

## Chapter 26

# The Impact of YouTube and TikTok Influencers in the Customer Journey: An Empirical Comparative Study Among Generation Z Users



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**Abstract** The present paper aims to analyze the impact of YouTubers and TikTokers influencers in the customer journey phases, among Generation Z users. To do so, a quantitative deductive empirical study was carried out. The respective data collection was made via an online questionnaire survey, obtaining a valid sample of 529 participants. The results show that both type of influencers might influence the customer journey, but mainly in the first stages of the process. It was also found that YouTubers tend to have a higher influence in each of those stages than TikTokers. Although the topic of social media influencers has already been studied in several research papers, no study was found addressing separately the stages of the customer journey decision-making process, neither comparing influencers of both platforms in that context.

## 26.1 Introduction

Social media users have been increasing across the world. In 2021, there were 2.26 billion users, and it is expected that in 2027, the global number of users will reach 5.85 billion [1]. The use of social media platforms is especially relevant among the younger generation: in 2021, in the US, 70% of the citizens stated that they use social network sites (SNS), and 84% of adults aged between 18 and 29 say they use, mainly YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and TikTok [2].

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Aligned with the growing importance of Internet and specifically around SNS, digital influencers expanded exponentially in numbers and credibility, and firms diverted billions of dollars in their marketing budgets [3]. An increasing number of companies are allocating higher budgets on digital marketing and digital influencers due to their relevance and persuasive power [4, 5]. These digital influencers represent an independent third-party endorser who shape audiences' attitudes, creating and sharing content, endorsing brands and products through different social media platforms [4]. Digital influencers may have different typologies, from nano-influencers to macro-influencers and celebrities' endorsers [5], different backgrounds, and different purposes. Therefore, they can be effective across many different market segments by presumably being authentic and relevant in their content creation and in the interaction with their followers, attracting attention for products and services and often compel their followers to action [6]. In fact, they are being used along with traditional celebrity endorsers in digital marketing activities because they appear to be more authentic, like regular consumers [7]. So, digital marketing strategy and digital influencers may have an important impact on the different stages of the customer journey, due to their credibility, expertise, intimacy, and authenticity with their followers. Given that Generation Z consumers grew up in an "always on" technological mode, and research has already shown that this brings dramatic shifts in youth behaviors, attitudes, and lifestyles [8], the influencers' impact might be particularly relevant within that generation.

Therefore, based on the available literature, this study intends to understand how individuals belonging to Generation Z perceive the level of influence of YouTubers (YTrs) and TikTokers (TTrs) in their consuming decisions, not restricting the approach to decisions related to buy/not buy, but rather understanding the impact in each stage of the customer journey process. Consequently, this study addresses the following two research questions, focusing on Generation Z users:

- RQ1: Does YTrs and TTrs influence the phases of the customer journey process in the light of users' perception?
- RQ2: Are there perceived differences between YTrs and TTrs in their ability to influence each phase of the customer journey?

To address those research aims, this paper is structured as follows. After this introduction, the theoretical background is presented, addressing the characterization of Generation Z and its use of SNS. Then, the literature related to digital influencers and their impact in the customer journey is revised. This is followed by the description of the methodology adopted in the empirical study, describing the survey, variables used, and sample obtained. Next, the statistical results are presented. Finally, in the last section, the conclusions report the main findings, and the implications for managers and researchers are drawn, as well as the study limitations.

## 26.2 Theoretical Background

### 26.2.1 *Generation Z and the Use of Social Network Sites*

According to Pew Research [9], the year of birth, and therefore age, is an important predictor of differences in attitudes and behaviors among individuals, being the reason why cohort analysis is important, leading to grouping individuals in generations. Some generations are already widely accepted and mentioned in literature, like Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, or Generation Z (also known as “Centennials” or “GenZ”). There is not a unique definition of who belongs to GenZ, but according to Pew Research Center (2019), most part of the literature considers that GenZ is composed of individuals who were born between the 1996 and 2010 [10]. More important than the birth year is what has shaped each generation and its main characteristics. GenZ is the first generation that has never known a world without the Internet, a technology that has become a natural part of their lives, being true digital natives [10, 11]. Therefore, one defining characteristic of GenZ is that they are the first generation that grew up using SNS, like YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and TikTok.

