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THE VALUE OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION INNOVATIONS AND DIGITAL TRUST AS MOTIVATORS OF GENERATION Z ONLINE BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

The dynamic digitalization of society is fundamentally transforming the ways in which Generation Z perceives brands, responds to marketing communications, and embraces digital innovations. As the first cohort to grow up in a fully online environment, they demonstrate a high level of digital competence, but their behavior is also shaped by psychological and perceptual determinants, primarily Digital Trust and Perceived Innovation Value. The present study focuses on the analysis and evaluation of the relationships between individual constructs, Digital Trust, Perceived Innovation Value, and Online Behaviour of Generation Z. The empirical part of the research was conducted through a quantitative questionnaire survey, while the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method was applied to verify the model and test hypothetical relationships. The methodological framework allows us to identify the structure of relationships between the investigated constructs and describe the mechanisms of their interaction in the digital environment. According to the findings, Generation Z responds positively to innovative marketing approaches that bring perceived added value in the form of interactivity, personalization and functional originality. The results point to the need for transparent, trustworthy and innovation-oriented digital strategies that support trust and long-term engagement of Generation Z in the online environment.

KEYWORDS: digital engagement, digital trust, Generation Z, marketing communication, perceived value of innovation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The current landscape of marketing communication is characterized by high dynamism, increasing competition, and rapid technological development, which fundamentally transform the way brands communicate with consumers [5]. In this context, Generation Z emerges as a group with strong career ambitions, a distinctive working style, clearly defined educational preferences, and a pronounced innovative mindset [8]. For this generation, which is naturally oriented toward innovation and entrepreneurship, innovative approaches serve as a tool for identifying market opportunities and creating solutions that deliver greater value to consumers [13]. At the same time, innovations provide Generation Z with greater comfort, efficiency, and personalization in digital interactions, shaping their perception of brand value and strengthening their emotional connection with brands [14].

Examining the relationship between digital trust, perceived innovation value, and the online behavior of Generation Z is significant not only from a theoretical but also from a practical perspective. It enables a deeper understanding of whether innovations in marketing communication provide real added value for consumers or remain merely a technical element without a substantial impact on trust and behavior. Moreover, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms shaping the digital behavior of young consumers and provides a foundation for developing ethical and innovative strategies that strengthen trust, loyalty, and long-term engagement of Generation Z in the online environment.

Marketing innovations incorporate elements such as visual design, interactivity, and experiential communication, which enhance brand attractiveness and foster long-term consumer relationships [12]. Moreover, they contribute to more efficient information processing and reduce cognitive load in brand evaluation, thereby reinforcing brand credibility [8]. Marketing innovations also play a strategic role, as they can serve as the foundation for a competitive advantage built on the principles of sustainability. Ecological and socially responsible approaches increase the perceived value of a brand by reflecting the ethical and social expectations of Generation Z [16]. Through technology-driven solutions, innovations become a medium for building a transparent and trustworthy digital brand identity. Innovations in digital communication enable brands to reach consumers more effectively and strengthen trust. However, their effectiveness

depends on implementation—if they disrupt user comfort, they can have the opposite effect. For instance, pop-up ads can increase brand awareness but may simultaneously undermine credibility if perceived as intrusive [6]. Innovative forms of communication are therefore beneficial only when they deliver genuine value and foster long-term consumer trust.

Based on these insights, it can be assumed that innovative and value-oriented marketing communication strengthens the perceived credibility of brands in the digital environment. Innovations that bring added value to consumers and enhance the quality of interaction contribute to higher levels of digital trust, particularly among Generation Z. From this theoretical framework arises the first hypothesis formulated as follows:

H1: *The perceived value of innovation positively influences the digital trust of Generation Z consumers.*

Both of these relationships will be validated in our research. The perceived value of innovations is thus shaped through technology-driven solutions that expand the possibilities of interaction, personalization, and experiential engagement between the consumer and the brand [2]. Such approaches allow consumers to perceive the brand in an individual and authentic way, which increases satisfaction and strengthens the consumer-brand relationship. Generation Z does not perceive innovations as isolated technological phenomena but rather as tools that enhance their digital autonomy, increase comfort, and enable more meaningful engagement with brands [14]. Consequently, innovative and value-based communication becomes the foundation of trust and long-term digital engagement among consumers.

