

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

Faculty of Social Sciences

School of Economics and Business Administration

Yuliana Kandiak

BANDWAGON EFFECT DRIVERS' RELATIONSHIP TO GENERATION Z
PURCHASE INTENTION IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Bachelor Thesis

Supervisor: Junior Lecturer Kerli Ploom

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I have written this Bachelor Thesis independently. Any ideas or data taken from other authors or other sources have been fully referenced.

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Introduction

The bandwagon effect is a cognitive bias that makes customers want and buy trendy things to be accepted by society (Leibenstein, 1950; Tsai, Yang, & Liu, 2013). This cognitive bias refers to the behaviour of individuals to think and act simply as others (Leibenstein, 1950; Choi, Lee, Han, Man, & Chong, 2015). The root cause is that humans, in general, have an inherent desire to be accepted by society and be part of a group (Hoffman, 2024).

86% of women said social media influences their purchase choices (Walk-Morris, 2023). As the relevant example, TikTok has completely changed the way Generation Z looks for, buys, and uses products in the beauty and personal care industries. 69% of them use the platform to learn about beauty, which impacts their purchasing decisions. For instance, Maybelline's Lash Sensational Sky High Mascara sold out completely in an overnight fashion thanks to a single viral video on TikTok. 54% of Gen Z adults trust makeup artists and beauty influencers on the internet. (Mintel, 2024) Although both the bandwagon effect and the need for uniqueness showed a significant impact on multi-motivational attitudes and purchase intentions toward luxury brands, the bandwagon effect has a greater impact than the need for uniqueness (Cho, Kim-Vick, & Yu, 2021).

This research addresses the issue of exploiting the bandwagon effect by brands, which encourages Gen-Z customers to make the same impulsive purchasing decisions as the majority. It highlights the concern of overconsumption, as Gen-Z, especially young women, buy lots of unnecessary things via social media rather than considering personal preferences or needs. Hence, it stresses the negative outcome of this problem - an absence of individuality in style as Gen-Z customers often buy things that do not match their style, body type and lifestyle.

Although the bandwagon effect and its influence on consumer behavior have been widely studied, significant gaps remain in the literature. Many existing studies focused on luxury brands (Cho, Kim-Vick, & Yu, 2021; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Husic & Cicic, 2009; Tsai, Yang, & Liu, 2013; Kang & Ma, 2020; Pentina, Guilloux, & Micu, 2018), which overlooks the dynamics of usual fashion products that play a more integral role in usual purchasing behavior, especially for Gen-Z consumers who might not have high income. The previous research investigated bandwagon drivers on social media like Twitter (Li, Vafeiadis, Xiao, & Yang, 2020), which is not typically considered as a primary platform for purchasing among Gen Z, and Facebook (Zafar, Qiu, Li, Wang, & Shahzad, 2021; Shamim, Azam, & Islam, 2024), which remains less favored by Gen Z compared to platforms like Instagram (Bharti, 2021; Kaltbeitzler & Anantachart, 2022) and TikTok (Furinto, Tamara, Maradona, &

Gunawan, 2023). It highlights the need for further investigation of bandwagon drivers on Instagram. Besides, majority of prior studies have examined either single specific factors such as bandwagon cues (Li, Vafeiadis, Xiao, & Yang, 2020), social media influencers (Zafar, Qiu, Li, Wang, & Shahzad, 2021; Rosli, Johar, Lazim, Hashim, & Juhari, 2024), electronic Word-of-Mouth (Sulthana & Vasantha, 2019; Romadhoni, Akhmad, Naldah, Putu, & Rossanty, 2023; Nadroo, Lim, & Naqshbandi, 2024), or the general impact of the bandwagon effect (Cho, Kim-Vick, & Yu, 2021; Kaltbeitzler & Anantachart, 2022). These separate researches limit understanding of how these different bandwagon factors in comparison relate to Gen-Z purchasing decisions. Moreover, studies often focus broadly on consumer attitudes and behaviors, without specifically addressing purchase decision as a distinct outcome. In terms of methods used, most of direct similar studies rely solely on single traditional methods, thus constraining the exploration of deeper insights of subconscious consumer behavior.

This study aims to address the research gap by redirecting the focus from luxury brands to everyday fashion product as the first ones have been studied a lot. It focused on Instagram platform, which is known for fostering rapid purchasing behaviors and influencing consumer trends. Unlike prior researches that address consumer behavior broadly, this study will narrow its focus specifically to purchase intention, offering a more precise understanding of consumer decision-making. First of all, the study explored the interplay between different levels of two bandwagon drivers on catching attention and purchasing decisions. Furthermore, this study determined the factor with the strongest influence on purchasing decision. Finally, the research provided with the insights of perception of the main bandwagon factors, which serve as a background for purchasing decisions. All in all, this research will be the first to use such a mix of methods, including neuro-marketing, traditional quantitative and qualitative tools, introducing a new methodology to enhance the validity of research findings.

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to find out the bandwagon effect drivers' relationship to Generation Z purchase intention in social media marketing.

To achieve the aim following research tasks are set:

- Define and explain a key concept "bandwagon effect" and its drivers.
- Provide an overview of the previous empirical studies on the influence of the bandwagon effect drivers on purchase intention in social media marketing.
- Collect data about the relationship between the bandwagon effect drivers and Gen-Z purchase intention in social media by using neuro-marketing tools and survey.

- Highlight and analyze the results, draw conclusions and generalizations.

The research consists of theoretical and empirical parts. The main part starts with defining the bandwagon effect, examples of the bandwagon effect drivers, particularly in social media, explanations of social conformity, conspicuous consumption, FoMO, social media marketing, and influencer marketing. The second subchapter of the theoretical part covers a brief explanation of why Generation Z is relevant for this research, the overview of previous empirical studies on the influence of the bandwagon effect drivers on Gen-Z purchase intention in social media marketing. The recent articles are taken into account to provide the overview. In the empirical part, methodology is presented, sample and data used for conducting the analysis are introduced, also describing how data was collected. The main findings about the relationship between bandwagon effect drivers and Gen-Z consumers' purchase intention in social media are presented. The synthesis analysis is conducted and conclusions are made.

Keywords: bandwagon effect, Generation Z, purchase intention, social media

1. The bandwagon effect in Gen-Z purchase decision-making in social media

1.1. The bandwagon effect in consumer behavior and decision-making

The concept of the bandwagon effect, which first appeared in political discourse in the 1940s, describes people's propensity to adopt the position or viewpoint of the majority (Pierce, 1940). The bandwagon effect, a concept frequently explored in consumer behavior research, refers to individuals' inclination to adopt behaviors, purchase decisions, or trends based on the choices of others (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Sabir, Azam, Majid, Mahmud, & Sabir, 2020; Kang & Ma, 2020). This part reviews definitions from different authors, analyzing the social and psychological drivers behind the bandwagon behavior.

Leibenstein (1950) was the first who defined the concept of the "bandwagon effect". "The desire of people to wear, buy, do, consume, and behave like their fellows; the desire to join the crowd, be "one of the boys," etc. — phenomena of mob motivations and mass psychology either in their grosser or more delicate aspects" is called "the bandwagon effect" (Leibenstein, 1950, p. 184). The bandwagon effect refers to "the desire of people to purchase a commodity in order to get into "the swim of things"; in order to conform with the people they wish to be associated with; in order to be fashionable or stylish; or, in order to appear to be "one of the boys." (Leibenstein, 1950, p. 189).

As the main focus of this study is on the relationship between the bandwagon effect and purchasing decisions, the terms "bandwagon effect" and "bandwagon consumption

behaviour" will be used interchangeably for the rest of the work to align with previous studies.

Nearly all authors highlighted a social conformity aspect in their definitions. They define the bandwagon effect as individuals' desire to align with a social group (Leibenstein, 1950; Kang & Ma, 2020; Sabir, Azam, Majid, Mahmud, & Sabir, 2020), or gain recognition (Tsai, Yang, & Liu, 2013; Leibenstein, 1950). For instance, Leibenstein (1950) defined it as a "desire to join the crowd" (p. 184), while Tsai, Yang, and Liu (2013) highlighted the need to "seek recognition from in-group members" (p. 293). The alignment with social norms and values stresses the social conformity aspect in the bandwagon effect (Kang & Ma, 2020). The desire of the majority extends to others and influences their decision-making (Choi, Lee, Han, Man, & Chong, 2015). Kang and Ma (2020) use the term "collective consumption behaviour" which is related to following others to align with group behavior (p. 1). Consumers copy the purchasing actions of others "to get into the swim of things" and to "be one of the boys" in consumer behavior (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, p. 1401). The consumers want "to be associated with upper-class people" by buying expensive fashionable things (Mainolfi, 2020, p. 288). By applying collective consumption behaviour they want to show higher status in society (Kang & Ma, 2020). The mass of people try to be similar to prominent figures in order to feel "fashionable or stylish" (Leibenstein, 1950, p. 189). The consumers purchase fashionable luxury goods when they recognize that everyone needs them to be actively involved in trend movements and to adopt group's preferences (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). Another factor that drives the bandwagon effect is "fashionable information" (Choi, Lee, Han, Man, & Chong, 2015, p. 3). This shows that the bandwagon effect is caused by following widely accepted trends.

According to the authors' definitions and explanations, I classified them into three categories: social conformity, conspicuous consumption, and trend conformity (see Table 1). The first one refers to adopting the behavior with group norms and preferences to gain acceptance; the second one means purchasing products to showcase status and wealth to others; and the last, trend conformity is about following current popular trends and mainstreams to stay relevant or fashionable.

The belonging to a society and its recognition are the main motivations among definitions. It gives consumers a chance to express their alignment with certain groups or aspire to a higher social class. The influence of authoritative figures plays a role in bandwagon behaviors. However, social circles can also create bandwagon effects independently of famous people.

Table 1

Aspects of different definitions of "bandwagon effect"

Definitions	Social conformity	Conspicuous consumption	Trend conformity
The bandwagon effect refers to "the desire of people to purchase a commodity in order to get into "the swim of things"; in order to conform with the people they wish to be associated with; in order to be fashionable or stylish; or, in order to appear to be "one of the boys"" (Leibenstein, 1950, p. 189)	X		X
The bandwagon consumption pattern refers to "the phenomenon of collective consumption behavior which emulates the actions of others, and represents one's social status, the belonging of a particular group, and conspicuous consumption" (Kang & Ma, 2020, p. 1).	X	X	
"... consumers observe the consumption behavior of others and, when they identify the kinds of popular luxury products that everyone must have "to get into the swim of things" and to "be one of the boys", they buy them too— (re)creating bandwagon effects" (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, p. 1401)	X		X
"Within the context of luxury product consumption, this bandwagon effect represents the desire to be associated with upper class people" (Mainolfi, 2020, p. 288)		X	
"Bandwagon is a scenario where people change consumption patterns according to their social circle to be a part of it" (Sabir, Azam, Majid, Mahmud, & Sabir, 2020, p. 88)	X		
"The bandwagon effect is a phenomenon in which fashionable information affects personal choices for an item (Long, Fox, & York, 2007); when most people want an item, a person also wants the item as well" (Choi, Lee, Han, Man, & Chong, 2015, p. 3).	X		X

Note: "X" means that the specific aspect is highlighted in the definition

Source: Compiled by author based on the sources in the table

Bandwagoners tend to think a product is worth more because it is widely accepted (Cho, Yu, & Kim, 2020). For bandwagon consumers, it is more important to have an impact on others while buying prestige brands, rather than a price as a status measurement (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999; Husic & Cicic, 2009).

Everybody who takes an active part in daily people's lives influences the mindset and decision-making, thus people feel the alignment with the group (Sabir, Azam, Majid, & Mahmud, 2020). Individuals worry about how they look, and whether they are fashionable, which results in applying a variety of tactics to get social acceptance (Husic & Cicic, 2009). Due to the increased demand in the fashion industry, consumers rely on fashion trends while making purchases (Chetioui, Benlafqih, & Lebdaoui, 2020). Trends are created and followed by a high demand, or in other words — plenty of people. It means that consumers' purchasing decisions are based on others' ones. People seek belonging and connection in social relationships, where “this view of the self and the relationship between the self and others features the person not as separate from the social context but as more connected and less differentiated from others” — the interdependent self-concept (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227).