GenZ is the cohort with the biggest population in the consumer world nowadays [11–13], and anecdotal evidence suggests that these consumers may behave differently than consumers from previous generations. It is expected that these consumers would “do everything” online, but marketing practitioners seem to figure out that, even though these consumers have been connected online throughout their whole lives, their shopping behavior demands a tactile experience [14, 15], where they appreciate the presence of physical stores. This demand, however, is not due to lack of trust of what they see online, but it is more related to a thrive for a different consumption experience in retail settings. Even though GenZ consumers are familiar with most of SNS channels, some are more popular among these consumers, namely Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok [16]. Furthermore, YouTubers influencers are especially popular among youngsters, namely, pre-teens, teens and young adults [17, 18]. The same is true for TikTok [19–22]. In fact, according to the latest data available from Datareportal [23], TikTok users aged 18–24 account for the largest share of its advertising audience.

However, the reason why people use TikTok seems to be different from the reasons related in using YouTube. According to Montag et al. [22], the use of TikTok by individuals might be explained by gratification theory, social impact theory, and self-determination theory. Besides, TikTok has been used for several purposes, including for marketing products [24].

All those facts lead to the proposition that YouTube and TikTok might pose different challenges for marketers, especially in what relates to savvy Internet users like GenZ. Therefore, a comparative study of both platforms was designed in the present study.

### 26.2.2 *Customer Journey and Touchpoints*

The concept of consumer journey was created by Court et al. [25] in the practitioner market, and it has been discussed and used in the market by marketing professionals ever since [26]. Lemon and Verhoef [27] adapted this concept to the academic literature by connecting the concept of the journey with the concept of customer experience, mentioning that the journey is influenced by previous journeys, and it will influence future journeys. The authors, then, proposed the concept of customer journey, an academic version of the consumer journey proposed by Court et al. [25] that incorporates the notion of past and future experiences a customer experience throughout their journeys. There is not a unique “state of the art” definition for customer journey in the literature, as the discussion related to its elements and terminologies are extensive throughout different perspectives, but from the systematic literature review performed by Folstad and Kvale [28] it is clear that the customer journey incorporates previous customer experiences, and it is a consumption journey that can be separated into three main stages. The (i) prepurchase, where individuals recognize/identify needs, look for options, acquire information, analyze and compare options. The (ii) the purchase stage, in which the individuals analyze and choose an option to buy, not buy, or postpone. The (iii) post-purchase stage, where they use, discard, and comment their experiences on using the product or service. It is important to notice that the customer journey framework considers the buying process not as a fragmented flow process, but as a dynamic and iterative process in which the individuals have multiple touchpoints to interact with brands and products, and this journey is connected to past and previous customer experiences [27].

So, throughout this journey, the customers go through several touchpoints—points of formal and informal interaction between the customer and brands—where they access and exchange information with brands and other consumers [27–29]. In these interactions, customers access information, view, touch and try products or services, buy, pay, return, complain, connect with other customers, socialize with their friends, learn about a brand, among several other activities [30]. These touchpoints may be online, offline, and are either controlled by the brand (i.e., their online and offline stores), or are out of their control (i.e., SNS channels, such as TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram) [31].

Resuming, the concept of customer journey has been vastly discussed in the marketing literature, as it entails researchers to focus on the experience customers have in each stage, and in the connections between previous and future experiences challenging the traditional view of the buying process. So, it is highlighted that the journey is a continuous, dynamic, and iterative process, where consumers interact with brands through a “myriad touchpoints in multiple channels and media, and customer experiences are more social in nature” [27].

### **26.2.3 *Digital Influencers in the Customer Journey***

Recent previous studies (e.g. [32, 33]) have explored the relevance of digital signs and SNS in the customer journey with different focus, like in specific markets where the presence of electronic word-of-mouth and user generated content is essential, such as tourism (e.g. [34, 35–37]) or clothing (e.g. [6, 38, 39]). Among all these studies found an agreement related to the fact that digital influencers have an important influence in consumers' decisions.

Kozinets et al. [40] studied how the creation of desire occurs in the use of SNS. They performed an in-depth analysis of how content is created and disseminated in SNS and extended the theory of desire by conceptualizing desire creation and critically questioning the role of SNS in the creation of a technologically enhanced desire in consumers. Specifically, they analyzed the desire for food, with the analysis of the phenomena of #foodporn on Instagram. This complex research is an example of how consumers are influenced by what they post and see in SNS and how it affects their customer journeys. Complementary, Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández [41] discussed how digital influencers influence consumers' purchase intention, engagement and expectation. These are examples of how the literature is approaching SNS and digital influencers are present in different stages of the consumer journey.

## **26.3 Methods**

To address the research problem, a quantitative empirical study was carried out with primary data, inquiring a sample of YouTube and TikTok Generation Z users, via an online questionnaire built specifically for this purpose using Google Forms. The questionnaire was disseminated in 2021, via Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn, between October and November.

