as a digital generation (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021).

There is a significant difference in the frequency in use of Instagram  $F(2) = 6.505$ ,  $p = .003$ , among different generations, generation Z used it the most (generation X:  $M=1.23$ ,  $SD=2.088$ ,

generation Y:  $M=2.76$ ,  $SD=2.343$ , generation Z:  $M=4.95$ ,  $SD=3.956$ ) (Table 23). This is an indicator on where generation Z can be reached the most.

Ultimately, results show that generation Z used social media platforms for consumption notably the most out of three different generations (generation X:  $M=5.31$ ,  $SD=3.119$ ; generation Y:  $M=5.67$ ,  $SD=2.436$ ; generation Z:  $M=7.76$ ,  $SD=3.576$ ),  $F(2) = 3.479$ ,  $p = .038$ . When it comes to participation, generation Z also performed the most among generations (generation X:  $M=1.08$ ,  $SD=1.320$ ; generation Y:  $M=2.52$ ,  $SD=1.940$ ; generation Z:  $M=3.43$ ,  $SD=2.204$ ),  $F(2) = 5.973$ ,  $p=.005$  (Table 24).

Interestingly, results shown that there is an extreme difference when it comes to the type of content each generation generates. The difference in question concerns two type of content type, photo  $F(2) = 5.542$ ,  $p=.007$ , and video  $F(2)=4.683$ ,  $p=.013$ . Thus, generation Z generates more photo (generation X:  $M=2$ ,  $SD=1.780$ ; generation Y:  $M=3.10$ ,  $SD=1.300$ ; generation Z:  $M=4.71$ ,  $SD=3.364$ ), and video (generation X:  $M=2.85$ ,  $SD=2.824$ ; generation Y:  $M=3.71$ ,  $SD=1.736$ ; generation Z:  $M=5.25$ ,  $SD=2.508$ ) content type while using social media platforms (Table 25).

The most significant difference when it comes to type of activities that generations performed subsequently showed the relationship each generation had with social media. For instance, texting (generation X:  $M=.31$ ,  $SD=.855$ ; generation Y:  $M=1.67$ ,  $SD=1.906$ ; generation Z:  $M=2.62$ ,  $SD=1.717$ ), watching videos (generation X:  $M=2.85$ ,  $SD=2.824$ ; generation Y:  $M=3.71$ ,  $SD=1.736$ ; generation Z:  $M=5.25$ ,  $SD=2.508$ ), liking (generation X:  $M=.38$ ,  $SD=.768$ ; generation Y:  $M=1$ ,  $SD=1.581$ ; generation Z:  $M=2.19$ ,  $SD=2.112$ ), watching photos (generation X:  $M=2.08$ ,  $SD=2.1801$ ; generation Y:  $M=3.14$ ,  $SD=1.352$ ; generation Z:  $M=4.57$ ,  $SD=3.340$ ), and scrolling (generation X:  $M=2.15$ ,  $SD=2.154$ ; generation Y:  $M=3.19$ ,  $SD=1.692$ ; generation Z:  $M=4.52$ ,  $SD=3.010$ ) was the most performed by generation Z (Table 26). This shows how

generation Z performs more activities while using social media platforms initially consuming more information about various topics.

There is a significant difference in consumed content that is irrelevant  $F(2) = 4.051$ ,  $p = .023$ , which explains that generation Z spends the most time consuming irrelevant content (generation X:  $M = 1.38$ ,  $SD = 1.121$ ; generation Y:  $M = 1.43$ ,  $SD = 1.720$ ; generation Z:  $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 3.528$ ) (Table 27). Showing that generation Z is prone to generate significantly more irrelevant content in comparison to other generations.

### **Discussion**

Interestingly, the results showed that all generations use social media the most for consuming content that is being generated. However, what was surprising is the significant difference when it comes to the amount of consumption that generation Z performs. As mentioned in results, generation Z uses social media to consume content on social media the most. The information that generation Z is addicted to the phone and the internet is mentioned in everyday life and on the internet every day. Therefore, this should not come as a surprise since generation Z is described as “digital native”. When it comes to the motives as to why generations use social media there is no significant difference. The results actually showed that all three generations share similar motifs such as using social media for entertainment, socializing, gathering news, and etc.