Veblen (1900) was the first who introduced the concept of conspicuous consumption, pointing out that some people begin to engage in conspicuous consumption as wealth accumulates within a society. Conspicuous consumption is a term used to describe the act of purchasing and using goods or services not for their intrinsic utility, but to display wealth, status, or social position publicly (Veblen, 1900; Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010). Status-seeking consumers are anxious about their social roles and care about how others perceive their position in society (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

Consumers often prioritize the social status associated with specific products over their functional value, as these products serve as indicators of success and belonging to certain status groups. People consume conspicuously because they believe that status and price are socially balanced. Brands encourage people to consume luxury goods by associating them with celebrities, which stimulates materialistic desires. (Niesiołędzka, 2018)

People express themselves to others by consuming status products and brands (Husic & Cicic, 2009; Tsai, Yang, & Liu, 2013). The motivation behind conspicuous intention is determined for different social classes: while rich people often do it to confirm their status, people with less income and affordability desire to achieve status and recognition (Truong, Simmons, McColl, & Kitchen, 2008; Mazzocco, Rucker, Galinsky, & Anderson, 2012; Husic

& Cicic, 2009). Prestige-sensitive people do not want to seem “cheap” (Husic & Cicic, 2009, p. 234).

The previous literature suggests that consumers are motivated by a desire to influence others' perceptions and reinforce their social standing. Conspicuous consumption, a behavior where goods are purchased to demonstrate wealth and status, becomes a tool for social positioning. This literature review highlights the role of conspicuous consumption as a powerful means of self-expression and social identification in contemporary consumer culture.

Conspicuous consumption and social conformity are directly correlated with Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is a psychological phenomenon, behind which there is the human desire to belong to a group, to be on the same line with others, to know what is going on, and anxiety about being socially isolated (Kang & Ma, 2020; Kang, Cui, & Son, 2019; Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013). People who have a strong need to align with others keep a focus on social interactions (Kang, Cui, & Son, 2019). This need causes higher bandwagon consumption behavior. If people feel the separation from the mainstream, the necessity of social conformity is enhanced. FoMO can drive consumers to buy specific brands or products and encourage them to engage in inappropriate consumption. In other words, FoMO is a psychological trait where people emulate conformity because they do not want to be left out of the mainstream. (Kang & Ma, 2020)

The purchasing decisions can be influenced by strong feelings of leaving behind something good or desirable that others have. For example, someone may decide to purchase better or more costly goods because they are afraid of not aligning with social expectations or trends. (Abel, Buff, & Burr, 2016)

In order to show off their desired status, be ostentatious, and maintain relationships with the surroundings, consumers who have high-level FoMO tend to buy premium items (Kang & Ma, 2020). As a result of FoMO, they follow collectivism and adapt their actions not to stand out like a white crow (Kang, Cui, & Son, 2019).

FoMO has been strategically used in marketing with a common “call to action” trigger, mainly targeting young audiences (p. 66). FoMO-based appeals prompt consumers to confront their reluctance or hesitation to take action. (Hodkinson, 2016)

FoMO has a strong link to social media use, as it can push individuals to engage excessively with platforms to satisfy social needs. Individuals with higher FoMO often use social media more frequently to fulfill desires for belonging and popularity (Beyens, Frison,

& Eggermont, 2016), which may lead to compulsive use and even addiction due to the need for constant social validation. (Alt & Boniel-Nissim, 2018; Elhai, Levine, Dvorak, & Hall, 2016; Lai, Altavilla, Ronconi, & Aceto, 2016; Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013; Alt, 2015)

People may feel worse about not being updated on events or actions (including purchasing ones) in others' lives as a result of the frequent access to information via social media. It is hard for younger generations to be uninformed about what is going on, given their 24/7 access to their social media updates. (Abel, Buff, & Burr, 2016) They use social media to feel a connection with the external world, specifically people and mainstream (Casale & Fioravanti, 2015), and according to Kang and Ma (2020), findings show that high level of FoMO can lead to the bandwagon consumption behavior.

Besides FoMO, the bandwagon consumption behavior can be affected by the product directly with persuasive facts about it, such as the necessity or feeling of well-being from purchasing it and a description of what consumers get from it (Kang & Ma, 2020). All in all, the bandwagon consumption is closely related to the inhabited desire for luxury consumption and psychological trait FoMO.

The bandwagon effect plays a significant role in shaping consumer behavior, often leading individuals to conform to popular choices to attain social acceptance or affirm their personal status. Individuals mimic the purchasing decisions of others to strengthen their sense of belonging and connection. Bandwagoners value the influence of their choices on others over personal preferences or practical product functions. Consequently, individuals are motivated to buy well-known or prestigious brands, enabling them to align with social norms and craft a desired identity.

As theorized by Veblen (1900), people may engage in visible spending, especially luxury consumption, to signal social status. FoMO encourages people to follow trends or buy particular goods by appealing to their fear of being left out, especially in a digital world where social media highlights others' experiences and possessions. This pursuit of social acceptance and prestige guides purchasing decisions, embedding the bandwagon effect within consumer behavior.

Together, social validation, status-seeking, conspicuous consumption, and FoMO interact to reinforce conformity in consumer behavior, revealing the complex influence of the bandwagon effect on people's purchasing choices and decision-making.

1.2. Bandwagon effect drivers' influence on Gen-Z purchase intention in social media marketing

Gen Z includes people born between 1997 and 2012 (Slepian, Vincent, Patterson, & Furman, 2024). Their characteristics set them apart even from Generation Y (millennials) (D'Arpizio, Levato, Prete, & Montgolfier, 2020). Social media has transformed the fashion shopping experience, with Generation Z emerging as the key demographic shaping the digital market (Pantano and Gandini, 2018). The increasing shift toward digital platforms is significantly replacing traditional physical distribution channels (D'Arpizio, Levato, Prete, & Montgolfier, 2020).

Gen Z grew up with smartphones, WiFi, and social media as their main way to connect, learn, and communicate daily. Streaming, social media, and instant access to information define their experience. Unlike Millennials, Gen Z did not have to adapt to these technologies as they have always been there. (Dimock, 2019; Slepian, Vincent, Patterson, & Furman, 2024; McKinsey & Company, 2024)

Although using social media might cause FoMO, Gen Z members also believe that being online can help them express themselves and make new acquaintances. Generation Z prioritizes convenience and efficiency, preferring mobile payment systems, app-based platforms, and seamless online transactions. Moreover, advertisements are present in nearly all aspects of their lives as this generation engages with brands continuously. (McKinsey & Company, 2024) Generation Z prefers social media ads to the traditional ads, where brand awareness, product perception, brand loyalty and customer-business interaction influences the purchase intention of Gen Z through social media marketing (Ninan, Chacko Roy, & Cheriyan, 2020). Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok were identified as particularly influential for Generation Z, as they are highly visual and interactive; Instagram is effective for creating brand awareness and showcasing products through influencers and advertisements (Merdzhanova, 2023).

Gen Z is a main consumer group in the digital market, where the desire for social status and popularity determine purchasing behavior. This demographic's reliance on social media for information, trends, and social acceptance makes them particularly relevant for investigating how the bandwagon effect drivers are related to purchasing decisions in the context of social media marketing.

Social influence and group conformity significantly affect Generation Z consumers' attitudes toward fashion brands. Based on previous research, the bandwagon effect reflected a direct and indirect impact through the hedonic function of attitude on their intention to

purchase exclusive fashion items. Although findings showed that both the desire for uniqueness and the bandwagon effect influence purchasing decisions, the bandwagon effect proves to be considerably more influential. Cho, Kim-Vick, & Yu (2021) used five key factors from Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) to measure the bandwagon effect: desire for conformity, social approval seeking, avoiding exclusion, perceived popularity influence, and status association. Hence, social proof and popularity associated with brands are key factors in determining Gen Z consumers' preferences for them. (Cho, Kim-Vick, & Yu, 2021)

Contrary to Cho, Kim-Vick, & Yu (2021), Kaltbeitzler and Anantachart (2022) investigated that bandwagon effect has no impact on Generation Z consumer's behavior on Instagram native advertising. According to this study, the bandwagon effect directly influences the intention to share but does not have a major impact on the intrusiveness of advertisements, attitudes toward the ad or brand, which include purchase intentions. The possible reasons why the study showed no impact of the bandwagon effect on consumer behavior, particularly attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions may lie in respondents' persuasion knowledge, brand unfamiliarity, product involvement, lack of purchase necessity and methodological differences. It is possible that participants understood the advertisement's persuasive purpose, which weakened the bandwagon effect's impact. Moreover, the study's fictional brands were unknown to the participants. The study used high-involvement products, which push customers to look for specific information. Hence, consumers might have assessed elements like product functionality or design, ignoring engagement metrics such as likes and comments. The impact of the bandwagon effect may have been further reduced as participants had not been encouraged to buy anything during the experiment. (Kaltbeitzler & Anantachart, 2022)

One of the significant driver in pushing purchasing decisions is influencer marketing, where influencers are leaders to follow. Compared to the world's celebrities, influencers are less well-known and less famous social media users who nevertheless have a significant impact; they are somewhat of an opinion leader who are perceived as neither celebrities nor usual people (Johansen & Guldvik, 2017; Lin, Bruning, & Swarna, 2018). A new generation of influencers has been created by social media, which has also emerged as a key instrument for increasing product awareness and generating sales (Bastrygina & Marc Lim, 2023). Customers' attitudes, awareness, credibility perceptions, loyalty, intention to buy, confidence in brands, perceptions, preferences, choices, and decisions are all influenced by their interactions with social media influencers (Bastrygina & Marc Lim, 2023; Joshi, Lim, Jagani, & Kumar, 2023; Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019).

From the consumer's perspective, seeing brands collaborate with popular influencers or partner with other respected companies enhances the brand's image, and signals prestige and high status, thus the desire to consume such brand's product appears. This perceived exclusivity and credibility encourage consumers to trust the brand and buy its products, illustrating how influencer marketing significantly impacts purchasing decisions in social media marketing. (Bharti, 2021)

From a marketing point of view, influencers aim to acknowledge their readers about the product, thus increasing the purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Chetioui, Benlafqih, & Lebdaoui, 2020). What Gen Z watch online from bloggers on social media accounts greatly impacts their thoughts, perceptions, and behavior (Slepian, Vincent, Patterson, & Furman, 2024; Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). Generation Z is more likely to pay attention to digital marketing communication and advertising if it is delivered by someone they respect and admire. As a result, social media influencers are leaders of main thoughts who can capture their interest. (Munsch, 2021)

The recent study finds that TikTok, where the bandwagon effect serves as a mediator, has led to increased conspicuous consumption behaviors of luxury products, particularly among Generation Z. The platform's features, such as viral trends and influencer content, amplify the bandwagon effect, influencing users to purchase items to gain social status. (Furinto, Tamara, Maradona, & Gunawan, 2023) Furthermore, Shamim, Azam, and Islam (2024) demonstrated findings where trust in the branded posts of fashion influencers has a beneficial effect on urge to buy impulsively.

To provide the research with deeper insights of influencer marketing, micro- and mega-influencers were compared. The micro- and mega-influencers were taken to discover if there exist any significant differences of influence due to significant gap in the followers base.

The micro-influencers were defined as those with a follower count between 10000 and 100000, while mega-influencers have over one million followers. The first ones were found to be more persuasive than second ones due to higher perceived authenticity, but only for hedonic products. This differential effect of social media influencer type was not observed for utilitarian products. Similarly, according to Kim (2020), for young female consumers, micro-influencers who actively engaged with products in their posts led to more favorable brand attitudes and a stronger intention to purchase products, even high-involvement ones, compared to mega-influencers. In contrast, Furtana and Ögüt (2024) found that mega-

influencer has a positive impact on the decisions of the Generation Z, while micro-influencer positively impacts the Generation Y's purchasing decisions.

Mega-influencers are distinguished by greater popularity and attributed opinion leadership, which increases followers' intention to adopt their recommendations indirectly through these perceptions. In contrast, micro-influencers establish closer relationships with their followers, which directly enhance followers' intention to adopt recommendations and reduce the importance of follower count and opinion leadership in influencing this intention. (Conde & Casais, 2023)

The another key driver of social media engagement is the volume of interactions a post receives, such as likes, comments, and shares. The engagement metrics are associated with social engagement and recognition of particular post.