To be included in the sample, each respondent must have had already seen product/brand reviews in YouTube and TikTok. Users that had seen product reviews in only one of those social media platforms were excluded from analysis. Following that procedure, a valid sample of 529 individuals was the final basis for analysis. The data was analyzed with IBM SPSS Statistics 25 and the mean age of respondents was 19.49 (standard deviation 2.288), 70% female and 30% male. Besides the filtering and demographical questions, the questionnaire contained questions directed to obtain information to provide statistical testing basis to answer the hypothesis established. The variables used to do so are summarized in Table 26.1. All those variables were answered by respondents in a four-option frequency scale (“1-never”, “2-rarely”, “3-sometimes”, “4-very often”).

**Table 26.1** Main variables in the questionnaire

Variable	Platform	Cust. journey stage	Operationalization
YT-Awr	YouTube	Pre-purchase (Need recognition)	Know about new products or brands due to YouTubers
TT-Awr	TikTok	Pre-purchase (Need recognition)	Know about new products or brands due to Triktokers
YT-Lrn	YouTube	Pre-purchase (Need recognition)	Learn more about products in YouTube without being that the initial searching purpose
TT-Lrn	TikTok	Pre-purchase (Need recognition)	Learn more about products in TikTok without being that the initial searching purpose
YT-SrchBfr	YouTube	Pre-purchase (Information search)	Search for YouTubers product reviews videos before a purchase
TT-SrchBfr	TikTok	Pre-purchase (Information search)	Search for TikTokers product reviews videos before a purchase
YT-SrchAft	YouTube	Pre-purchase (Alternatives evaluation)	Search for more informations about products after watching YouTubers
TT-SrchAft	TikTok	Pre-purchase (Alternatives evaluation)	Search for more informations about products after watching TikTokers
YT-Purch	YouTube	Purchase	Purchase after watching YouTubers reviews
TT-Purch	TikTok	Purchase	Purchase after watching TikTokers reviews
YT-Cup	YouTube	Purchase	Used YouTubers cupons
TT-Cup	TikTok	Purchase	Used TikTokers cupons
YT-Rgrt	YouTube	Post-purchase	Regret having followed advices of YouTubers product reviews
TT-Rgrt	TikTok	Post-purchase	Regret having followed advices of TikTokers product reviews

Source survey output

## 26.4 Results

A comparative analysis of YTrs and TTrs was made using parametric tests. In this study, even if several variables do not present normal distributions (as seen in the following Table 26.2 with K-S tests  $p < 0.05$ ), according to Marôco [42] the parametric testing techniques were possible to be done because the sample was not small and the variables' distributions were not extremely skewed or flat (i.e., symmetry  $sk < 3$  and flatness values  $lku < 10$ ), as presented in Table 26.2.

**Table 26.2** Descriptive statistics of the main variables in the study

Variable	N	Mean	St. Dev.	<i>Sk</i>	<i>ku</i>	K-S test
YT-Awr	529	3.25	0.740	−0.604	−0.382	0.000
TT-Awr	529	2.86	0.945	−0.353	−0.850	0.000
YT-Lrn	529	2.98	0.287	−0.527	−0.492	0.000
TT-Lrn	529	2.54	1.026	−0.062	−1.124	0.000
YT-SrchBfr	529	2.83	1.033	−0.418	−1.000	0.000
TT-SrchBfr	529	1.89	0.995	0.773	−0.593	0.000
YT-SrchAft	529	2.79	0.899	−0.331	−0.650	0.000
TT-SrchAft	529	2.11	0.995	0.453	−0.889	0.000
YT-Purch	529	2.50	1.015	0.042	−1.101	0.000
TT-Purch	529	1.83	0.948	0.814	−0.468	0.000
YT-Cup	529	2.19	1.160	0.339	−1.394	0.000
TT-Cup	529	1.62	0.976	1.329	0.389	0.000
YT-Rgrt	529	1.70	0.885	0.989	0.038	0.000
TT-Rgrt	529	1.60	0.845	1.232	0.511	0.000

Source Survey output

Considering the middle and neutral point of the response options (threshold 2.5), not all the variables present a higher mean than that. In Table 26.3, that same statistical significance tests are shown.

As mentioned, Table 26.3 presents the individual statistical testing of the perceived impact of each variable studied, by social media platform. It is not totally clear neither straightforward to draw conclusions and generalize from that, but it seems that both YTrs and TTrs have a higher influence in the earlier stages of the customer journey. It is also noticeable that YTrs tend to have a higher impact in each of those stages, when compared to TTrs.

