

## **Gen Z has changed society by developing a third place in their strong use of Instagram for everyday life.**

### **Abstract**

This paper argues that our Generation Z population have made digital platforms, such as Instagram a third place. This generation has, especially during the pandemic built a secure Third Place, by using this platform as a sociological structure to function within society. This change has been adapted due to the characteristics, behaviours, and motives of this generation, and because they are online in a multi-use environment such as Instagram, influencers have used these same characteristics and behaviours to manipulate their own business and therefore have given strength to this way of life. The prediction is that the new Generation A is in their formative years, will consistently, the same as Generation Z, continue on with the new societal way of allowing technology to lead our values, beliefs, and attitudes.

### **Introduction**

It is understood that technology is in our lives, there are generations that have had to learn and adapt while others have had it in their lives from day one, such as Generation Z. Society has seen change to move with technology advances, and the latest generations have moved fluidly with the change. Generation Z have strengthened the social change of making a digital platform, in this case Instagram, as a solid third place, in that they have allowed influencers that use Instagram as a marketing influence, to make behavioural changes in purchasing. Oldenberg and Brissett's (1982) defined a theory of Third Places, which they defined as "non-home/ non-workplace which gives a certain sense of well-being and belonging whilst still allowing the ability to build relationships." (Littman, (2021)

This paper will argue that Generation Z, "our digital native born", a phrase coined by (Prensky, 2001, as cited in Goldring, Azab, 2020), get this name due to having technology in their lives from day one, and this has allowed this generation to embed a promotion of social change in the high use of digital platforms, namely Instagram. This is to say that the pandemic has given strength to digital platforms, due to lockdowns, becoming the main way of life in home, work and therefore Instagram has become a third place, such as churches, community groups, shopping centres, etc. Gen Z population have taken hold of this digital way of life so strongly that they have created a third place in the form of their own community. They have moved rapidly ahead with social change, due to the fact that they have always lived within it, this has given them the ability to embed it more into their lives and therefore setting a way of life for the next generations.

Within this paper, the argument will move through generational characteristics and behaviours of Gen Z and how through the behaviours and motives the social change has come about. Then reference to how influencers have taken these same characteristics, behaviours, and motives to build the online networks, to grow this third-place community.

### **Generational Characteristics**

When you put this ideal of generation into a sociological concept, a person moves into the functionalism side of the concept, by looking at what is referred to as norms and values, which is where our behavioural patterns that are shown within our communities and our networks appear. These communities and networks, which are now online as a third place, so the functionalism has changed from the way society uses these communities and networks and therefore behavioural patterns have changed.

This paper will concentrate on the Gen Z cohort, due to the fact that they are constantly surrounded and in use with digital devices, anything from the digital age fascinates them. It is said that kids born into this culture learn the digital way of life easily and will resist the old way of it could be said “the analogue way of life.” They are of the ages between 10 and 25 which are considered formative years (Goldring, Azab, 2021)

To put this behavioural change into perspective, research from (Fietkiewicz, etal, 2016) has found five different behaviours from this generation and they are creators, critics, collectors, joiners, and spectators. To break this down further, a creator behaviour is when the person on a digital platform is strong in either publishing or uploading information, a critic behaviour will be the one that is strong in commenting and rating, collector behaviour are those that like to share and save, joiners are those that will connect easily and show a unity to other groups, and the spectator is the one that just sits back and reads what everyone is posting. (Fietkiewicz, etal, 2016) further states that the motives for these behaviours come from needs of information, personal identity, entertainment, and social interaction, this leads into the functioning behaviour of societies in daily lives.

This is where the power from Instagram comes about in instilling change, through what is referred to as a Social Networking Site (SNS) (Barker, 2012). This is where Influencers come into the fore, as it has been found that there is an increase of relationship strength having a positive long-term impact on working relationships between services/product providers and customers.

### **Influencers for Third Place**

What makes Instagram a third place is in how influencers have made use of this platform and how easily Gen Z have changed their behaviours to flow with the change. This quote from Goffman

(1959) in "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life", gives an understanding to how an influencer works to build this third place. "An individual's effort to act and behave in a way that influences how an audience sees him/her, usually with the intent to create, present, and maintain a favourable image in a social situation for a particular purpose." This quotation identifies that influencers have created a way of enticing Gen Z to change their purchasing behaviours, in the form of not going out to a shop but moving from seeing a picture on Instagram to moving further online to purchasing the product.

As noted earlier, a third place has been defined as being a place outside of home or work, this is where Instagram has become that place outside of home or work, the third place has now become an online place which has formed into a multi user environment

Instagram has become that platform that has formed into a third place and influencers have swiftly acted to benefit from it. Instagram is known as a photo and video sharing social network and influencers use the motives for self-esteem and group identity. Not only are they able to build new relationships they have also found a way of maintaining their offline relationships. These motives for self-esteem and group or personal identity led to three concepts, and they are Social Identity, Social Identity Gratification and Social Compensation. (Barker, 2012)

The theory concept of Social Identity has been found to be obtained from being a member of a group. This membership is used to maintain contact with friends and family offline but also to make new friends, it gives the ability to introduce themselves to the world (and has been found to occur earlier than it should), but also builds an online social capital. This capital is the influence of the third place.