The high levels of bandwagon cues in social media ads on Twitter (number of likes, comments) make the ads seem more convincing and reduce negative emotions compared to low bandwagon cues. Social media users may be tempted to assume that "if so many others think this is good, then it must be good" when an online post obtains a large number of "likes", even before reading and watching precisely the content (p. 500). However, they did not show significant effect on either attitude towards the sponsored post or behavioral intentions. (Li, Vafeiadis, Xiao, & Yang, 2020) According to Rosli, Johar, Lazim, Hashim, & Juhari (2024), likes and shares showed significant positive relationship between likes/shares and purchase intention, compared to comments which did not reflected significant relationship with purchase intention on Facebook and Instagram.

Bharti (2021) conducted empirical research on which attributes have a strong influence on the conversion rate on Instagram fashion brand, where influencer appeal reflected the highest result. The second main finding indicates that attractive posts with visible high numbers of followers, comments, likes, and views also have a significant influence on consumers' purchase intention (Bharti, 2021). Similarly, the next empirical research reflected that authentic celebrities' posts and the number of likes, comments, shares have a positive effect on impulsive purchase behavior on Facebook (Zafar, Qiu, Li, Wang, & Shahzad, 2021) but focusing on restaurant sector which might not be generalizable for the fashion industry. Consumers are influenced by the visible popularity of the posts and presence of respected person, which reinforces the desire to buy products immediately without rational thinking.

The influencer leads people to follow popular trends and share their opinions under influencers' posts, called electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which according to Nadroo,

Lim, and Naqshbandi (2024) reinforces the bandwagon effect, making people more inclined to buy. The electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) refers to any positive or negative statement, opinion, or information about a product, service, or company that is created and shared by consumers, whether they are potential, actual, or former customers, through internet-based platforms, making it accessible to a broad audience online (Babić Rosario, de Valck, & Sotgiu, 2019). According to Sulthana and Vasantha (2019) and Romadhoni, Akhmad, Naldah, Putu, and Rossanty (2023), social media users share product information and trust other user' reviews and recommendations, resulting in positive influence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on purchase intention, which is also connected to brand awareness and trust. According to Arora and Mail (2018), the quality of reviews has an influence on purchase intention but the quantity of reviews does not have significant influence on purchase intention of high involvement products. In contrast to several previous findings, Pratama, Ilham, Sutomo, Hermawan, & Wardhana (2024) examined that influencer marketing and customer reviews have no significant effect on purchasing decisions. Such differences might occur due to small sample (N=60) and low reliability of the instruments used to measure variables.

Based on the findings from previous studies, the author highlighted the key bandwagon drivers within social media contexts: social media influencers, bandwagon cues (number of likes, comments, shares), electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). These factors reinforce the bandwagon effect, which influences purchase intentions. (Figure 1)

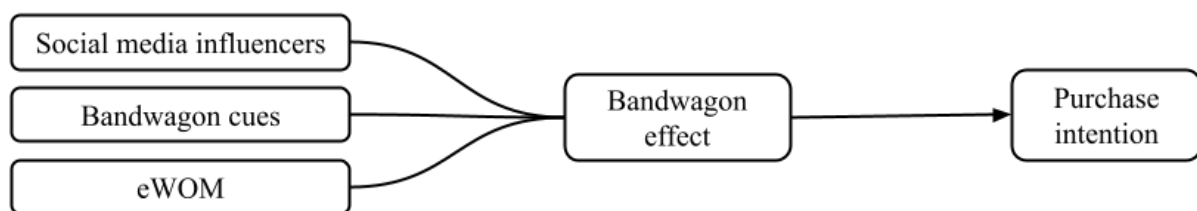


Figure 1: The key drivers of the bandwagon effect influencing purchase intention in social media

Source: compiled by author based on the previous studies (Furinto, Tamara, Maradona, & Gunawan, 2023; Shamim, Azam, & Islam, 2024; Bharti, 2021; Zafar, Qiu, Li, Wang, & Shahzad, 2021; Nadroo, Lim, & Naqshbandi, 2024; Sulthana & Vasantha, 2019; Romadhoni, Akhmad, Naldah, Putu, & Rossanty, 2023)

Finally, it is important to mention indirectly relevant studies which used neuro-research techniques. Kuan, Zhong, and Chau (2014) combined self-reported data and one of the neuro-research technique (EEG recordings) to examine how informational and normative social cues influence purchase decisions. Results showed that “buy” information led to emotional responses linked with negative emotions in EEG activity, while “like” information evoked positive emotional responses. Both cues influenced attitudes and intentions but “like” information had a greater impact when combined with “buy” information. These findings highlight the connection of social influence and emotion in decision-making. (Kuan, Zhong, & Chau, 2014)

The another study provides an indirect but relevant basis for the research methodology. Mundel, Huddleston, Behe, Sage and Latona (2018), employing eye-tracking and surveys, examines how consumers' perceptions of product type (utilitarian vs. hedonic) and minimal branding influence attentional processes and quality perceptions, ultimately influencing purchase intentions. The finding that consumers visually prioritize hedonic products over utilitarian ones testify about brand popularity influence purchase intention.

To sum up, the theoretical review demonstrates that social media influencers, engagement metrics, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) all significantly influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, though findings are sometimes contradictory and context-dependent. Studies consistently indicate that visible social proof, manifested through high engagement metrics like likes, comments, and shares, can significantly enhance the persuasive power of advertisements. At the same time, influencer endorsements, whether by well-known figures or micro-influencers, have been shown to affect brand attitudes and purchase intentions by providing credibility and aspirational appeal. Beyond these elements, the literature also emphasizes the influential role of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in purchasing processes. However, some studies report no significant influence of any of these bandwagon drivers on purchase intention, highlighting the need for ongoing research and up-to-date confirmation. (see Appendix A)

The previous empirical studies investigated the influence of individual bandwagon effect drivers on purchase intention, which gave theoretical justification for this study. Building on the previous findings, this study investigated the relationships to Gen-Z's purchase intention between social media influencers, bandwagon cues, electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM). The comparison of different previous findings provided a clearer understanding of the key drivers behind Gen Z's purchase intention on social media, setting the basis for the methodology of the current research.

2. Empirical research on the bandwagon effect drivers' relationship to Gen-Z purchase intention in social media marketing

2.1. Methodology of the empirical study

Previous research in the field of social media marketing and consumer behavior employed a diverse range of methodological approaches. Majority of previous studies used survey-based methods to assess the influence of social media platforms' attributes on purchasing decisions. While these approaches provided important insights into consumer perceptions, they rely on self-reported data, which may not fully capture the subconscious factors driving behavior.

Li, Vafeiadis, Xiao, and Yang (2020) as well as Kaltbeitzler and Anantachart (2022) adopted a 2 by 2 between-subjects experimental design. Their factorial designs proven effective in isolating the effects of specific bandwagon cues or bandwagon effect itself on behavioural intentions. However, these studies capture conscious evaluations without delving into the underlying subconscious processes.

Cho, Kim-Vick, & Yu (2021) and Bharti (2021) used surveys to collect data, followed by the SEM analysis of the results. Shamim, Azam, and Islam (2024) and Rosli, Johar, Lazim, Hashim, & Juhari (2024) further advanced the field by employing online questionnaires paired with partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM) to explore causal relationships among variables. Furthermore, Zafar, Qiu, Li, Wang, and Shahzad (2021) combined PLS-SEM with qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) to gain a comprehensive understanding of impulsive purchasing behavior on social media.

Additional contributions come from Nadroo, Lim, and Naqshbandi (2024) and Furinto, Tamara, Maradona, and Gunawan (2023), who explored the bandwagon effect and its influence on consumer behavior in different digital contexts using quasi-experimental designs and online surveys. Their work provided complementary insights, particularly regarding social media influencer and the role of engagement metrics.

Besides, neuromarketing approaches were introduced by researchers such as Mundel, Huddleston, Behe, Sage, and Latona (2018) and Kuan, Zhong, and Chau (2014), who incorporated eye-tracking and EEG techniques, respectively, to capture subconscious responses to social media cues. These studies highlighted the potential of neuromarketing to reveal implicit attentional and emotional processes that traditional surveys alone cannot access.

Table 2 provides an overview of methodologies from previous studies, where methods, sample characteristics and researched platforms are indicated.

Table 2

The methodology of previous empirical studies

Authors	Methods	Sample	Platform
Shamim, Azam, & Islam (2024)	Online questionnaire, 5-point scale, PLS-SEM	452 Pakistani social media users, age 20-29 (58%)	Facebook
Zafar, Qiu, Li, Wang, & Shahzad (2021)	Online questionnaire, PLS-SEM, fsQCA,	452 Pakistani respondents, age under 30 (63.1%)	Facebook
Bharti (2021)	Survey, SEM	327 young students, age 18-25 (88.07%)	Instagram
Kaltbeitzer and Anantachart (2022)	2 by 2 factorial experiment, 5-point Likert scale survey, independent samples t-test , Univariate ANOVA, Correlation	129 undergraduate students, aged 18-24	Instagram
Rosli, Johar, Lazim, Hashim, & Juhari (2024)	Online survey, PLS-SEM	265 respondents	Facebook and Instagram
Furinto, Tamara, Maradona, & Gunawan (2023)	Online survey, 5-point Likert scale, PLS-SEM	100 Indonesian respondents, Gen Z age (43%)	TikTok
Li, Vafeiadis, Xiao, & Yang (2020)	A 2 by 2 between-subjects online experiment, 7-point Likert scale	207 undergraduate students, average age 20.24	Twitter
Nadroo, Lim, & Naqshbandi (2024)	Quasi-experiment, on-screen questionnaire, PLS-SEM	252 consumers, age 13-43	Simulated platform
Kuan, Zhong, & Chau (2014)	Controlled EEG experiment, questionnaire	18 undergraduate students, age 20-24, Hong Kong	Group-buying site
Mundel, Huddleston, Behe, Sage & Latona (2018)	Eye-tracking experiment (Tobii X1), online survey, 9-point Likert scale, 10-point Juster scale	From previous studies, mostly Caucasian	-
Cho, Kim-Vick, & Yu (2021)	Online survey, 7-point Likert scale, SEM	486 college students, Gen Z, age 18-22	-

Note: “-” means that no specific platform was researched

Source: Compiled by author based on sources in the table

As shown in Table 2, Kuan, Zhong, and Chau (2014), and Mundel, Huddleston, Behe, Sage and Latona (2018) used neuro-marketing experiments to research the consumer

behaviour. Neuromarketing is the application of neuroscience and physiological research methods to explore consumer behavior and brain responses, providing insights into how marketing practices influence preferences, decision-making, and choices (Ouzir, Chakir Lamrani, Bradley, & el Moudden, 2024; Stanton, Sinnott-Armstrong, & Huettel, 2017). The neuro-marketing methods was used in this study to help to explore the cognitive and emotional aspects, which determine the relationships between bandwagon cues, social media influencer and purchase intention. Eye-tracking shows where people look in social media and what holds their attention, helping to understand what elements make the bandwagon effect work. Emotion measurement, using facial expression analysis, helps to understand what emotions are evoked when they see influencers, likes, comments, shares, products on Instagram posts. These methods go beyond traditional methods by revealing hidden responses that people may not even realize they have.

The methodological approach of this study was built on combined methodologies from previous studies, such as a 2 by 2 between-subjects factorial experiment (Li, Vafeiadis, Xiao, and Yang, 2020; Kaltbeitzler & Anantachart, 2022), eye-tracking experiment (Mundel, Huddleston, Behe, Sage & Latona, 2018), 5-point Likert-scale online survey (Shamim, Azam, & Islam, 2024; Furinto, Tamara, Maradona, & Gunawan, 2023). Additionally, positive emotion measurement and open-ended questions were used. The combination of different methodologies was necessary to capture subconscious and wide responses to reflect deeper insights into consumer decision-making processes. Besides, this study explored social media with more focus on Instagram for practicality in research. Instagram platform is the top platform influencing purchasing decisions of Generation Z (Walk-Morris, 2023).

The sample for the research included Generation Z people aged 18-27 years old. For the neuro-marketing experiment only Ukrainians were recruited. The decision to focus on Ukrainian Gen-Z consumers was based on the need for a culturally homogeneous sample to enhance the validity of familiarity with the influencer. A total sample size of 30 participants (15 females, 15 males) was determined to ensure statistical reliability, considering the resource constraints of neuromarketing experiment. However, for the survey the sample was extended to 161 Gen Z people aged 18-27 from any nationality to gain broader insights and increase the generalizability of findings. Participants were recruited through social media, student groups and university networks.