The results of the research shown that generation Z is leading in every aspect of activities performed on social media, from consumption to participation to production. This poses a question, if the generation Z consumes, participates and produces the most on social media, ultimately creating new trends and ways on how to navigate social media platforms, will it be hard for other generations to catch up? As mentioned, generation X has been the generation that went

through all of the stages of technology development, therefore, has had a hard job to adjust to each time a significant change happened. Could this roll of events tire an entire generation and make them into passive observants on social media platforms? Among generation X the highest score on leading activity was for consumption, whereas participation and production fall drastically. The leading content type for generation X was text and considering that they had the highest score on relevancy of the content that they consumed, this can show that generation X creates a deeper relationship with usage of social media platforms. Perhaps, generations can be divided in groups where generation X would be the ones who utilize the value of content and technology, focusing on one thing at a time, and generation Z can be seen as a generation that needs constant entertainment and varieties of different content.

Another way to describe the results and profile of generations would be to divide them by personality type groups of a hedgehog and a fox. Where generation X would be a hedgehog, generation Z a fox and generation Y a mixture of both, in other words perfect transition between the two. What does this mean? As said generation X would represent a hedgehog which is a personality type that describes people who drive their knowledge, interests, and skills deep into specific subjects (Hedgehogs and Foxes, n.d.). Tending to focus deeply and occasionally with too much detail, may cause members of this group to be stuck and may prevent them to deepen the acceptance of social and environmental changes i.e., generation X's relationship with fast changes happening in technology and social media platforms. On the other hand, generation Z can be described as a fox. Foxes are people who seek little information about various topics (Hedgehogs and Foxes, n.d.). Driven by their passion foxes may leave a lot of things unfinished resulting in creating unclear vision and goals for themselves. This can be concluded based on results that show that generation Z performs different activities such as scrolling, texting, liking, watching videos

and photos the most out of three generations. Based on results, mindlessly scrolling through social media platforms without any feeling whatsoever is a perfect description of generation Z. The attention span of generation Z is 8 seconds (Boger, 2020), and the more content they generate the higher the motive for entertainment grows. Additionally, based on the results we can see that generation Z is not only passively scrolling through social media platforms, which can be concluded by indifference being the second emotion they felt while using social media platforms. Nevertheless, they were the ones who expressed more emotions among generations. Generally, all three generations expressed similar emotions, however, generation Z expressed feeling anxious while using social media. The question is why does generation Z feel anxious? The answer can be varieties of content provided. sensitive topics, pressure to engage and etc. However, as mentioned generation Z is a generation which understands their role responsibility in the world, therefore, they try to use different signs which can initially help to create a safer place on the internet. Because of this, generation Z has adopted a habit of writing TW, trigger warning, prior to posting sensitive content. Trigger warnings are used to minimize the potential feeling of anxiousness or being triggered by something that they have come across while using social media generation Z (Stenberg, 2018). Therefore, going on Twitter or Instagram and seeing posts with “TW” in the beginning of the post is an everyday occurrence for social media user. Despite the intention behind this trend, Harvard research found out that trigger warnings can actually increase level of anxiousness and can benefit in developing PTSD (as cited by Lukianoff et al, 2020). This leaves us with generation Y and their position in all of this. Generation Y is the perfect representation of a transition between two personality types. They have characteristics of both hedgehog and fox personality. The results show that generation Y uses social media to generate more relevant

content, but also scrolls aimlessly through social media which shows that they are a perfect transition between generation X and generation Z.