Digital communication represents the initial step in building trust between a brand and its consumers. It serves as the first point of contact through which consumers receive fundamental signals about a brand's credibility, values, and style of interaction [15]. Within the context of marketing communication, digital trust is a key psychological prerequisite that influences consumers' willingness to engage in online interactions with brands. This aspect is particularly significant for Generation Z, for whom trust is closely linked to personal values, authenticity, and sensitivity to social issues [1], [3]. The process of building trust in the digital environment depends on a combination of functional and emotional factors that shape the perception of brand authenticity. Among the most important are responsiveness, empathy, and transparency in communication, which reduce informational uncertainty and perceived risk, thereby strengthening credibility, authenticity, and loyalty

toward the brand [15];[8].

A notable role in creating emotional connection is also played by emojis as a visual language of digital communication. They facilitate emotional expression, reduce psychological distance, and foster positive brand perception—especially among younger consumers who prefer a natural and interactive style of communication [1].

Brands that align innovative marketing strategies with ethical principles and transparent communication achieve higher levels of consumer acceptance and long-term engagement. Innovations in marketing communication, such as personalized digital tools, interactive formats, and artificial intelligence, contribute to trust-building through mutual interaction, feedback, and active user participation in brand content [8],[15].

Digital trust therefore represents a crucial intermediary stage between innovations in marketing communication and consumer behavior. Its presence enables more effective adoption of technological advancements, strengthens brand loyalty, and fosters long-term digital relationships between brands and consumers. Based on these insights, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H2: *Digital trust mediates the relationship between the perceived value of innovation and consumers' digital behavior.*

Generation Z represents one of the most digitally oriented generations, which, unlike Generation Alpha, is already actively participating in the consumer market. Born approximately between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s, it constitutes the largest demographic group [7]. This generation grew up surrounded by rapidly developing digital technologies that have shaped its expectations for interactive, visually engaging, and technologically advanced communication with brands [10]. Generation Z often acts as a facilitator of digital transformation and ranks among the fastest adopters of innovation [5]. Its members are pragmatic, value-driven, and possess advanced digital skills. They obtain most of their information from the online environment, which serves as a natural source of knowledge, entertainment, and social interaction [11]. With the growing influence of technology, the way Generation Z communicates with brands is undergoing significant transformation. Digital innovations and social media have fundamentally reshaped the interaction between consumers and companies, as modern consumers no longer play a passive role as information recipients but actively engage in the communication process [5]. Members of Generation Z often take on the role of co-creators of brand content, values, and identity [8]. Engaging in

viral trends, sharing visually appealing content, or creating memes represents a natural way for this generation to express their attitude toward brands and strengthen mutual interaction [10]. Among the most popular formats are short videos, memes, and GIFs that combine entertainment, information, and self-expression in a concise and easily shareable form [4]. Such participation fosters spontaneous and authentic engagement of Generation Z in the online environment [5]. Generation Z shows the highest activity on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, which serve not only as spaces for social interaction but also as primary venues for discovering brands and products. These platforms shape not only their digital behavior but also their relationship with brands [10]. Social media as technologically interconnected platforms enable users to share experiences, review products, and form communities, thereby deepening the connection between consumers and brands [8]. This participatory nature of the digital environment supports two-way communication in which the line between producer and consumer becomes increasingly blurred. Digital engagement among Generation Z is also influenced by emotional and ethical factors, with trust playing a crucial role [1]. Authentic, transparent, and innovative communication thus forms the foundation of long-term relationships with this generation of consumers. Generation Z values brands that are open, honest, unafraid to admit mistakes, and willing to address socially or environmentally significant issues [4]. Moreover, Generation Z appreciates brands that offer personalized content. A personalized digital environment creates the feeling that the brand “knows” the consumer and respects their identity, thereby fostering emotional connection and long-term loyalty [10]. Conversely, Generation Z approaches traditional advertising formats with a high degree of skepticism, as they often perceive them as inauthentic and manipulative [4]. Instead, they prefer brands that engage in genuine storytelling and user-generated content (UGC) over overly polished corporate imagery [10].