As the experiment materials, Instagram posts with mega- and micro-influencers who wear T-shirts and usual accessories were taken. The chosen influencers align with lifestyle and fashion content on Instagram, making T-shirts a natural fit for their account topic. The T-

shirt as non-luxury clothing does not need precise relation to it and is more relevant to a broad Gen-Z audience. The posts were presented without the description under posts to ensure that only the visuals, such as bandwagon cues (likes, comments, shares) and influencers' presence, capture initial attention, avoiding any textual distraction that might directly promote the product. The text would require to introduce it as another variable, which was not the primary focus of this study. Besides, according to Hsiao and Lin (2025), the visual features and influencer attributes have a more significant impact than textual content on capturing audience attention. Specifically, engagement rate and influencers specializing in lifestyle, fashion, and travel tend to attract more attention, reflecting Instagram users' preferences. Hence, the stimuli were designed in such a way to assess the natural influence of bandwagon cues and influencer image without the interference of explicit product endorsements that text might provide.

The posts systematically manipulated bandwagon cues, with low engagement represented by 397 likes, 20 comments, 1 share and high engagement represented by 101K likes, 249 comments, 229 shares. These numbers reflected realistic engagement patterns seen on actual social media platforms, where popular content often generates engagement in these ranges, enhancing the external validity of this study. The influencer type varied between a mega-influencer (1,7 million followers) and a micro-influencer (99874 followers).

As the first part of the research, a 2 by 2 between-subjects factorial neuro-marketing experiment was conducted at the University of Tartu Neuromarketing Lab. Participants were welcomed and provided with an informed consent form outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and data privacy assurances. The computer screen eye-tracker Tobii X2-60 was calibrated for each participant on a five-point basis before the experiment to ensure accurate gaze tracking. The facial emotion analysis using Noldus FaceReader 7 software and a Logitech HD webcam assessed emotional responses, focuses on positive emotions. Participants were exposed to all four experimental conditions in a randomized order, each on a white background, to control for confounding variables and allow causal inferences about the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Afterwards, they were asked to click on the one post that would most likely influence them to purchase, providing a direct insights about purchase intention. The posts were displayed for a pre-tested fixed duration of 7 seconds, ensuring uniform exposure across all participants.

Afterwards, a manipulation check was conducted to verify participants' ability to distinguish between influencer types based on follower counts. Participants rated their agreement on a 5-point scale (where 1 is "Strongly disagree" and 5 is "Strongly agree") to

statements about their ability to recognize mega-influencers and micro-influencers in the stimuli. The high mean values reflect the recognizability of mega- and micro-influencers, where mega-influencer was slightly more recognizable (mean=4,80) than micro-influencer (mean=4,53). A Wilcoxon signed-rank test results indicated no statistically significant difference in participants' recognizability between mega- and micro- influencers ($Z = -1,84$, $p = ,066$), meaning that both micro- and mega-influencer were recognized. These results showed that the selected influencers were clearly defined and resonated well with the target audience, demonstrating the experiment's validity .

The second part of the methodology was a survey with 5-point Likert-scale and open-ended questions. Some of the survey questions were taken from previous studies directly, however, if previous researchers did not include questions they used in their studies, the questions were compiled based on their research findings and results from neuro-marketing experiment (see Appendix B). The general demographic information was gathered for solely research purposes. The questionnaire was compiled in Google Forms, adjusting settings to ensure respondents' anonymity.

For the eye-tracking results analysis, the following eye-tracking metrics were analysed: Time to First Fixation, Total Fixation Duration to record participants' visual attention patterns, and Mouse Click Count to see which post the most likely would encourage them to buy. Descriptive statistics summarized the overall trends in the data, including means and standard deviations of purchase intention scores across the four conditions, and heatmaps visualizing eye-tracking focus areas. Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests were used to determine the main and interaction effects of bandwagon cues (low and high number of likes, comments, shares) and influencer type (mega- and micro-influencers) on catching attention and likelihood to buy. Additionally, for positive emotion measurement analysis, the means of positive emotional responses were highlighted, compared and interpreted.

For survey results analysis, previous studies used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis. However, in this study, the research design and data characteristics led author to choose non-parametric tests as the variables were ordinal. The primary reason for this choice was that the 5-point Likert-scale questions directly measured the purchase intention across different factors, without the need to infer it from latent constructs or to model complex interrelationships among multiple variables. Therefore, my methodological choice was justified because the nature of my data and research questions did not require modelling latent variables or complex causality. Instead, the focus was on directly comparing

repeated measures across different factors. The statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software.

The open responses were analyzed by highlighting codes from responses, grouping them into categories, based on which coding tables were created and generalizations made. The Figure 2 reflects the methodology of the empirical research.

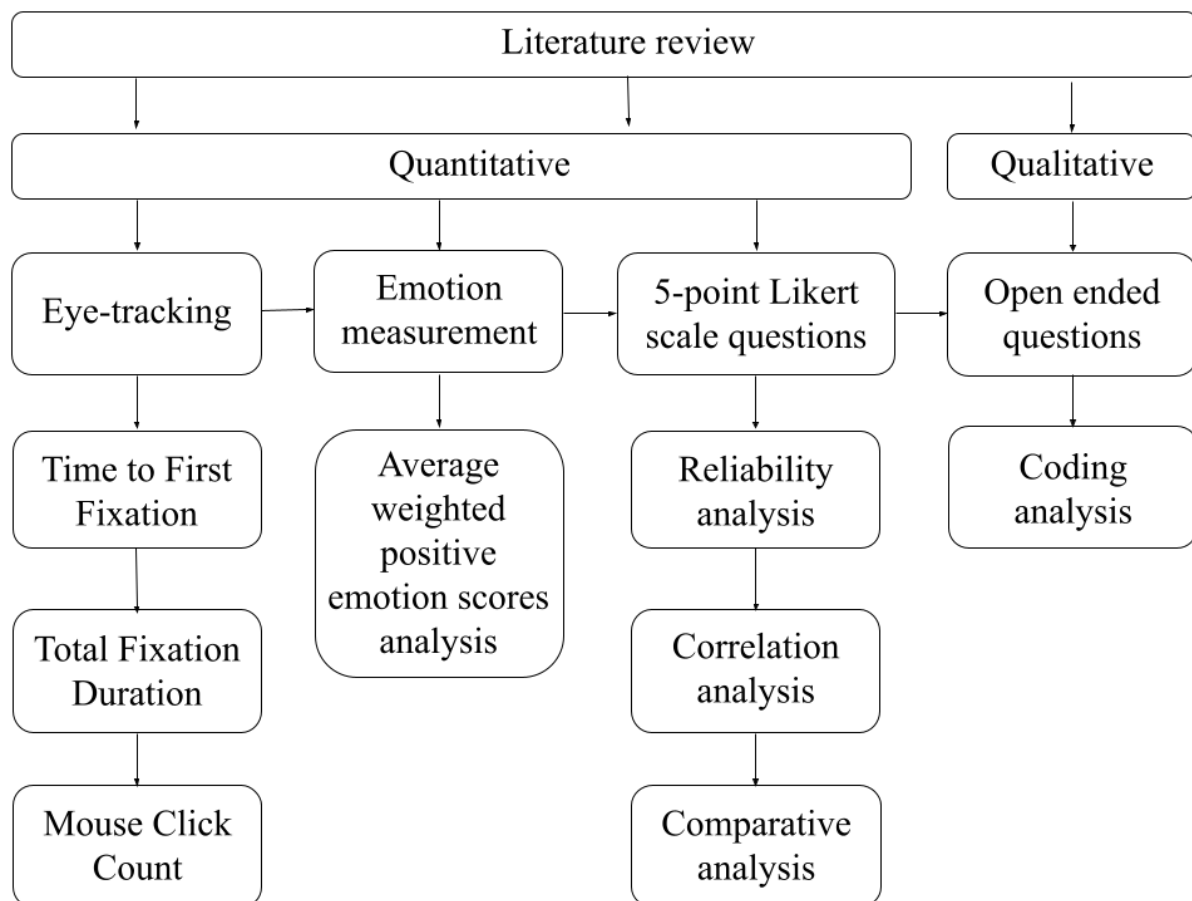


Figure 2. The methodology of the empirical research of current study

Source: Compiled by author

All in all, the methodology used in this research is presented. The data, results, interpretation of findings and generalization are performed in the next subchapter.

2.2. Data and results

For analysing experimental results, the author highlighted 5 Areas of Interest (AOIs) on each experiment design: social media influencer, username, likes, comments, shares. Time to First Fixation, Total Fixation Duration and Mouse Click Count metrics were analysed.

Time to First Fixation (TFF) refers to the duration from the moment a stimulus appears on the screen until a participant's gaze first fixates on a predefined Area of Interest

(Tobii AB, 2017). This metric indicates how quickly an element captures attention, with shorter times suggesting higher visual attention.

First of all, the descriptive statistics of Time to First Fixation is presented in Table 3. The number of participants who noticed specific AOIs, mean and standard deviation values of TFF on AOIs across different posts (conditions) are presented.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of Time to First Fixation (TFF) on AOIs across different conditions

AOIs	Conditions	N	Mean	Std. dev.
Social media influencer	Mega influencer + high engagement	30	0,58	0,75
	Mega influencer + low engagement	30	0,54	0,55
	Micro influencer + high engagement	30	0,11	0,15
	Micro influencer + low engagement	30	0,08	0,11
Username	Mega influencer + high engagement	16	2,82	2,13
	Mega influencer + low engagement	14	1,47	1,45
	Micro influencer + high engagement	20	2,42	1,81
	Micro influencer + low engagement	14	2,59	2,56
Likes	Mega influencer + high engagement	10	3,31	1,92
	Mega influencer + low engagement	7	4,04	1,31
	Micro influencer + high engagement	9	2,53	1,31
	Micro influencer + low engagement	9	3,66	1,72
Comments	Mega influencer + high engagement	11	2,75	1,65
	Mega influencer + low engagement	9	4,08	1,18
	Micro influencer + high engagement	11	2,49	1,48
	Micro influencer + low engagement	11	3,56	1,59
Shares	Mega influencer + high engagement	9	3,67	1,79
	Mega influencer + low engagement	10	4,66	1,24
	Micro influencer + high engagement	9	2,76	1,54
	Micro influencer + low engagement	8	3,01	1,83

Note: "AOIs" refers to "Areas of Interest"

Source: Compiled by author based on Time to First Fixation results

As the sample is small (N=30) and the normality check was violated, Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to find out if there are any statistically significant differences in Time to First Fixation (TFF) on each AOI across four conditions. Based on the results, only the "Social media influencer" Area of Interest (AOI) showed a statistically significant difference in TFF across four conditions ($H(3) = 57,536, p < ,001$). There were no significant differences in TFF revealed on AOIs "Username", "Likes", and "Shares". Although, the TFF on AOI "Comments" also had no significant difference across conditions, the p-value is very close to the significance threshold ($p=0,052$), which remains an interesting result. (Table 4)

Table 4

Differences in Time to First Fixation (TFF) on AOIs across different conditions

AOIs	Conditions	Kruskal-Wallis H	p-value
Social media influencer	Mega influencer + high engagement	57,536	<,001***
	Mega influencer + low engagement		
	Micro influencer + high engagement		
	Micro influencer + low engagement		
Username	Mega influencer + high engagement	4,336	,227
	Mega influencer + low engagement		
	Micro influencer + high engagement		
	Micro influencer + low engagement		
Likes	Mega influencer + high engagement	4,167	,244
	Mega influencer + low engagement		
	Micro influencer + high engagement		
	Micro influencer + low engagement		
Comments	Mega influencer + high engagement	7,732	,052
	Mega influencer + low engagement		
	Micro influencer + high engagement		
	Micro influencer + low engagement		
Shares	Mega influencer + high engagement	6,045	,109
	Mega influencer + low engagement		
	Micro influencer + high engagement		
	Micro influencer + low engagement		

Note: ***. Difference is significant at the 0,001 level; df=3

Source: Compiled by author based on Kruskal-Wallis test results

The statistically significant difference in Time to First Fixation on AOI “Social media influencer” across four conditions means that participants’ first fixated gaze at social media influencer differs in terms of time depending on the post (condition). To determine at which specific conditions the TFF on the AOI “Social media influencer” differs significantly, Mann-Whitney U tests between each pair of conditions were performed. There were demonstrated significant differences within each 4 pairs of conditions ($p < ,001$). (Table 5)

Based on the test results, we can observe no significant difference between posts of the same influencer type with different engagement level. However, there is significant difference between micro- and mega-posts with either high or low number of likes, comments and shares on them. This suggest that a social media influencer type (mega or micro) is the main factor affecting Time to First Fixation rather than the engagement level. Micro-influencers attract visual attention significantly faster than mega-influencers, regardless of engagement level. The different level of likes, comments and shares metrics, whether it is

low or high, does not have a significant effect on initial attention for either mega- or micro-influencer posts.