Other interesting findings show that certain social media platform significantly attracts certain generation. While generation X chooses to focus on Facebook, younger generations have chosen Instagram. This can be a beneficial information for business on where to attract certain generation target group. Segmenting their customers can help with creating specific marketing strategies. Also, this can show how younger generations have more ability to adjust to new things like new social media platforms, whilst generation X chooses the comfort of already mastered social media platform, Facebook. As mentioned, having to constantly adopt to new changes in technology could have influenced this behavior. However, some researchers suggest that Facebook's declining in popularity was influenced negatively when the news that political campaign firm used personal data from over 50 million Facebook users without their permission appeared, and the fact that Facebook stands as the worst platform when it comes to spreading fake news (Herhold, 2019; Travers, 2020).

Furthermore, what is interesting is that all three generations prefer watching video content type on various social media platforms, this connects with the motive of entertainment. This seems to suggest that social media platforms are used as a way to escape from the real world, find easy entertainment and engage in content of your desires.

What business can take from this research is the importance of investing time into researching customers. This can influence product development by utilizing customers preferences and needs.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

Limitations of this study included time limit since the study needed to be finished in fifteen weeks, because of this the research could not provide more elaborate and precise data. This automatically affected the sample size. Having more time to finish the paper would enable more samples for the research. Not only that but because of the limitation of sample size many of them were eliminated due to incomplete results. One significant limitation that put a hold everything in the world was Covid-19 which prevented the chance of gathering more participants and delivering instructions to participants prior the submission of their diary. This would minimize the number of incomplete results. Additionally, suggestions for future studies would be more time dedicated to collecting data, bigger sample size and doing the diary method for more than one day.

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Table 1. Demographics - Generation X

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<b>Gender</b>	Female	11 (84.6%)
	Male	2 (15.4%)
<b>Relationship status</b>	Dating	1 (7.7%)
	Married	12 (92.3%)
<b>Level of education</b>	High School	3 (23.1%)
	Master's Degree	8 (61.5%)
	Ph.D. or higher	2 (15.4%)
<b>Employment status</b>	Employed full-time	12 (92.3%)
	Unemployed	1(7.7%)

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Table 2. Time spent awake and time spent on social media platforms – Generation X

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	<b>Hours</b>	<b>M(in minutes)</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Time spent awake</b>	16	960	73.5
<b>Time spent on social media platforms</b>	1:43	103	65.5

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Table 3. Social media platform usage – Generation X

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<b>Social media platform</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Facebook	11 (84.6%)
YouTube	11 (84.6%)
Instagram	6 (46.2%)
Google+	5 (38.5%)
Wikipedia	3 (23.1%)
LinkedIn	2 (15.4%)
Zara	2 (15.4%)

---

Table 4. Number of activities per social media platform – Generation X

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<b>Social media platform</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
YouTube	1.85	2.609
Facebook	1.85	1.519
Instagram	1.23	2.088
Google+	.62	.870
Zara	.15	.870
LinkedIn	.15	.376

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Table 5. Activities performed on social media – Generation X

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<b>Activities performed</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Consumption	5.31	3.119
Participation	1.08	1.320
Production	.54	1.198

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Table 6. Number of content type consumed on social media platforms – Generation X

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<b>Content type</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Text	3	1.826
Video	2.85	2.284
Photo	2	1.780
Audio	.23	.439

---



Table 7. Type of activity performed on social media platforms – Generation X

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<b>Activity type</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Watching videos	2.46	2.537
Reading	2.23	1.641
Texting	.31	.855

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Table 8. Demographics – Generation Y

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<b>Gender</b>	Female	13 (61.9%)
	Male	8 (38.1%)
<b>Relationship status</b>	Single	6 (28.6%)
	Dating	9 (42.9%)
	Married	6 (28.6%)
<b>Level of education</b>	Bachelor's Degree	14 (66.7%)
	Master's Degree	5 (28.8%)
	Ph.D. or higher	2 (9.5%)
<b>Employment status</b>	Student	3 (14.3%)
	Employed part-time	1 (4.8%)
	Employed full-time	15 (71.4%)
	Unemployed	2 (9.5%)

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Table 9. Time spent awake and time spent on social media platforms – Generation Y