Based on theoretical insights, it can be concluded that trust represents a key determinant of the digital engagement of Generation Z. Authentic, transparent, and innovative brand communication strengthens the emotional connection with consumers and encourages their active participation in the online environment. From these premises, the following hypothesis is derived:

H3: *Transparent and innovative brand communication enhances digital trust and increases the engagement of Generation Z.*

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2. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The conducted research had a quantitative, exploratory-explanatory character and focused on verifying the relationships between the constructs of digital engagement (DA), digital trust (DV), and perceived value of innovation (VH) in the context of Generation Z's consumer behavior. It was assumed that the increasing digitalization of marketing communication influences how Generation Z perceives brands, builds trust, and evaluates their innovative approaches.

Data collection was carried out through an online questionnaire distributed via social media and the university platform Teams. The sample consisted of 1,380 young adults aged 18 to 24, belonging to Generation Z. The majority were women (71.9%),

while men accounted for 28.1%. Most respondents had higher education (60.4%), followed by secondary education (38.8%), and a small proportion had primary education (0.5%).

The questionnaire was based on theoretical concepts of digital communication, trust, and innovation in marketing. The items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Each construct was operationalized through multiple indicators as follows:

1. Digital Engagement (DA) captures the level of respondents' interaction with brands in the online environment.
2. Digital Trust (DV) expresses the belief in the reliability and truthfulness of information provided by brands online.
3. Perceived Value of Innovation (VH) reflects the perception of the quality and usefulness of innovative digital solutions, such as interactive and personalized forms of communication.

An overview of the constructs and their respective items is presented in Table I.

TABLE I: RESULTS OF THE STRUCTURAL MODEL

Construct	Item Code	Question (Shortened Wording)
Digital Engagement (DA)	DA1	Brands communicate with me increasingly through digital channels.
Digital Engagement (DA)	DA2	I prefer digital forms of advertising over traditional ones.
Digital Trust (DV)	DV1	I believe that online information about sustainability provided by brands is truthful.
Digital Trust (DV)	DV2	When a brand uses transparent communication, it increases my trust.
Digital Trust (DV)	DV3	Some brands use "eco" only as a marketing trick (greenwashing).
Perceived Value of Innovation (VH)	VH1	The digital communication of brands is clear and easy to understand.
Perceived Value of Innovation (VH)	VH2	Innovative digital campaigns attract my attention more.
Perceived Value of Innovation (VH)	VH3	Digitalization helps me better understand what the brand offers.
Perceived Value of Innovation (VH)	VH4	I remember brands that effectively communicate ecological values online.

The relationships between the constructs were tested using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method in SmartPLS 4 software. The reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed using Cronbach's α , Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) indicators. Prior to data collection, respondents were informed about the objectives of the research, data processing procedures, and personal data protection principles. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Data collection and analysis were conducted in accordance with ethical research standards and GDPR guidelines.

3. RESULT

This section presents and interprets the results of the structural model, which examines the relationships between Perceived Value of Innovation (VH), Digital Trust (DV), and Digital Engagement (DA). Based on the theoretical framework emphasizing the role of trust as a mediating factor

between innovation and consumer behavior, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: $VH \rightarrow DV$ - The perceived value of innovation positively influences the digital trust of Generation Z consumers.

H2: DV mediates the relationship between VH and DA - Digital trust mediates the relationship between the perceived value of innovation and the digital behavior of consumers.

H3: $DV \rightarrow DA$ - Transparent and innovative brand communication strengthens digital trust and increases Generation Z engagement.

The analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method in SmartPLS 4 software, which is particularly suitable for examining relationships between latent variables in predictive and exploratory models. To estimate the significance of the parameters, bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples was applied, ensuring the robustness of the results and the accuracy of confidence intervals. The results revealed that all tested relationships were positive and statistically

significant ($p < 0.001$). A higher perception of innovativeness and originality in digital campaigns increased respondents' trust in brands, which subsequently led to a higher level of digital engagement. Moreover, a significant effect of trust on digital engagement was confirmed (DA; $\beta = 0.675$), indicating that trust plays a crucial role in shaping Generation Z's willingness to interact with brands in the online environment. Fig. 1 presents the structural model created in SmartPLS 4, illustrating the relationships among the examined constructs, along with standardized coefficients (β) and coefficients of determination (R^2), which express the explained variance of the variables. The coefficients of

determination (R^2) indicate that the model demonstrates an adequate explanatory power:

$R^2 (DV) = 0.461$ – meaning that 46.1% of the variance in Digital Trust is explained by the Perceived Value of Innovation.

$R^2 (DA) = 0.456$ – meaning that 45.6% of the variance in Digital Engagement is explained by Digital Trust. Digital Engagement is explained by Digital Trust.

These values confirm both the theoretical and practical relevance of the model in examining the digital behavior of Generation Z and suggest that innovations indirectly increase engagement by strengthening trust in brands.

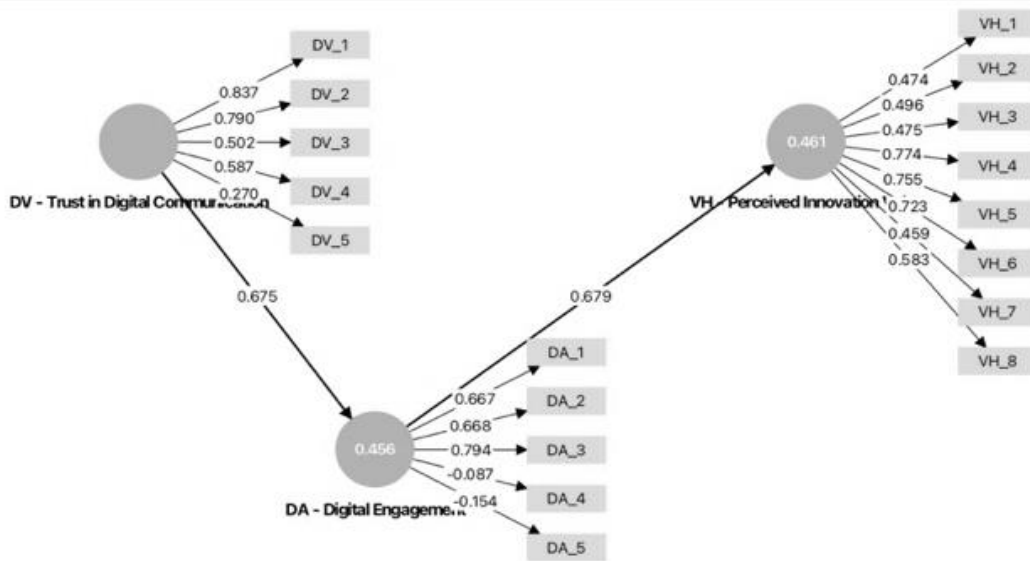


Figure 1: Structural model with path coefficients and coefficients of determination (SmartPLS 4)

Before interpreting the model, the reliability and convergent validity of the measured constructs were verified. The Cronbach's α values ranged from 0.320 to 0.744, which is acceptable in the context of exploratory research. The highest reliability was achieved by the construct Perceived Value of Innovation (VH; $\alpha = 0.816$), followed by Digital Trust

(DV; $\alpha = 0.748$). The lowest value was observed for Digital Engagement (DA; $\alpha = 0.320$), which can be attributed to its broader and more heterogeneous nature, encompassing multiple forms of online interaction. Table II presents an overview of the reliability and validity values of the constructs:

Table 3: The reliability and validity values of the constructs

Construct	Cronbach's α	AVE
DA	0,320	0,508
DV	0,748	0,748
VH	0,816	0,816

The Composite Reliability (CR) values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.5, confirming adequate internal consistency. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values indicate partial yet sufficient convergent validity, which is acceptable given the exploratory nature of the research.