Table 5

Differences in TFF on AOI "Social media influencer" between each pair of conditions

Conditions	N	Mean ranks	Z	p-value (2-tailed)
Mega influencer + high engagement	30	29,27		
Mega influencer + low engagement	30	31,73	-,546	,584
Mega influencer + high engagement	30	41,08		
Micro influencer + high engagement	30	19,92	-4,725	<,001***
Mega influencer + high engagement	30	42,50		
Micro influencer + low engagement	30	18,50	-5,374	<,001***
Mega influencer + low engagement	30	42,22		
Micro influencer + high engagement	30	18,78	-5,231	<,001***
Micro influencer + high engagement	30	31,88		
Micro influencer + low engagement	30	29,12	-,656	,512
Mega influencer + low engagement	30	43,70		
Micro influencer + low engagement	30	17,30	-5,911	<,001***

Note: ***. Difference is significant at the 0,001 level

Source: Compiled by author based on Mann-Whitney U test results

The same procedure was completed for the Total Fixation Duration analysis. Total Fixation Duration represents the cumulative time a participant spends fixating on a specific Area of Interest (AOI) during the experiment (Tobii AB, 2017). Longer fixation durations generally indicate higher interest and attention to specific AOI.

The descriptive statistics, Kruskal-Wallis test and Mann-Whitney U test results are presented in the Appendix C, D, E and F. Based on the Kruskal-Wallis test results, AOI "Social media influencer" ($H(3) = 55,116$, $p < ,001$) and AOI "Username" ($H(3) = 9,274$, $p = ,026$) showed a statistically significant difference in Total Fixation Duration across the four conditions (see Appendix D). Then author performed several Mann-Whitney U tests to find out at which specific conditions Total Fixation Duration on "Social media influencer" and "Username" AOIs differ significantly from each other. There were revealed significant difference across 4 pairs of conditions ($p < ,001$) for "Social media influencer" AOI (see Appendix E). The statistically significant difference in Total Fixation Duration on AOI "Social Media Influencer" across the 4 conditions suggests that influencer type, specifically a micro influencer, has a stronger effect on catching viewer attention than the level of engagement. The participants spent significantly more time fixating on micro-influencers

compared to mega-influencers, regardless of whether the post had high or low engagement. This aligns with the Time to First Fixation results, where micro-influencers captured attention faster.

The Total Fixation Duration on "Username" AOI was significantly different across 2 pairs of conditions ($p=,008$; $p=,023$) (see Appendix F). The total time fixated on AOI "Username" was found significantly higher for a mega-influencers' post with low number of likes, comments, shares compared to micro-influencer's post with either high or low engagement. To provide the summarized overview of the results, the heatmaps, which reflect participants' visual attention and engagement with the different stimuli, are presented in the Appendix G.

At the final stage of experiment participants were asked to click on one out of four experimental posts which would most likely encourage them to buy clothing. Mouse Click Count tracks the number of times participants click within a specified AOI (Tobii AB, 2017). The Chi-Square test was performed to find out whether the distribution of clicks across the four different posts differed significantly from what would be expected by chance.

The results reflect that there is no statistically significant evidence to suggest that participants preferred any particular post in terms of encouraging them to buy ($p= ,779$). Based on the number of clicks, mega-influencer's post with high engagement is considered the most attractive among other posts. (Table 6)

Table 6

Mouse Click Count

AOIs	N	Chi-Square	df	p-value
Mega influencer and high engagement	12	0,500	2	,779
Mega influencer and low engagement	4			
Micro influencer and high engagement	7			
Micro influencer and low engagement	7			

Note: statistically significant difference is considered at 0,05 level

Source: Compiled by author based on Chi-square test results

To sum up, the descriptive statistics together with statistical tests provide an illustration of social media influencer catching the quickest and longest attention, while engagement metrics such as likes, comments, shares were not viewed much by Generation Z's participants (see Appendix G). The participants fixated significantly faster and much longer on micro-influencers compared to mega-influencers, regardless of engagement

metrics. In addition, within the same influencer type category (mega- or micro-), there was no significant difference in TFF between high and low engagement conditions. This suggests that influencer type plays a crucial role in capturing initial visual attention and engagement metrics may be secondary to influencer. These results aligns with Munsch (2021) who said that social media influencers who are respected and admired by Gen Z, capture their interest. Finally, results demonstrate a higher attention to the username on mega-influencer's post with low engagement compared to micro-influencer with either low or high engagement. This suggests that low engagement on a mega-influencer's post may arouse suspicion, leading users to check who posted.

Together with eye-tracking metrics, the author had a chance to track positive emotional responses to different stimulus. The Table 7 provides the main outcome of this measurement.

Table 7

Positive emotion measurement results

Stimulus	Mean
Micro-influencer with high level of engagement	1,15
Mega-influencer with high level of engagement	1,04
Micro-influencer with low level of engagement	0,82
Mega-influencer with low level of engagement	0,99

Note: N=30

Source: Compiled by author

Based on the average weighted positive emotion scores, micro-influencer with high level of engagement (1,15) and mega-influencer with high level of engagement (1,04) elicited the higher positive emotions compared to the average by 15% and 4% respectively, indicating they resonated more positively with participants. Conversely, micro-influencer with low engagement (0,82) and mega-influencer with low engagement (0,99) scored below the average, suggesting they generated less positive emotion. The findings aligns with Kuan, Zhong, and Chau (2014) who investigated that "like" information evoke positive emotional responses. Also, results confirm the study by Li, Vafeiadis, Xiao, & Yang (2020) who found that high number of engagement metrics make the ads seem more convincing and reduce negative emotions compared to low engagement. This suggests that regardless of influencer size, the number of engagement metrics significantly impacts the emotional response of the audience, with high engagement causing more positive emotion and vice versa.

The second part of this research was analysis of the online survey. The total of 171 responses were collected. However, 10 respondents indicated that they do not use social media and/or make purchases on social media, particularly Instagram platform, making their answers not relevant for the research. Hence, they were excluded from the analysis, and the responses of 161 Generation Z representatives were analysed. Among them, 30 individuals had previously participated in the neuro-marketing experiment, conducted as part of this study. Their answers might have been biased by residual exposure effects from the experimental stimuli. Besides, to examine whether their responses could be analyzed together with those of the non-experimental participants, an Independent Samples T-test was conducted for each of the 24 survey items. The results reflected statistically significant differences in 11 items, indicating notable variation between the two groups. Based on these findings, the decision was made to analyze the responses from both groups separately. Therefore, although both groups' data were analyzed, the main conclusions and generalizations were made based on the responses of the 131 non-experimental respondents. Their answers were considered more representative of the broader Gen Z population that ensures reliability of the research. Figure 3 provides demographic information about the 131 participants.

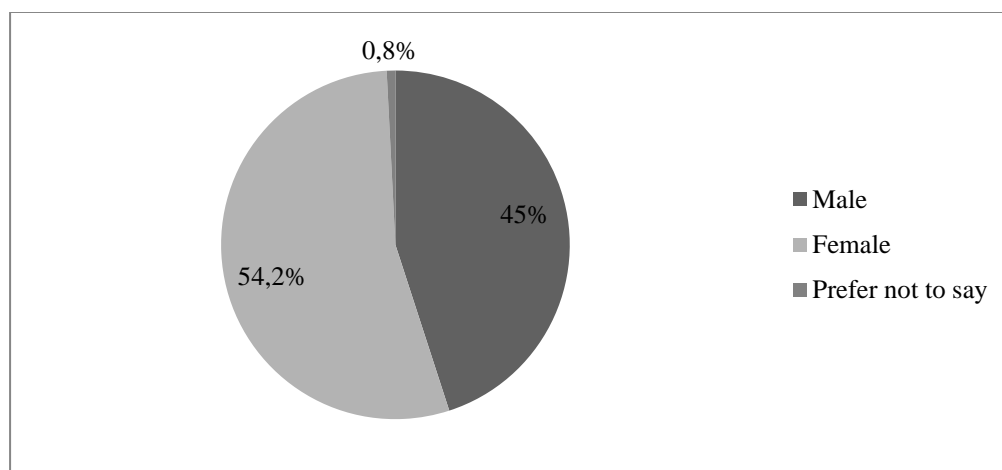


Figure 3. Gender of respondents (N=131)

Source: Compiled by author

Prior to conducting the main analysis, several steps were taken to prepare the data and check the validity of the measurement tools. Firstly, reverse-coded questions were recoded to ensure that all items consistently measured the same underlying factor. The negatively worded statements were recoded so that higher scores indicated higher relationship to

purchase intention. Secondly, the items were grouped into five factors that relate to purchase intention: bandwagon cues (likes, comments, shares), electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM), social media influencer and its subcategories of mega- and micro-influencer. Thirdly, reliability analysis was performed to assess the internal consistency of item scales used to measure each factor (Table 8).

Table 8

Reliability analysis of measurement tools

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Bandwagon cues	,851	8
e-WOM	,877	5
Social media influencer	,759	6
Micro-influencer	,850	3
Mega-influencer	,856	2

Source: Compiled by author

From the Table 8, Cronbach's alpha values are above 0,7 each, which suggests acceptable internal consistency of determined factors. Following the reliability assessment, descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the results of responses and provide the general picture of the respondents' agreement with each construct, where 1 is "Strongly disagree" and 5 is "Strongly agree" (Table 9).

Table 9

Descriptive statistics of studied variables

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Std. deviation
Bandwagon cues	1,00	4,63	2,50	2,52	,87
e-WOM	1,00	4,33	4,00	4,06	,89
Social media influencer	1,00	5,00	2,33	2,37	,75
Micro-influencer	1,00	5,00	3,00	3,08	1,13
Mega-influencer	1,00	5,00	2,00	2,02	1,00

Note: N=131

Source: Compiled by author

Table 9 reflects that the electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) received the highest average score (mean=4,06) and a median of 4,00. This suggests a strong positive relationship between positive peer reviews, shared opinions about the product, and Gen Z's likelihood to make a purchase. The relatively low standard deviation (,89) suggests that this agreement is consistent among respondents. The bandwagon cues (likes, shares, comments) had a

moderate average score (mean=2,52) and a median of 2,50. This shows that the relationship between visible engagement and purchase intention is weaker, with more neutral responses and moderate variability (std. deviation =,87). The social media influencer with a mean value of 2,37 indicates the weakest relationship between influencer promotion and purchase intention. In terms of the type of social media influencers, micro-influencers received a higher average score (mean=3,08) than mega-influencers (mean=2,02), suggesting that Gen Z respondents are more likely to consider purchases recommended by micro-influencers, possibly due to perceived relatability and credibility.

Afterwards, the correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between the three main variables: bandwagon cues, social media influencer, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). The moderate positive correlation was observed only between bandwagon cues and social media influencer, indicating that the relations to Generation Z's purchase intention between these two factors are moderately close. (Table 10)

Table 10

Correlation between the main variables

Column head	Bandwagon cues	Social media influencer	e-WOM
Bandwagon cues	1,00		
Social media influencer	,457**	1,00	
e-WOM	-,119	-,031	1,00

Note: N=131; **. Correlation is significant at 0,01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Compiled by author based on Spearman's correlation coefficient results

Furthermore, to examine whether there were significant differences in the relationship to purchase intention between bandwagon cues, social media influencers, and e-WOM, the Friedman's test was performed. Also, Kendall's W test was used to measure the strength of agreement among respondents in ranking this relationships. (Table 11)

Table 11

The relationship to purchase intention between variables

Variables	Mean Rank	df	Chi-Square	Kendall's W	p-value
Bandwagon cues	1,64				
e-WOM	2,79	2	126,558	,483	<,001***
Influencer	1,57				

Note: N=131; ***. Correlation is significant at 0,001 level (2-tailed).

