WHY DO YOU USE TIKTOK? DEVELOPING MEASUREMENT SCALES FOR PLEASURE AND FUNCTIONALITY FROM GENERATION Z PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract
Nowadays, TikTok dominates the social media world, particularly among Generation Z. Being on TikTok involves not only receiving content, but also creating it, sharing and engaging with people from across the world. On TikTok, individuals feel happy, curious, informed and relaxed as the platform offers the opportunity to romanticize life and escape the real world. On the other hand, TikTok is the driving source for Generation Z to talk about real life problems. This study aims to investigate the determinants that describe the motives to use TikTok by Generation Z and to develop measurement scales for motives to use TikTok by Generation Z users. Data were collected from 2589 respondents from Generation Z. The questionnaire included a scale which consists of 36 items describing various motives to use TikTok. Integrating the SPSS software for data analysis, two important variables were identified as main motives for TikTok usage: pleasure and functionality. Understanding the motives behind its usage became increasingly important, as the findings can serve as a source of information for influencers and brands in building trust among Generation Z users.
Keywords: Gen Z, TikTok, social media, motivation, short – form videos, pleasure.
JEL Classification: M3, M31, M37.

1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z lives in a digital era that is in continuous development. While always being connected through social media, Gen Z are the ones who might become the new gold mines for platforms. One of these platforms is TikTok – an app based on short-form video format that helps content creators and influencers to be more visible. Based on its algorithm and user-friendly interface, TikTok has revolutionized how Generation Z consumes and produces digital content. Moreover, Gen Z are not just passive consumers, but also active participants who seek social recognition through the platform's features. This study aims to analyse the motives that drive Generation Z to spend time on TikTok and engage with different types of content. Using empirical measurement scales, the study identifies the key factors that influence young users to entertain and educate themselves through TikTok. Through this approach, the research contributes to a clearer understanding of the online behaviour of Generation Z and their social needs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, we discuss about TikTok and Gen Z, and we dive into more details regarding their motives to use TikTok. Further, we try to understand why Gen Z spends hours scrolling through this app, emphasizing the benefits that it can bring to individuals.

2.1 Motives to use TikTok

Before presenting the reasons behind TikTok usage, it is essential to first provide an overview of the application and its functionality. TikTok is a platform that gives the possibility to create, share, and watch video content of different formats (D'Souza, 2022). The app was developed in 2016 under the name ByteDance which later became the TikTok we know nowadays. Investopedia demographic research shows that of one billion global users, 43% of them are Gen Z, with an age range of 18–24 years (Investopedia, 2022). It is important to mention that TikTok is not only for entertainment, but also for creative purposes. As the platform started to gain popularity during the pandemic, more and more individuals migrated from Instagram and developed their TikTok accounts till they had millions of followers. Why? Because being on TikTok means being more seen, appreciated, watched, and shared (The Fix, 2020). Moreover, the app is more convenient to use than YouTube or other social platforms, due to its short–form content (Falgoust et al., 2022). In general terms, the preference for TikTok is given by the benefits that it has, in comparison to other social media. Unlike other apps, TikTok users can share their stories and engage with other people's lives (Scherr et al., 2021). Also, if we compare with Facebook or Instagram, TikTokers can express themselves not only through photos, but also through voice and emotions, which attracts more

engagement and trustworthiness (Dong et al., 2023). In other words, we can say that the motives behind the use of TikTok depend on the type of user: is he a player or a watcher? Players are the ones who not just watch but also create short videos on TikTok, while watchers just scroll and engage without producing any content (Yang, 2016). But both categories use TikTok first to escape the real world. Other than that, studies highlighted reasons like self–presentation, trends, addiction, information, and recognition (Xie et al., 2024). On the other hand, engaging in TikTok is also a form of time–killing and inspiration–seeking (Jung et al., 2025). Moreover, studies show that the app is positively correlated with addiction and dependency symptoms, as it was found out that Gen Z watches 68 videos on average daily (Pew Research Center, 2019).