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	<b>Hours</b>	<b>M(in minutes)</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Time spent awake</b>	16:21	981.2	59.9
<b>Time spent on social media platforms</b>	3:36	216.9	139.8

---

Table 10. Social media platform usage – Generation Y

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<b>Social media platform</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Instagram	18 (85.6%)
YouTube	15 (71.4%)
Facebook	10 (47.6%)
Google+	8 (38.1%)
Twitter	7 (33.3%)
TikTok	7 (33.3%)
LinkedIn	6 (28.6%)
Zara	4 (19%)

---

Table 11. Number of activities per social media platform – Generation Y

---

<b>Social media platform</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Instagram	2.76	2.343
YouTube	1.29	1.231
Facebook	1.14	1.459
Twitter	.81	1.365
TikTok	.52	.814
Google+	.29	.680
LinkedIn	.29	.463
Zara	.19	.402

---

Table 12. Activities performed on social media – Generation Y

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<b>Activities performed</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Consumption	5.67	2.436
Participation	2.52	1.940
Production	.76	1.179

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Table 13. Number of content type consumed on social media platforms – Generation Y

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<b>Content type</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Video	3.71	1.736
Text	3.38	1.554
Photo	3.10	1.300
Audio	.48	.814
Memes	.38	.740

---

Table 14. Type of activity performed on social media platforms – Generation Y

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<b>Activity type</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Watching videos	3.67	1.770
Scrolling	3.19	1.692
Posting content	.10	.301

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Table 15. Demographics – Generation Z

---

<b>Gender</b>	Female	19 (90.5%)
	Male	2 (9.5%)
<b>Relationship status</b>	Single	12 (57.1%)
	Dating	9 (42.9%)
<b>Level of education</b>	High School Degree	15 (76.2%)
	Bachelor’s Degree	5 (23.8%)
<b>Employment status</b>	Student	16 (76.2%)
	Employed part-time	2 (9.5%)
	Employed full-time	3 (14.3%)

---

Table 16. Time spent awake and time spent on social media platforms – Generation Z

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	<b>Hours</b>	<b>M(in minutes)</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Time spent awake</b>	15:57	957	94.09
<b>Time spent on social media platforms</b>	4:56	296.3	151.5

---

Table 17. Social media platform usage – Generation Z

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<b>Social media platform</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
YouTube	19 (90.5%)
Instagram	18 (85.7%)
Facebook	14 (66.7%)
TikTok	7 (33.3%)
Google+	6 (28.6%)
Zara	4 (23.8%)

---

Table 18. Number of activities per social media platform – Generation Z

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<b>Social media platform</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Instagram	4.95	3.956
YouTube	2.10	1.261
Facebook	1.38	1.359
TikTok	.67	1.238
Google+	.52	.981
Zara	.33	.730

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Table 19. Activities performed on social media – Generation Z

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<b>Activities performed</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Consumption	7.76	3.576
Participation	3.43	2.204
Production	.86	1.558

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Table 20. Number of content type consumed on social media platforms – Generation Z

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<b>Content type</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Video	5.24	2.508
Photo	4.71	3.364
Text	3.48	2.250
Memes	.57	1.076
Audio	.38	.590

---

Table 21. Type of activity performed on social media platforms Generation Z

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<b>Activity type</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Watching videos	5.38	2.729
Watching photos	4.57	3.340
Scrolling	4.52	3.010
Texting	2.62	1.717
Listening to music	.19	.402

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Table 22. Comparison between generations on time spent on social media

	<b>Generation X</b>		<b>Generation Y</b>		<b>Generation Z</b>		<b>Comparison</b>
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F**
<b>Time spent on social media platforms</b>	103	65.5	216.9	139.8	296.3	151.5	8.622



Table 23. Number of activities performed on social media platforms

<b>Number of activities performed</b>	<b>Generation X</b>		<b>Generation Y</b>		<b>Generation Z</b>		<b>Comparison</b>
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F**
<b>Instagram</b>	1,23	2,088	2,76	2,343	4,95	3,956	6.505