Source: Compiled by author based on Friedman test and Kendall's-W test results

According to the results, the Friedman test reflected a significant result ($\chi^2(2)=126,558$; $p < ,001$), indicating that there is statistically significant difference in the relationship to purchase intention between bandwagon cues, social media influencers, and e-WOM. The mean ranks show that e-WOM is considered the most related factor to Generations Z's likelihood to purchase among all factors. Kendall's W value of 0,483 suggests a moderate level of agreement among respondents regarding the relative relationship to purchase intention between bandwagon cues, social media influencers, and e-WOM. Finally, to determine which specific pairs of factors differ significantly, post-hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted using Wilcoxon signed-rank tests (Table 12).

Table 12

The relationship to purchase intention between pairs of variables

Pairs in comparison	Z	p-value
Social media influencer – Bandwagon cues	-1,70	,089
e-WOM – Bandwagon cues	-8,82	<,001***
e-WOM – Social media influencer	-9,26	<,001***
Mega-influencer – Micro-influencer	-6,60	<,001***

Note: N=131; ***. Correlation is significant at 0,001 level.

Source: Compiled by author

As shown in Table 12, several significant differences were revealed. Specifically, e-WOM was found to have a significantly greater relationship to purchase intention compared to both bandwagon cues ($Z = -8,82$, $p < 0,001$) and social media influencer ($Z = -9,26$, $p < 0,001$). However, no significant difference was found in the relationship to purchase intention between social media influencer and bandwagon cues ($Z = -1,70$, $p = 0,089$). Additionally, micro-influencers showed a significantly greater relationship than mega-influencers ($Z = -6,60$, $p < 0,001$). The main findings stress the close relationship of e-WOM to purchase intention within the Generation Z demographic.

For the analysis of the 30 participants, the same analysis procedure was applied. The reliability of measurement tools was satisfied for all variables with Cronbach's Alpha value in a range between 0,768 and 0,896. The descriptive statistics showed that the order of means for the variables remains consistent across both samples, from highest to lowest, which indicates similar patterns in the relationship of these factors to purchase intention in both groups. Unlike the results from analysis of 131 respondents, the correlation analysis reflected a significant positive correlation between e-WOM and bandwagon cues (coef.=0,374,

$p=0,041$). However, there were no significant correlation between social media influencer and either electronic Word-of-Mouth (coef.=0,084, $p=0,660$) or bandwagon cues (coef.=0,243, $p=0,196$). Also, the Friedman's and Kendall's tests highlighted statistically significant differences between 3 main variables ($p<0,001$) with moderate level of agreement (Kendall's $W = 0,360$). Furthermore, findings from the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests reflected that e-WOM makes generation Z more likely to buy product compared to bandwagon cues ($Z = -3,77$, $p<0,001$) and social media influencer ($Z = -4,06$, $p<0,001$). Additionally, there was no statistically significant difference in relationship to purchase intention revealed between bandwagon cues and social media influencer ($Z = -1,23$, $p=0,056$). Micro-influencers tend to drive more purchase intention compared to mega-influencers ($Z = -2,99$, $p=0,003$). Hence, patterns in results remained roughly similar to the larger sample, which enhance the generalizability of findings across different sample sizes.

In summary, the electronic-Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM), particularly positive consumers' reviews and feedback on products, were found to have a close relationship to Gen Z purchase intention, which cannot be stated about high bandwagon cues (likes, comments, shares) and social media influencer. This confirms the findings of Nadroo, Lim, and Naqshbandi (2024), Sulthana and Vasantha (2019) and Romadhoni, Akhmad, Naldah, Herlina, and Rossanty (2023), who investigated that e-WOM reinforces the bandwagon effect by encouraging purchases based on others' shared experiences. At the same time, the results contradicts Pratama, Ilham, Sutomo, Hermawan, and Wardhana (2024), who found no significant effect of customer reviews on intention to buy. Gen Z social media users prefer e-WOM to direct their intention to buy and rely on authentic people's feedback as a more trustworthy source of information.

Furthermore, the findings show Generation Z neutrality regarding the relationship between high bandwagon cues and purchase intention, as well as the relationship between social media influencers and purchase intention. This contrasts with Bharti (2021) who found that high engagement metrics and influencer appeal positively influence purchase intention. However, it supports the findings of Li, Vafeiadis, Xiao, and Yang (2020), who concluded that although high number of likes and comments make ads more credible, they do not significantly influence behavioral intention or attitudes toward the ad. In addition, findings do not support the results of Rosli, Johar, Lazim, Hashim, & Juhari (2024) who investigated the strong influence of likes and shares on purchase intention, compared to comments with people's feedback.

Although the social media influencer did not show the relationship to willingness to

buy, this study reveals that Generation Z is more likely to adopt micro-influencers' product recommendations compared to those from mega-influencers. It confirms the results of Park, Lee, Xiong, Septianto, and Seo (2021), who observed micro-influencers to be more persuasive than mega-influencers due to perceived authenticity. Additionally, as previous finding was stated for hedonic products, this study extend it for usual products. It aligns with Kim (2020), who found that micro-influencers produce stronger purchase intention and brand attitudes among young consumers. Besides, it supports Conde and Casais (2023), who demonstrated that micro-influencers create a close connection with the audience, which drive purchase intention more directly than the opinion leadership of mega-influencer does. In contrast, it contradicts Furtana and Öğüt (2024), who concluded that mega-influencers have a stronger impact on Generation Z. The findings of this study highlights a preference for relatability and authenticity over influencer great popularity or recognition.

To supplement the analysis, this study provides additional insights by analyzing open-ended responses, allowing for a clearer understanding of the underlying reasons behind the observed findings from the Likert-scale results.

The Gen Z inclined to perceive influencers' recommendations as paid advertisements (mean=4,17). Hence, terms "recommendation" and "promotion" will be used interchangeably to align with the responses. The analysis of Generation Z's perceptions of social media engagement metrics and influencers offers in-depth understanding of what stays behind the consumer decision-making. The findings were categorized into both positive and negative perceptions of engagement metrics as well as social media influencers.

On the one hand, Generation Z associates high engagement on social media post with positive qualities such as trustworthiness, credibility and a sense of safety. The high numbers of likes, comments and shares are also linked to crowd approval, popularity of the post and high demand for the promoted product. These metrics are perceived to indicate genuine interest in the product, assurance of its quality, and reliability of the content shared by social media influencers. Besides, one respondent noted that "seeing many likes and comments evokes the feeling of the trust relationship between influencers and their audience". (Table 13)

On the other hand, some respondents expressed skepticism toward high engagement metrics. This negative perception stems from distrust in social media influencers who rely on bots, artificial methods to fake the appearance of popularity. Hence, reading thoughtful comments makes them feel more confident about a product's quality, since they provide clear insights that numbers alone cannot. The results showed that Generation Z generally

value genuine, detailed feedback from other users in comments over simple indicators like number of likes, comments and shares. This aligns with Arora and Mail (2018), who found that the quality of reviews positively influences purchasing decisions, while their quantity showed no significant effect.

Table 13

The perception of social media engagement metrics and influencer by Generation Z

Themes	Codes	Categories	
Perception of social media engagement metrics	Confidence	Positive perception of high engagement	
	Trustworthiness		
	Credibility		
	“Safe” feeling		
	Popularity		
	Crowd approval		
	High demand		
	People’s interest in the product		
	Guarantee of the product quality		
	Reliability of the content		
	Trust relationship with the audience		
	Artificial		Negative perception of high engagement
	Fake		
	Perception of social media influencer		Untrustworthiness
Irrelevancy			
Low interest in the product			
Poor quality of the product			
Not worth buying			
Dissatisfaction with the product			
Scam			
Fraud			
Inactive followers			
Trustworthiness		Positive perception	
Good reputation			
Popularity			
Professionalism			
Quick delivery of information			
The ability to find out properties of the product			
Reflection of the practicality of the product	Negative perception		
Personal approach to product promotion			
Non-genuine opinion			
Biased promotion	Negative perception		
High amount of paid ads			

Source: compiled by author based on Generation Z’s open responses

The low engagement metrics also carry negative perception for Generation Z. They are associated with irrelevance, lack of interest in the product, poor quality, dissatisfaction,

and even scams. Respondents tend to think that low engagement often indicates a lack of credibility or value in both the influencer and the product being promoted. (Table 13)

When it comes to perceptions of social media influencers, Generation Z values traits such as trustworthiness, good reputation, popularity, and professionalism. Social media influencers' recommendations give a valuable opportunity to acknowledge with the product quickly by learning its properties and examine its practicality. Gen-Z's trust is often conditional on whether the social media influencer appears authentic and not just promoting a product for payment. The big amount of paid advertisements makes Generation Z think that the promotion is biased and non-genuine, thus not trusting their recommendations.

In summary, Generation Z's perceptions of social media engagement metrics and influencers are connected to their desire for authenticity and trustworthiness. While high engagement can signal popularity and credibility, it can also raise doubts if perceived as artificial. Similarly, influencers who prioritize genuine interactions over excessive promotions are more likely to gain the Generation Z's trust. These findings emphasize that real users' feedback and influencer authenticity play more influencing role on Generation Z's purchase intention rather than solely quantity of engagement metrics and presence of social media influencer.

The Table 14 shows that Generation Z social media users prefer recommendations from micro-influencers over those from mega-influencers.

The micro-influencers seem trustworthy and transparent to Generation Z people who believe that micro-influencers know a lot about the product promoted and share their personal experience with the product. The respondents found that micro-influencers, who usually work with a smaller and more engaged audience, tend to offer recommendations that feel more honest and sincere which evoke "feeling of friend's recommendation". It aligns with Conde and Casais (2023), who mentioned strong close connections between audience and micro-influencers. (Table 14)

The mega-influencers, who are perceived as popular and recognizable, make Generation Z to be more confident in a promoted product. However, Gen-Z rely solely on mega-influencers they follow and trust. Furthermore, Gen-Z tends to think that mega-influencers might have stricter standards when choosing products for promotion, as they have a high responsibility for the promoted product. In addition, respondents believe that mega-influencers "cannot lie or mislead in an open manner" as it is crucial for them to have a good reputation. (Table 14)

Table 14

Perception of micro-/mega- influencer by Generation Z

Themes	Codes	Categories
Perception of micro-influencer	Trustworthiness	Positive perception
	Truthfulness	
	Honesty	
	Authenticity	
	Sincerity	
	Transparency	
	Genuine opinion	
	Close to followers	
	Feeling of friend's recommendation	
	Awareness about the promoted product	
Personal product experience		
Perception of mega-influencer	Promotion of less quality products	Negative perception
	Indiscriminate promotion	
	Desire to solely get more income	
	Reliability	
Perception of micro-influencer	Recognition	Positive perception
	Popularity	
	Confidence in a product	
	Cannot lie or mislead in an open manner	
	High responsibility for the promoted product	
	Unjustified recommendations	
Perception of mega-influencer	Promotion motivation is driven solely by income	Negative perception
	Quality of the promoted product disregard	

Source: compiled by author based on Generation Z's open responses

From negative perception perspective, Generation Z claimed that both micro- and mega-influencers' motivation behind giving recommendations is solely getting money. Such motivation may lead to unjustified recommendations by mega-influencers who disregard the quality of the promoted product. The limited number of collaboration offers, combined with a desire for receiving money, may lead a micro-influencer to promote lower-quality products. (Table 14)

To conclude, Generation Z perceive micro-influencers as authentic, who give honest, friend-like product recommendations, while mega-influencers give a sense of reliability and confidence due to their popularity and recognition. However, both types of social media influencer might be seen as primarily motivated by money, which raises concerns about the genuineness of their recommendations and the quality of the promoted product.