2.2 Generation Z

iGen, Gen Tech, Click Gen, or Online Generation—these are the terms we use when we try to identify Generation Z—a bunch of post-millennials that is specifically known as connected or computerized, always in change, and always clicking (Dolot, 2018). But who is this Gen Z in reality? Born after 1996, people from this generation are already technology natives, used having access to instant information and communication (Cilliers, 2017). Being constantly connected, what makes the Gen Z one of the most prominent ones compared to past generations (Lu et al., 2018), as they are the truth and freedom seekers. Gen Z individuals value authenticity, and they are not afraid to be open on social platforms (Francis et al., 2018). That is why, they are more likely to develop strong online bonds not only with people from the same group, but also with influencers and brands (Kotler et al., 2021). They try new experiences and share them, which makes this generation one of the most essential markets for products and services. From a similar perspective, Gen Z individuals prefer the screen instead of paper, and the internet instead of books (Salleh et al., 2017). Literature describes the Gen Z generation through four characteristics: (1) innovation, (2) convenience, (3) security, and (4) escapism (Wood, 2013). In this order of ideas, marketplaces represent an important tool for them to always be on track, to have all products in one place, and with considerable discounts. On the other hand, Gen Z is also called the "do-it-yourself" generation, as they tend to have a greater preference for entrepreneurship, due to the economic crises they have grown up in (Singh et al., 2016). Compared to the past generations, Gen Z has a different approach to tasks, putting more emphasis on flexibility and fast and open-minded solutions.

2.3 Generation Z on TikTok

TikTok is a platform that gives the opportunity to express yourself, and that is what Generation Z is all about. They like to communicate, to be seen, and to share their opinions, frustrations, feelings, and achievements in the online world,

as this gives them the feeling of being heard and understood. In this order of ideas, the motives of Generation Z to stay on TikTok are rather hedonistic than practical (Rahayu et al., 2025). The desire to experience and to find new sources of joy, motivates this generation to embrace a new user-friendly platform like TikTok (Zips et al., 2023). In other words, Gen Z's natural interest in everything that is new in the digital world, motivates them to explore more and TikTok's content is perfect for this scenario. Curiosity has an important role in engagement, as young users are in a constant need of novelty (Salasac et al., 2022). Another key factor that influences the motives of Gen Z to browse on TikTok is the short-form content that the application offers, as the preferences in terms of time have changed nowadays (Turner, 2015). This generation has lots of contrasts: from powerful and edgy, to feminine and soft, and TikTok is the best place where they can be themselves (Stahl et al., 2022). Besides self-expression and popularity hunting, the reason why Gen Z watches so much content on TikTok is because they are seeking authenticity. They follow influencers who have the same values, or they fight for the same causes (Francis et al., 2018). Another role of the platform is for activism or spreading important information on different social causes (Zips et al., 2023). Ultimately, the explosion of information and its widespread presence on TikTok have attracted many users who now primarily use this platform as a source of news instead of solely for entertainment (Hai Bui, 2022).

3. METHOD

3.1 Research design

This study relies on quantitative research. We collected data from Generation Z individuals using a questionnaire-based online survey. The purpose of this paper is to identify latent variables describing the motives to use TikTok by Gen Z users. In this case, the objectives of the research are the following:

(1) To identify the determinants that describe the motives to use TikTok by Generation Z.

(2) To configure measurement scales for motives to use TikTok by Generation Z users.

3.2 Participants

As specified in the previous section, the participants of this study were Generation Z TikTok users on whom we used an age filter.

3.3 Questionnaire design

The online questionnaire was adapted, modified, and enriched with the existing scales from the literature (Gu et al., 2022; Scherr et al., 2021). The

initial scale consists of a pool of 36 items describing various motives to use TikTok as observable variables. For each item, participants were asked to choose the grade for the level of agreement on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items list was previously pretested.

3.4 Data collection and data analysis

Data collection implied the use of the snowball technique. A number of 2589 responses were retained for further analyses, as these users corresponded to the Generation Z age interval (between 13 and 28 years old). We employed the SPSS software for descriptive and inferential statistics.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Sample description

The age range of participants was 15 to 28 years (mean M = 21.25, SD = 2.39). Most participants identified as female (62.3%), while 64.2% live in urban areas. Almost 70% reported low and very low income (less than 3000 RON/month). Almost 50% (46.5%) admit to spending between 2–3 hours/day using TikTok.

4.2 Identifying the determinants that describe the motives to use TikTok by Generation Z users

We conducted Principal Components method under SPSS for the exploratory factor analysis. The analysis initially includes 36 items.