The already mentioned statistical parametric testing made to compare the perceived influence of YTrs and TTrs in each variable of the customer journey is presented in Table 26.4. It is possible to observe significant differences in each variable, leading to the insight that YTrs and TTrs in fact do not have the same impact in the customer decisions. Moreover, the perceived influence of YTrs is significantly higher than the influence of TTrs in all variables and stages of the customer journey.

## 26.5 Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications

This study aimed to contribute to the discussion of the impact of digital influencers in marketing, more specifically to address and compare the influence of YouTubers and TikTokers along the customer journey. The study was focused on GenZ

**Table 26.3** Perceived impact of YTrs and TTrs in the customer journey

Variable <sup>a</sup>	t	df	Sig. 2-tailed	Mean difference to threshold <sup>b</sup>
YT-Awr	31.176	784	0.000*	0.813
TT-Awr	7.794	786	0.000*	0.267
YT-Lrn	14.955	684	0.000*	0.504
TT-Lrn	-0.019	682	0.000*	-0.001
YT-SrchBfr	8.456	785	0.985	0.304
TT-SrchBfr	-16.374	646	0.000*	-0.642
YT-SrchAft	9.809	666	0.000*	0.341
TT-SrchAft	-12.317	783	0.000*	-0.439
YT-Purch	-1.042	769	0.298	-0.038
TT-Purch	-23.839	769	0.000*	-0.784
YT-Cup	-7.717	750	0.000*	-0.324
TT-Cup	-28.108	770	0.000*	-0.955
YT-Rgrt	-29.044	750	0.000*	-0.850
TT-Rgrt	-33.006	756	0.000*	-0.973

Source Survey output

<sup>a</sup>Variables measured from 1 to 4 (1-never, 2-rarely, 3-sometimes, 4-very often)

<sup>b</sup>Difference to middle point of the response options (2.5)

\*Significance 2-sided test 0.05

consumers, aiming to understand how these consumers are influenced by YouTubers and Tiktokers on their consumer journeys.

Regarding the first research question (Does YTrs and TTrs influence the phases of the customer journey process in the light of users' perception?), the results indicate that both YouTubers and TikTokers influence various stages of the customer journey, but that fact is much more visible in the prepurchase stage of the journey. Concerning the second research question (Are there perceived differences between YTrs and TTrs in their ability to influence each phase of the customer journey?), the results also show that such power is not equal between those two social networks, since YouTubers tend to have a higher perceived influence. This is consistent with the fact that videos from YouTube are longer than in TikTok, and therefore, contains more information that would help consumers in acquiring more information about a given product in the prepurchase stage.

In what relates to implications for managers, the results suggest that both YouTube and TikTok are relevant tools to consumers, especially in the prepurchase stages of their journeys, and if brand managers critically analyze the digital influencers in these SNS they may find a way to connect, interact and promote their brands to GenZ consumers in this stage. YouTubers can be used in marketing materials with more dense information, and TikTokers may be used in short videos with one or two essential information about a brand or product, that may be useful in the pre-purchasing stage of consumers' journeys.



**Table 26.4** Equality of means T-test between YTrs and TTrs influence in the customer journey

How frequently <sup>a</sup> ...	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Difference means	Std. error difference
Know about new products or brands due to YT versus TT	14.805	784	0.000*	0.549	0.037
Learn more about products without being that the initial searching purpose YT versus TT	11.525	682	0.000*	0.505	0.044
Search for product reviews videos before a purchase YT versus TT	20.169	645	0.000*	0.997	0.049
Search for more information about products after watching YT versus TT	16.957	666	0.000*	0.732	0.043
Purchased after watching YT versus TT	18.699	747	0.000*	0.737	0.39
Used coupons YT versus TT	16.707	768	0.000*	0.633	0.038
Regret followed advice of product reviews YT versus TT	5.323	743	0.000*	0.122	0.023

Source Survey output

<sup>a</sup>Variables measured from 1 to 4 (1-never, 2-rarely, 3-sometimes, 4-very often)

\* Asymptotic significance 2-sided test 0.05

Regarding the limitations and implications for research, the study was conducted with a large, but non probabilistic sample, which poses limitations to generalizations. Also, it is important to stress that respondents recalled their previous experience when answering about previous impact on their customer journeys, and therefore, memory of past events may not be totally accurate. Therefore, future studies could address these matters by capturing respondents' actual responses and behaviours, without the limitation of memory. Furthermore, the SNS context is rapidly and constantly changing, so it is important to study how the influence of SNS and digital influencers change when the context changes. More specifically, we suggest that future studies may offer tools that help monitoring the influence of specific SNS and digital influencers in the customer journey stages and touchpoints.

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