To continue with the analysis of open responses from Generation Z, the author highlights main factors that have an effect on the purchase intention on social media, in terms

of social media engagement metrics and influencers. These were categorized into friend's approval, people's experience and feedback, influencer's recognition, and influencer's experience and promotion. (see Table 15)

Table 15

Influencing factors on Generation Z's purchasing decision on social media

Themes	Codes	Categories
Social media engagement metrics and e-WOM	Friend's liking	Friend's approval
	Friend's sharing	
	People's recommendations	People's experience and feedback
	People's opinions/thoughts about the product	
	People's experience with the brand/ product	
	Reviews on the product	
	Honest feedback of real people	
	People's reactions	
Number of people who bought the product	Influencer's recognition	
Photos of product from previous customers		
Social media influencers	Solid background	Influencer's recognition
	Public recognition	
	Influencer experience and taste in the product	Influencer's experience and promotion
	Influencer brand preferences	
The quality of the product presentation/recommendation		

Source: compiled by author based on Generation Z's open responses

Friend's approval is important for Generation Z, as highlighted by the mentions of "friend's liking" and "friend's sharing" in responses. This suggests that Generation Z consumers take into account the opinions of their peers when considering a purchase. The impact of close social communities cannot be underestimated, because individuals are more likely to purchase a product if their friends approve it.

Furthermore, 81% of respondents emphasized the reliability of detailed user feedback, viewing shared opinions as a form of genuine social proof that have a weight on purchase decision. It aligns with the main finding of previous analysis, where positive electronic-Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) reflected the strongest relation to purchase intention among other factors. Gen Z relies on the collective actions of the crowd through recommendations, opinions, reviews, and feedback about the product shared by other consumers in comments. The availability of user-generated content, such as photos of product from previous customers, further reinforce their decision-making process.

The influencer's "solid background" and "public recognition" suggests that Gen Z consumers are influenced by influencers with a strong presence and credibility. The reputation and recognition of influencers might have an effect on Generation Z decision on the purchase. In addition, influencer's promotion highlights the importance of influencer's expertise, personal preferences, and the quality of their promotional content. Generation Z consumers are more likely to be interested in products that align with the influencer's tastes and are presented in a compelling manner.

To summarize the empirical findings, Generation Z's purchase intention on social media is closely related to people's opinions and reviews about the product. The social media influencer and simple indicators of engagement, such as likes, comments, and shares, did not show a relationship with the intention to buy among Generation Z. However, the results showed that posts by micro-influencers, who are perceived as more genuine and relatable, drew attention more quickly and held gaze longer than those by mega-influencers. This was extended by the survey results, which reflected that Generation Z are more likely to adopt micro-influencer recommendations rather than mega-influencer recommendations. By contrast, varying the number of likes, comments, and shares on a post had little effect on initial attention. Overall, Generation Z consumers are more likely to purchase a usual fashion product after reading real and honest positive opinions and reviews about it from other people, rather than relying on social media influencer recommendations or the visibility of high engagement through the number of likes, comments, and shares on the social media posts.

Conclusion

This study investigated the bandwagon effect drivers' relationship to Generation Z's purchase intention in social media marketing. This research addressed a notable gap in the literature: prior studies mostly focused on luxury brands or less-preferred platforms among Gen-Z consumers, overlooking ordinary fashion purchases on more relevant social media platforms like Instagram. Moreover, most of them researched the individual factors without comparative approach in their studies. By focusing on Gen-Z consumers and comparing how different bandwagon effect drivers (bandwagon cues, social media influencer and electronic-Word of Mouth) relate to purchase intention in social media marketing, the study fulfilled its aim.

First of all, various definitions of the "bandwagon effect" were introduced and compared. The different aspects mentioned in definitions were identified, specifically social conformity, conspicuous consumption, and trend conformity. Based on the conducted

synthesis analysis, the author's own generalized definition was developed. Furthermore, the primary drivers, which reinforce the bandwagon effect on social media, were examined. These bandwagon effect drivers include visible bandwagon cues (likes, shares, comments), social media influencer, and electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM). The findings from prior studies regarding these drivers were compared, analyzing their influence (or lack thereof) on purchase intention. The theoretical review was not limited to descriptive summaries but engaged in critical analysis, comparing similarities and differences in previous results, and synthesizing them to make the author's own conclusions and generalizations. The prior literature suggests that the high number of bandwagon cues (likes, comments, shares), social media influencers' recommendations, and other customer's authentic feedback and opinion can influence purchase intentions. At the same time, some findings contradicted each other and were context-dependent, which justifies the updated investigation conducted in this study.

The methodology for this research was built upon the findings and methodologies of previous studies. The empirical findings were clear and consistent across methods used. The results were analyzed using statistical program SPSS. In the eye-tracking experiment, micro-influencers captured visual attention significantly faster and for a longer total duration than mega-influencers, regardless of the number of likes, comments, or shares on the post. Varying the engagement metrics on posts had minimal effect on initial attention, as they were not much viewed by participants. The Likert-scale survey results supported these results further. Among Gen Z respondents, positive customers' reviews and feedback (e-WOM) showed the closest relationship to purchase intention. In contrast, bandwagon cues (likes, comments, shares) and social media influencer did not show the close relationship to purchase intention. The recommendations from micro-influencers were rated substantially higher than those from mega-influencers, reinforcing the importance of authenticity and relatability, proved by open-ended insights. The open-ended survey responses added qualitative depth. The participants perceived high engagement metrics as an indicator of popularity and credibility but were also skeptical of them, perceiving as artificial ones. The majority of respondents emphasized that detailed opinions and reviews in comment section provides genuine feedback about the product, which increased their confidence in purchase intention. They described micro-influencers as more "trustworthy" sources with promotion and recommendations that feel like a friend's advice, while mega-influencers were seen as more professional but strongly biased by paid promotions.

All in all, Generation Z consumers in this study were more inclined to make purchase of an usual fashion product (e. g. clothing) based on real positive users' feedback rather than relying on high numbers of likes, comments, shares or social media influencer recommendations. This conclusion addresses the thesis's aim and completes the research tasks: the bandwagon effect and its drivers were clearly defined, relevant literature reviewed, and new data collected and analyzed. The original contribution lies in the mixed-methods approach (combining neuromarketing, quantitative, and qualitative tools), which extends prior research and advances understanding of Gen Z consumer behavior in social media marketing.

However, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size, although adequate, is relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the respondents came from a few nations, restricting the applicability of the results to Gen-Z consumers in other cultural or geographical contexts, where social media usage patterns and the bandwagon effect behavior may differ significantly. The experimental stimuli did not include any textual elements under the social media influencer post, such as comments content or influencer's promotional text, so the effect of users' feedback and direct influencer's promotion on attention was not captured. The study did not investigate Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), a relevant psychological factor, due to the complexity of its measurement. Moreover, in the neuromarketing experiment, participants' interest in the product itself might also captured attention, stressing the importance of highlighting product as a separate variable and compare bandwagon effect drivers and product itself in the future researches.

Future research could incorporate textual feedback in comment section into neuromarketing stimuli to align findings with survey results. Future studies could also introduce Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) triggers, such as calls to action, into the experimental design to evaluate their direct influence on catching attention and purchase intention. These limitations highlight opportunities for future research to address these gaps.

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APPENDIX A

The summary of previous findings about the influence of the bandwagon effect drivers on purchase intention in social media

The bandwagon drivers influence on purchase intention

Authors	Engagement metrics (number of likes/comments/shares)	Social media influencer	Electronic-Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM)
Furinto, Tamara, Maradona, & Gunawan (2023)	N/A	+	N/A
Shamim, Azam, & Islam (2024)	N/A	+	N/A
Bharti (2021)	+	+	N/A
Zafar, Qiu, Li, Wang, & Shahzad (2021)	+	+	N/A
Nadroo, Lim, & Naqshbandi (2024)	N/A	N/A	+
Sulthana & Vasantha (2019)	N/A	N/A	+
Romadhoni, Akhmad, Naldah, Putu, & Rossanty (2023)	N/A	N/A	+
Li, Vafeiadis, Xiao, & Yang (2020)	- (likes and comments)	N/A	N/A
Rosli, Johar, Lazim, Hashim, & Juhari (2024)	+ (likes and shares); - (comments)	N/A	N/A
Pratama, Ilham, Sutomo, Hermawan, & Wardhana (2024)	N/A	-	-

Note: “+” means that the specific bandwagon driver showed influence on purchase intention;

“-” means that the specific bandwagon driver showed no influence on purchase intention in the previous studies; “N/A” means the driver was not investigated in the particular study

Source: Compiled by author based on sources in the table

APPENDIX B

Likert-scale questions for a survey

Measurement tools for Likert-scale questions analysis

Factors	Items	Theoretical basis
Engagement metrics	High social media engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares) makes me think that "if so many others think this is good, then it must be good"	Li, Vafeiadis, Xiao, & Yang, (2020)
	A high number of likes, comments, shares on Instagram ads convinces me more to purchase the product (e. g. usual clothing)	
	I do not consider a high number of likes, comments, and shares on the influencer's post on Instagram as an indicator that a promoted product (e. g. usual clothing) is worth buying. (R)	
	A high number of likes, comments, shares on Instagram ads leads me to impulsive purchasing of the product (e. g. usual clothing)	Zafar, Qiu, Li, Wang, & Shahzad (2021)
	A small number of likes, comments, shares on the influencer's post on Instagram makes me less interested in buying the recommended product (e. g. usual clothing).	Based on eye-tracking results
	I do not pay attention to how many likes, comments, shares an influencer's post has on Instagram when making a purchase of the recommended product (e. g. usual clothing). (R)	
	A high number of likes, comments, and shares on a micro-influencer's promotional post makes me more likely to purchase a product (e. g. usual clothing).	
Even if an influencer has many followers, I only trust their recommendations if their posts have high engagement (likes, comments, and shares).		
e-WOM	When people share their positive reviews about the product under the influencer's post (in comments), it makes me more inclined to buy it.	Nadrou, Lim, & Naqshbandi (2024)
	I believe other customers' positive feedback about product in comments so as to have confidence in my purchase intention.	
	I trust online reviews from other consumers when deciding to purchase a product.	Sulthana & Vasantha (2019)
	The detailed positive users' reviews about the product influences my likelihood to purchase it.	Arora and Mail (2018)
Social media influencer	The opinions about the product shared by people under the influencer's post (in comments) do not affect my intention to buy it. (R)	Rosli, Johar, Lazim, Hashim, & Juhari (2024)
	The social media influencers' recommendations reinforces my desire to purchase promoted product (e. g. usual clothing).	Bharti, (2021)
	I believe that the social media influencer (I follow)	

	knows a lot about the product/service endorsed.	
	I believe that the social media influencer (I follow) is competent to promote the product/service.	Shamim, Azam, & Islam (2024)
	Promotional post from influencer I trust leads me to make the <u>impulsive</u> purchase of the product (e. g. usual clothing).	
	I want to buy a product (e.g. clothing) because it is worn by influencer.	Furinto, Tamara, Maradona, & Gunawan (2023)
	When social media influencer promote a product, it increases the likelihood of me buying it (e. g. usual clothing).	Bharti (2021)
Micro-influencer	I am more likely to trust micro-influencers recommendations as they are more authentic about the products they promote (e.g., usual clothing) than mega influencers.	Park, Lee, Xiong, Septianto, & Seo (2021)
	I find micro influencers are more authentic than mega-influencer when it comes to promoting products (e.g., usual clothing).	
	Micro-influencers who actively engage with products in their posts strengthen my intention to purchase products.	Kim (2020)
Mega-influencer	I am more likely to adopt recommendations from mega-influencer because of their greater popularity.	Conde & Casais (2023)
	The recognizability of a mega influencer does not make me more likely to adopt their recommendations. (R)	

Note: "R" refers to "reverse-coded"

Source: Compiled by author

APPENDIX C

The descriptive statistics of Total Fixation Duration (TFD)

Descriptive statistics of TFD on AOIs across different conditions

AOIs	Conditions	N	Mean	Std. dev.
Social media influencer	Mega influencer + high engagement	30	1,94	0,83
	Mega influencer + low engagement	30	1,93	0,99
	Micro influencer + high engagement	30	3,71	3,71
	Micro influencer + low engagement	30	4,12	4,12
Username	Mega influencer + high engagement	16	1,1	0,67
	Mega influencer + low engagement	14	1,38	0,86
	Micro influencer + high engagement	20	0,84	0,56
	Micro influencer + low engagement	14	0,65	0,5
Likes	Mega influencer + high engagement	10	0,36	0,2
	Mega influencer + low engagement	7	0,4	0,18
	Micro influencer + high engagement	9	0,55	0,37
	Micro influencer + low engagement	9	0,3	0,2
Comments	Mega influencer + high engagement	11	0,39	0,23
	Mega influencer + low engagement	9	0,43	0,35
	Micro influencer + high engagement	11	0,32	0,24
	Micro influencer + low engagement	11	0,3	0,25
Shares	Mega influencer + high engagement	9	0,43	0,39
	Mega influencer + low engagement	10	0,27	0,23
	Micro influencer + high engagement	9	0,26	0,15
	Micro influencer + low engagement	8	0,31	0,16