The first output revealed 4 factors with EigenValue > 1 to explain 65.7% of the total variance. The items loading below 0.3 were excluded from the analysis. As such, we conducted several analyses, excluding one item at a time, until we reached a model with two dimensions. 18 items were removed, and 18 items were retained in the final dimensions. KMO score is 0.946, which is greater than 0.7, indicating a good model. The sig corresponding to Barllett's Test of Sphericity is lower than 0.5, indicating there is at least one correlation between the initial variables. The final two dimensions explain 68.11% of the total variance.

The following tables present the items grouped as factors. Table 1 presents the dimension Pleasure consisting of 11 items, and explains almost 48.48% of the total variance.

Table 4.1. Pleasure

Item	Item load
I use TikTok from smartphone because it gives me a good mood	0.844
I use TikTok from smartphone because it relaxes me	0.844
I use TikTok from smartphone because it is entertaining	0.841
I use TikTok from smartphone because it creates a good vibe	0.835
I use TikTok from smartphone because it gives the chance to take a break from activities	0.782
I use TikTok from smartphone because the time passes more faster, even when I am bored	0.771
I use TikTok from smartphone because there are a lot of new things	0.759
I use TikTok from smartphone because it makes me happy again when I feel sad	0.753
I use TikTok from smartphone because in this way, the time passes faster	0.737
I use TikTok from smartphone because this way I can forget the unpleasant situations from work, school or life	0.692
I use TikTok from smartphone because I can inform myself	0.671

Based on the questionnaire results from SPSS analysis

Table 2 presents the Functionality dimension consisting of 7 items, and explains almost 19.62% of the total variance.

Table 4.2. Functionality

Item	Item load
I use TikTok from smartphone because I can record and post videos that attracts other's interest	0.905
I use TikTok from smartphone because I can film and post videos through which I can show my accomplishments	0.896
I use TikTok from smartphone because I can	0.875

become popular	
I use TikTok from smartphone because I can obtain reactions from others (likes, hearts etc.) by filming and posting videos	0.871
I use TikTok from smartphone because I like to film videos	0.828
I use TikTok from smartphone because the reactions I get on my videos (likes, hearts etc.) are an accomplishment for me	0.807
I use TikTok from smartphone because filming for TikTok is very easy	0.706

Based on the questionnaire results from SPSS analysis

4.3 Configuring measurement scales for Generation Z users' motives to use TikTok

The internal consistency of the scale assessing the latent variable Pleasure, measured with Cronbach-alpha, is 0.941, indicating the scale has excellent internal consistency. The internal consistency of the scale assessing the latent variable Functionality, measured with Cronbach-alpha, is 0.942, indicating this scale has also excellent internal consistency. As such, both scales can be used to assess the Pleasure and Functionality of a certain social media network, from Generation Z users' perspective.

5.   DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study we analyzed the relationship between Generation Z and TikTok usage, with the focus on what motivates them to navigate most of their time on this app. The results show that, mostly, Gen Z uses TikTok for two main motives: pleasure and functionality. Peeps from Generation Z are scrolling TikTok first to unwind, to get themselves in a good mood and to escape from the real-life problems. Previous research has reached similar results, highlighting that the significant motivation for using TikTok stays in the emotional relaxation (Omar et al., 2020). On the other hand, responses like 'I can inform myself', show that informational content is also valued by Gen Z and that it motivates them enough to stay on TikTok for hours. Through items like 'I can record and post videos that attract other's interest' or 'I like to film videos'; we can see the importance of the functionality of the platform for Generation Z. Moreover, TikTok became a place of self-presentation, identity construction, and social approval. This generation is mostly a player rather than just a watcher, because they are more motivated by the chance to be seen, to receive likes and to show their achievements - a desire for social recognition (Shao, 2009). To conclude, helping users to relax and escape the real world and enabling them to create and share content for visibility are two dimensions that motivate Gen Z to browse on TikTok. These dimensions can help marketers, content creators, and, most

importantly, brands to build stronger relationships with their customers from a generation that is always connected—Generation Z. To get more insight into the relationship between TikTok and Generation Z, we suggest a platform-based comparison study, in which we compare TikTok with other short-form content applications such as Instagram or YouTube. Also, another important aspect to consider is the analysis of motives to use TikTok from other generations' perspectives and how they vary from one generation to the next, such as Gen Alpha. Such efforts would further clarify the role of TikTok in shaping the behavior and social image of today's generations.

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