With Social Identity Gratification, it has shown that a person / user will only participate within groups that look, sound, think and share similar ideas or tastes. This behaviour or motive has a way of changing a person's real identity and can hinder the way that they learn about self-esteem. (Barker, 2012) Gen Z need to identify with others that have similar ideas and feelings.

Social compensation gives users the ability to build or reinvent themselves and in doing so they believe that they have a more positive self-esteem and will achieve positive friendship experiences. It has been found that social compensation motive is linked to psychological well-being. (Barker, 2012) states that this Generation, "treat their multitasking handheld gadgets almost like a body part", they own their own profiles and are positive in posting online videos and pictures. (Barker, 2012)

A parasocial relationship is defined (Su, et al, 2021) as non-face to face psychological relationship that is influenced by social media. Therefore to build this type of relationship they need to build an attractiveness into what they wanting to achieve whatever the task may be, they need to show the same likes and similar characteristics of the customer, which will then open communication lines, and then leads to the physical side of look characteristics, all of this together gives the influence of positive interpersonal relationship and therefore starts a sharing of information, which will then trigger a purchasing intention. (Su, et al, 2021) This relationship ties in the Social Identity Theory in that it gives the ability of understanding how influencers have been able to grow their market with Instagram and how they have used the behavioural characteristics of Gen Z, this in turn has made the functional change to daily society.

### **Social Change with Instagram**

The ideal of Generational Cohort Theory (GCT), (Goldring, Azab, 2021) state that changes across generations cause effect on values, attitudes, beliefs, and inclinations. These changes will pass on to younger generations, especially within their formative years which will be Gen A cohort, this predictability of the basic experiences such as online shopping, purchasing behaviours will be introduced.

Delanty, (2018), states that communication and other structures in society today have given way to a large number of possibilities with lifestyle and this is very much where Gen Z have connected with.

This structure with Instagram works due to the phrase coined by (Milgram, 1967 cited in Papacharissi, 2010, pg. 7) "six degrees of separation". The separation is used by influencers on Instagram by making use of the social identity theory, and in realising that it is understood that there has to be gratification and compensation.

There are specific characteristics found to build this type of structure and thus build a third place, (Yuan, 2021): User Centric in how much value a person will use the platform/ Instagram, Six degrees of separation which is how a user will base the worthiness of a new relationship, by tracking the shortest path, Social impact is noted as the influence from social behaviour that is triggered, Information dissemination how much and the speed of the need to be out there and spreading, Weak relationship phenomenon is the thought that users are only spectators and the last characteristic that was noted is the Emergence characteristics is where quality changes occur from the interactions on the platform, i.e.; Instagram.

To show these characteristics as examples, Instagram influencers and Gen Z use the social impact of showing similar videos or photos that a user has shown interest in. The information is easy to

achieve by the icons that are on the site and the posts that come from either side trigger further interest, which in hand build the social gratification and compensation that is required and needed within a society.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper argued that generation Z, which is known as a Digital Native, have instilled within our society a third place, by using Instagram along with other digital platforms, to manoeuvre through life. Due to their behaviours of always having a digital device in their hands and using it to control their lives. There is no adaptation for them as this is what they know, and due to the pandemic and putting us into lockdowns the use of Instagram and other digital platforms have now become a third place, taking up the behaviours of online shopping and purchasing. These behaviours are of being creators of profiles, publishing and or uploading of information, the critic is the process of commenting or rating on sites, collector is the sharer and saver of information, joiners are the ones that will connect with new and old friends and will maintain the relationships and then you have the spectators who just like to check in on what is happening on line, when you put all of these behaviours together it is a life, it is a relationship.

Influencers have a large number of Instagram accounts; they have understood the above behaviours and therefore the motives and built their markets on this. They are doing extremely well with a growth of \$10 billion just over the pandemic period and marketers are noting and they are now using 10% of their market budget on influencers. This third place is not considered a home or workplace but where this generation naturally go to shop, purchase, and move information and relationships along, Instagram is an easy platform to navigate and is also accessible.

Instagram allows them the ability to build social identities, receive gratification and compensation a new way of building self-esteem. This relationship is known as a parasocial relationship as it is a psychological non face to face relationship that is all influenced by a form of social media, Instagram.

The social change has come about as GCT states that if there are any value, attitude, belief changes during a person's formative years they will be affected, and Gen Z are in their formative years, the social change of this third place will carry through. The popular use of Instagram is understood by Gen Z and influencers alike, and Gen Z do not like to be too far separated from use of devices and that they prefer to have information as quickly as possible.

Gen Z have set a social change of a third place with Instagram, in that you do not need to go to places you just look up and order on the device that is in your hand.

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