A supplementary analysis showed that the majority of respondents use the Internet daily, while only a small percentage reported usage several times a week

or once a week. This finding confirms the high level of digitalization within the sample and its suitability for analyzing online behavior and digital brand communication. The results confirmed that the perceived innovativeness of brands significantly influences consumer trust, which in turn increases digital engagement. Thus, trust acts as a mediating factor between innovative communication and Generation Z's behavior.

The results of the structural model confirmed all three hypotheses. Hypothesis H1 ($\beta = 0.679$; $p < 0.001$) was supported, showing that the perceived value of innovation positively influences digital trust among consumers. Hypothesis H2 ($\beta = 0.381$; $p < 0.001$) confirmed the mediating role of digital trust between the perceived value of innovation and digital engagement. Hypothesis H3 ($\beta = 0.675$; $p < 0.001$) validated the positive relationship between trust and engagement. These findings emphasize that digital trust functions as a key mediator between innovative communication and consumer behavior, supporting the validity of the proposed theoretical model. From a marketing practice perspective, this means that brands should focus not only on implementing innovative digital formats but also on ensuring authenticity, transparency, and clarity in communication, which foster trust and strengthen long-term consumer relationships.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of our research confirm that the perceived value of innovation has a positive and statistically significant effect on digital trust, which in turn increases the level of digital engagement among Generation Z. This relationship indicates that technological innovations are effective only when consumers perceive them as authentic, transparent, and value-driven [5], [13]. Innovative approaches in marketing communication contribute to building a competitive advantage by enhancing interactivity, personalization, and emotional connection with the consumer [12], [8].

The findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing that trust is a key psychological prerequisite for consumer engagement in the online environment [15]; [3]. For Generation Z, trust also carries an ethical and value-based dimension, as this group is highly sensitive to social issues and the transparency of brand communication practices [1], [10]. Empathy, responsiveness, and authenticity in communication therefore play a crucial role in forming long-term relationships between consumers and brands [8].

From a practical perspective, the results confirm that brands capable of aligning technological innovation with ethical principles and a clear communication identity achieve higher levels of trust and loyalty. Transparent and consistent communication reduces informational uncertainty, thereby increasing consumers' willingness to interact with the brand [3], [15]. Consequently, digital trust

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acts as a mediating element between innovation and digital behavior, confirming that value-oriented innovations are a decisive factor in fostering long-term digital engagement among Generation Z [14].

5. CONCLUSION

The study provides comprehensive insights into the relationship between perceived value of innovation, digital trust, and digital engagement among Generation Z. The results confirmed that innovative marketing communication plays a crucial role in shaping trust and subsequent consumer behavior in the online environment. Generation Z responds more positively to brands that combine technological advancement with value consistency, thereby creating a sense of authenticity and credibility.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the understanding of trust as a mediator between innovation and consumers' digital behavior. It confirms that trust is a key element in transforming technology-oriented communication into a truly relationship-oriented interaction between the brand and the consumer. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating ethical principles, transparency, and personalization into innovative marketing strategies.

From a practical standpoint, the results highlight the need for brands to develop digital strategies based on a balance between innovation and a human-centered approach. The effectiveness of technology does not lie in its mere presence, but in its ability to deliver a trustworthy, comprehensible, and value-relevant experience to users. For marketing managers, this implies a shift from purely technological innovations toward relational and value-driven innovations that foster long-term digital engagement.

Future research could extend the model by including additional variables such as perceived brand authenticity or ethical responsibility in communication, which may play a significant role in shaping Generation Z's trust in the digital environment. It would also be valuable to test the model across different generations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior within the digital context.

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