Table 24. Activities performed on social media platforms

<b>Activities performed</b>	<b>Generation X</b>		<b>Generation Y</b>		<b>Generation Z</b>		<b>Comparison</b>
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F**
Consumption	5.31	3.119	5.67	2.436	7.76	3.576	3.479
Participation	1.08	1.320	2.52	1.940	3.43	2.204	5.973
Production	.54	1.198	.76	1.179	.86	1.558	.229

Table 25. Content type generated on social media platforms

<b>Content type</b>	<b>Generation X</b>		<b>Generation Y</b>		<b>Generation Z</b>		<b>Comparison</b>
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F**
Photo	2	1.780	3.10	1.300	4.71	3.364	5.542
Video	2.85	2.824	3.71	1.736	5.25	2.508	4.683

Table 26. Type pf activities performed on social media

<b>Type of activity</b>	<b>Generation X</b>		<b>Generation Y</b>		<b>Generation Z</b>		<b>Comparison</b>
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F**
Texting	.31	.855	1.67	1.906	2.62	1.717	7.956
Watching videos	2.85	2.824	3.71	1.736	5.25	2.508	6.578
Liking	.38	.768	1	1.581	2.19	2.112	5.230
Watching photos	2.08	1.801	3.14	1.352	4.57	3.340	4.605
Scrolling	2.15	2.154	3.19	1.692	4.52	3.010	4.195

Table 27. Relevance of content consumed on social media platforms

	<b>Generation X</b>		<b>Generation Y</b>		<b>Generation Z</b>		<b>Comparison</b>
<b>Relevance</b>	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F**
Irrelevant	1.38	1.121	1.43	1.720	3.38	3.528	4.051

## Appendix

Dear participant,

My name is Irma Omeragić, and I am a senior student at RIT Croatia Dubrovnik, a global campus of Rochester Institute of Technology, based in Rochester, New York.

For my final research project in International Hospitality and Service Management, I will be researching the dynamics of social media content consumption and production, more precisely the type of content consumed and generated on social media sites, and motifs guiding such use of social media. The purpose is to profile and compare three different social generations - X, Y and Z - in terms of their daily digital lives, i.e., their daily social media activities

The research will be conducted through a diary method. As a participant, you are kindly requested to record your social media activities for one day. If you choose to participate in this research paper, please document your social media activities as honestly and accurately as possible.

The information you provide in this diary will be kept completely anonymous and confidential, in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation. There is no risk to you. In order to ensure that all information will remain confidential, please do not include your name in your diary.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors.

If you would like additional information about the diary or my research project, please contact me via email: [ixo4180@rit.edu](mailto:ixo4180@rit.edu) or [irma.omeragic@live.com](mailto:irma.omeragic@live.com) or my mentor Vanda Bazdan, Ph.D via email: [vanda.bazdan@croatia.rit.edu](mailto:vanda.bazdan@croatia.rit.edu).

Sincerely,

Irma Omeragić

## Instructions

Diary method is a as a method that captures life as it is lived, in which respondents are asked to report on daily events and experiences. As a participant, you are required to keep a diary of your social media activities for one day.

During that particular day you need to record every activity you performed on social media. It is highly important to be honest while writing this diary. If you do not manage to write the diary entries in the requested way, please do not try to re-create or invent the missing information. In such a case, you are kindly requested to report of those inconsistencies or if you feel that your report/diary is incomplete in any way. It is important for the study to exclude the diaries which do not represent the complete report of participant's daily activity on various social media.

The *first part* of the diary is a questionnaire which requires you to provide basic information about yourself. Please note that the year of your birth is extremely important since the research data relevant to three generation levels.

The *second part* of the diary requires you to observe and record information for every activity performed. Please read the instructions for diary entries (provided below) prior to the day of observation.

Once you complete the diary (once the day of observation is done), please submit your diary via email: [ixo4180@rit.edu](mailto:ixo4180@rit.edu) or [irma.omeragic@live.com](mailto:irma.omeragic@live.com). Your diary can be in form of a word document, photos, or scanned document.