Note: "AOIs" refers to "Areas of Interest"; "TFD" refers to "Total Fixation Duration"

Source: Compiled by author based on Total Fixation Duration results

APPENDIX D

The differences in Total Fixation Duration (TFD) on AOIs across different conditions

Differences in Total Fixation Duration on AOIs across different conditions

AOIs	Conditions	Kruskal-Wallis H	p-value
Social media influencer	Mega influencer + high engagement	55,166	<,001***
	Mega influencer + low engagement		
	Micro influencer + high engagement		
	Micro influencer + low engagement		
Username	Mega influencer + high engagement	9,274	,026*
	Mega influencer + low engagement		
	Micro influencer + high engagement		
	Micro influencer + low engagement		
Likes	Mega influencer + high engagement	2,989	,393
	Mega influencer + low engagement		
	Micro influencer + high engagement		
	Micro influencer + low engagement		
Comments	Mega influencer + high engagement	1,914	,590
	Mega influencer + low engagement		
	Micro influencer + high engagement		
	Micro influencer + low engagement		
Shares	Mega influencer + high engagement	2,123	,547
	Mega influencer + low engagement		
	Micro influencer + high engagement		
	Micro influencer + low engagement		

Note: *. Difference is significant at the 0,05 level; ***. Difference is significant at the 0,001 level; df=3

Source: Compiled by author based on Kruskal-Wallis test results

APPENDIX E

Total Fixation Duration on AOI "Social media influencer"

Differences in Total Fixation Duration on AOI "Social media influencer" between each pair of conditions

Conditions	N	Mean ranks	Z	p-value (2-tailed)
Mega influencer + high engagement	30	30,57		
Mega influencer + low engagement	30	30,43	-,030	,976
Mega influencer + high engagement	30	19,17		
Micro influencer + high engagement	30	41,83	-5,027	<,001***
Mega influencer + high engagement	30	18,63		
Micro influencer + low engagement	30	42,37	-5,263	<,001***
Mega influencer + low engagement	30	18,97		
Micro influencer + high engagement	30	42,03	-5,116	<,001***
Micro influencer + high engagement	30	27,42		
Micro influencer + low engagement	30	33,58	-1,368	,171
Mega influencer + low engagement	30	18,35		
Micro influencer + low engagement	30	42,65	-5,389	<,001***

Note: ***. Difference is significant at the 0,001 level

Source: Compiled by author based on Mann-Whitney U test results

APPENDIX F

Total Fixation Duration on AOI "Username"

Differences in Total Fixation Duration on AOI "Username" between each pair of conditions

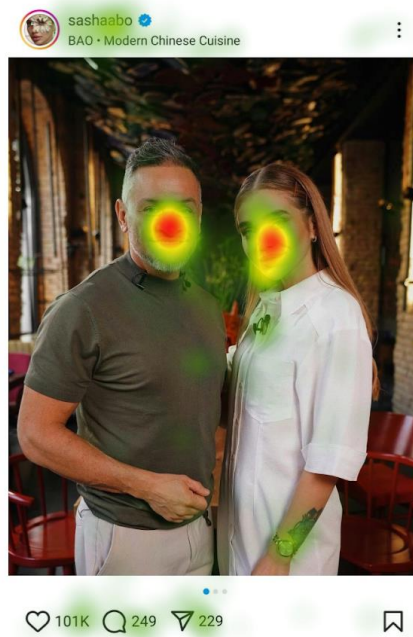
Conditions	N	Mean ranks	Z	p-value (2-tailed)
Mega influencer + high engagement	16	14,34	-,769	,442
Mega influencer + low engagement	14	16,82		
Mega influencer + high engagement	16	20,66	-1,098	,272
Micro influencer + high engagement	20	16,78		
Mega influencer + high engagement	16	18,44	-1,954	,051
Micro influencer + low engagement	14	12,14		
Mega influencer + low engagement	14	22,14	-2,275	,023*
Micro influencer + high engagement	20	14,25		
Micro influencer + high engagement	20	19,05	-1,085	,278
Micro influencer + low engagement	14	15,29		
Mega influencer + low engagement	14	18,61	-2,642	,008**
Micro influencer + low engagement	14	10,39		

Note: *. Difference is significant at the 0,05 level; **. Difference is significant at the 0,01 level

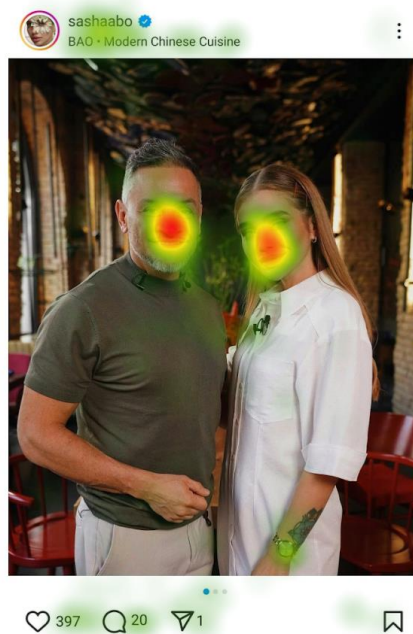
Source: Compiled by author based on Mann-Whitney U test results

APPENDIX G

Heatmaps of 4 different stimuli



The heatmap of mega-influencer's post with high engagement metrics
Source: Tobii Studio



The heatmap of mega-influencer's post with low engagement metrics
Source: Tobii Studio



The heatmap of micro-influencer's post with high engagement metrics
Source: Tobii Studio



The heatmap of micro-influencer's post with low engagement metrics
Source: Tobii Studio

Resümee

KARJAEFEKTI MÕJUTEGURITE SEOS Z-GENERATSIOONI OSTUKAVATSUSEGA SOTSIAALMEEDIA TURUNDUSES

Yuliana Kandiak

Käesolev uurimistöö uuris karjaefekti mõjutegurite seos Z-generatsiooni ostukavatsusega sotsiaalmeedia turunduses. Uurimus käsitles olulist tühimikku varasemas teaduskirjanduses: varasemad uuringud keskendusid peamiselt luksusbrändidele või Gen-Z jaoks vähem eelistatud platvormidele, jättes tähelepanuta igapäevased moeostud olulisemates sotsiaalmeediakanalites nagu Instagram. Lisaks käsitleti enamikus varasematest uuringutest üksikuid tegureid ilma võrdleva lähenemiseta. Keskendudes Gen-Z tarbijatele ja võrreldes, kuidas erinevad karjaefekti ajendid (karjaefekti näitajad, sotsiaalmeedia mõjutaja ja elektrooniline suust-suhu turundus) on seotud ostusooviga sotsiaalmeedias, täitis uurimus seatud eesmärgi.

Esmalt tutvustati ja võrreldi erinevaid “karjaefekti” määratlusi. Tuvastati erinevad määratlustes esinevad aspektid, eriti sotsiaalne konformsus, silmapaistev tarbimine ja trendide järgimine. Loodud oli autori enda üldistatud määratlus. Lisaks uuriti karjaefekti tugevdavaid peamisi ajendeid sotsiaalmeedias. Nendeks ajenditeks on nähtavad karjaefekti näitajad (meeldimised, jagamised, kommentaarid), sotsiaalmeedia mõjutajad ja elektrooniline suust-suhu turundus. Varasemate uuringute tulemusi nende tegurite kohta võrreldi ja analüüsiti nende mõju ostusoovile. Teoreetiline ülevaade ei piirdunud kirjeldustega, vaid sisaldas kriitilist analüüsi, kus võrreldi varasemate tulemuste sarnasusi ja erinevusi ning sünteesiti autori enda järeldused. Kirjanduse põhjal võivad kõrged karjaefekti näitajad, mõjutajate soovitusel ja teiste klientide ehtsad arvamused mõjutada ostusoovi. Samas olid osad tulemused vastuolulised või kontekstitundlikud, mis õigustab antud töö vajadust.

Töö meetodika tugines varasematel teadusuuringutel. Empiirilised tulemused olid meetodite lõikes järjepidevad ja selged. Tulemused analüüsiti SPSS statistikaprogrammis. Silma liikumise eksperiment näitas, et mikro-mõjutajad köitsid visuaalset tähelepanu märgatavalt kiiremini ja kauem kui mega-mõjutajad, olenemata postituses olevate meeldimiste, kommentaaride või jagamiste arvust. Karjaefekti näitajate varieerumine ei mõjutanud oluliselt esmast tähelepanu. Likerti-skaalaga uuring toetas neid tulemusi. Gen Z vastajate seas näitasid positiivsed arvustused ja tagasiside kõige tugevamat seost ostusooviga. Karjaefekti näitajad ja sotsiaalmeedia mõjutajad ei näidanud tugevat seost ostusooviga. Mikro-mõjutajate soovitusel hinnati märkimisväärselt kõrgemaks kui mega-mõjutajate omad, rõhutades autentsuse ja samastumise tähtsust, mida toetasid ka avatud vastused. Avatud

vastused lisasid kvalitatiivset sügavust. Osalejad nägid kõrgeid karjaefekti näitajaid populaarsuse ja usaldusväärseuse märgina, ent olid samas skeptilised, tajudes neid kui kunstlikke. Enamus vastajaid rõhutas, et sisukad kommentaarid ja tagasiside annavad toote kohta ehtsat infot, mis suurendas nende ostukindlust. Mikro-mõjutajaid peeti "usaldusväärsemateks" allikateks, kelle soovitusid tundusid nagu sõbra nõu, samas kui megamõjutajad tundusid professionaalsemad, ent kallutatud sponsoreeritud koostööde tõttu.

Kokkuvõttes eelistasid Gen Z tarbijad käesolevas uuringus tavamoekaupade (nt riided) ostmisel pigem ehtsat positiivset tagasisidet kui pelgalt kõrget meeldimiste, kommentaaride ja jagamiste arvu või mõjutajate soovitusi. See järeldus täidab lõputöö eesmärgi ning vastab uurimisülesannetele: karjaefekt ja selle ajendid määratleti, asjakohane kirjandus vaadati läbi ning koguti ja analüüsiti uusi andmeid. Originaalne panus seisneb kombineeritud meetodikas (neuroturundus, kvantitatiivsed ja kvalitatiivsed tööriistad), mis laiendab varasemaid uuringuid ja arusaamist Gen Z tarbijakäitumisest sotsiaalmeedias.

Siiski on sellel uurimustööl mitmeid piiranguid. Esiteks on valimi suurus, kuigi piisav, suhteliselt väike, mis võib piirata tulemuste üldistatavust. Lisaks pärinesid vastajad vaid vähestest riikidest, mis piirab tulemuste rakendatavust teiste kultuuride või piirkondade Gen Z tarbijate puhul, kus sotsiaalmeedia kasutus ja karjaefekti käitumine võivad olla erinevad. Eksperimentaalsetes stiimulites ei olnud sotsiaalmeedia postitustes tekstilisi elemente (nt kommentaaride sisu või mõjutaja reklaamtekst), seega ei saanud mõõta kasutajate tagasiside ega otsese reklaamsoovitus mõju tähelepanule. Uuring ei käsitlenud FoMO psühholoogilist tegurit, kuna selle mõõtmine on keeruline. Lisaks võib neuroturunduse eksperimendis osalejate tähelepanu köita ka toode ise, mis rõhutab vajadust käsitleda toodet edaspidi eraldi muutujana ja võrrelda selle mõju karjaefekti ajenditega.

Tulevikuuuringutes võiks neuroturunduse eksperimentidesse lisada kommentaaride tekstilist tagasisidet, et tulemused oleksid paremini kooskõlas küsitlusega. Samuti võiks lisada stiimulitesse FoMO käivitajaid, näiteks üleskutseid tegutsemiseks, et uurida nende otsest mõju tähelepanu köitmisele ja ostusoovile. Need piirangud loovad võimalusi edasisteks uurimusteks.

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