Lastly, if you are interested in finding out the results of the research paper, do not feel hesitant to inform me or contact me via email: [ixo4180@rit.edu](mailto:ixo4180@rit.edu) or [irma.omeragic@live.com](mailto:irma.omeragic@live.com).

**First part**

1. What gender do you identify with?

- a) Female
- b) Male
- c) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. When were you born (please state the year of your birth)? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your relationship status?

- a) Single
- b) Dating
- c) Married
- d) Divorced
- e) Widowed
- f) Separated

4. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed so far?

- a) Elementary School
- b) High School
- c) Bachelor's Degree
- d) Master's Degree
- e) Ph.D. or higher

5. What is your employment status?

- a) Student
- b) Employed part-time
- c) Employed full-time
- d) Retired
- e) Unemployed
- f) Other: \_\_\_\_\_



<b>Second part</b>
Date: _____
Day of observation (example: Monday, Tuesday, etc.): _____ When did you wake up on this day (state the exact time)? _____ When did you go to sleep on this day (state the exact time)? _____
Time of day (mark the exact time you started writing the first diary entry): _____

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR DIARY ENTRIES

On the day of observation, you need to keep track of various activities performed during each engagement with social media of any kind. **You need to create a separate diary entry for each social media ‘sitting’ during the day** (each time you pick up the phone, use your computer, or tablet to go to a social media platform), and **each diary entry should include all the information requested in the following checklist.**

**Please read the checklist carefully prior to the day of observation.**

Time of day you picked up the device you used in this sitting (please state the exact time): _____
Time of day when this sitting ended (please state the exact time): _____
Social media platform(s)* used (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, Google, etc.).  <b>List the social media platforms used in that ‘sitting’. Please note that if you are/were using multiple platforms <i>at once</i> that you need to write down all of them.</b>
*At the end of the document you can read whether a certain platform categorizes as social media.
Activities performed (e.g., consumption, production, or participation <sup>1</sup> ).  <b>Please list all of the activities performed in ‘one sitting’.</b> <b>Additionally, for each activity (e.g., watching a video), or a set of activities (e.g., browsing through photos, tweets, posting content) write down the type of content consumed, or shared (e.g., video, photo, text, meme, etc.), and whether this was private or public content.</b>

<sup>1</sup> Terminology: Consumption – content that was consumed (e.g., watched); Production – content that was produced (e.g., posted); Participation – content in which you participated (e.g., commenting, discussing, etc.)

State the **activity** you spent the most time on in this sitting (consuming, producing, or participating).

State the **content type** (video, photo, text, meme) you spent the most time on in this ‘sitting’.

Please describe a **specific video/photo/text/meme content** on which you spent most time in this sitting (e.g., watched video of a cat playing a piano, watched outfit reels, private texts exchanged with a friend, comment created on the anti-vaxxers post, etc.).

How would you assess the **relevance** of this content (was it irrelevant, relevant for you personally, relevant for a group you belong to, relevant in your culture, etc.)?

How did this content make you **feel** (e.g., happy, sad, surprised, annoyed, angry, etc.)?

Was the content on which you spent most time accompanied by an ad(s)? If it was, did you watch it? If yes, briefly describe the ad content.

**\*List of social media platforms:**

- Social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, BizSugar, etc.)
  - Media sharing networks (e.g., Instagram, Youtube, Snapchat, TikTok, Vimeo, etc.)
  - Bookmarking & content curation networks (e.g., Pinterest, Flipboard, etc.)
  - Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia, Scholarpedia, Citizendium, Infoplease, etc.)
  - Discussion networks (e.g., Reddit, Quora, Digg, etc.)
  - Shopping Networks (e.g., Zara, Mango, Asos, H&M, Farfetch, Etsy, etc.)
  - Blogging networks (e.g., WordPress, Tumblr, Medium, etc.)
  - Review networks (e.g., TripAdvisor, Yelp, etc.)
  - ‘Sharing economy’ networks (e.g., AirBnB, Uber, Wolt, Cameo, etc.)
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