

# **ENGAGING WITH GENERATION Z - FROM FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTIONS TO ONLINE COMMUNITIES**

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**ABSTRACT**

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| <p>Abstract</p> <p>This study examines generation Z and more specifically the age group of 13-to-15-year olds, and what sort of marketing communication strategy organizations should apply in order to create awareness, engagement and interaction with generation Z. Generation Z was born to an already technology-advanced society, and this study focuses on the needs, attitudes and characteristics of generation Z in a digital environment. The study was conducted to serve a Finnish case organization, a sport federation that aims to offer help for the growing concern of inactivity and obesity among Finnish youth. The organization is planning a youth movement-project for schools, and this study aims to find the channels and tools to successfully get generation Z's attention in digital environment in order to inform and engage them to the project. The study was conducted by a combination of earlier literature regarding digital marketing and generation Z and a qualitative research. The qualitative research consisted of ten semi-structured, in-dept interviews. The findings of this study indicate that the need for acceptance and being part of a group or movement is similar to earlier generations, but it has shifted from face-to-face hangouts to online communities. Social media is undoubtedly the right channel to reach out and engage with generation Z, but organizations must be careful about the channels and the content they choose. Generation Z seems to be quite specific about the channels they use, and they have a clear preference for visual content. The importance and opportunities that influencer marketing can bring to organizations and a deeper understanding of the meaning of influencers to youth could be an interesting and beneficial subject for future research.</p> |                                 |
| Key words<br>generation Z, social media marketing, digital marketing, influencer marketing  |                                 |
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## TIIVISTELMÄ

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| <p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on ymmärtää sukupolvi Z:n, ja erityisesti 13-15 vuotiaiden nuorten tarpeita ja asenteita digitaalisessa ympäristössä, jotta organisaatiot voisivat paremmin tavoittaa ja sitouttaa nuoret digitaalisten kanavien kautta. Sukupolvi Z on syntynyt teknologisesti hyvin kehittyneeseen yhteiskuntaan, ja tutkielma pyrkii selvittämään heille luonteenomaisia tarpeita ja piirteinä digitaalisessa ympäristössä. Tutkielman tavoite on palvella suomalaista urheiluorganisaatiota, joka on aloittamassa pilottihankkeen suomalaisilla yläasteilla. Hankkeen tavoite on ottaa osaa maamme kasvavaan huoleen nuorten liikkumattomuudesta ja lisääntyvästä ylipainosta kouluissa tapahtuvan liikuntaprojektin avulla.</p> <p>Tutkielma koostuu aiemmasta kirjallisuudesta ja tutkimuksista liittyen sukupolvi Z:aan ja digimarkkinointiin, sekä kvalitatiivisesta tutkimuksesta. Kvalitatiivisessa tutkimuksessa haastateltiin kymmentä henkilöä: osa aikuisia alansa ammattilaisia, ja osa sukupolvi Z:n edustajia. Haastattelut olivat osittain jäseneltyjä: niissä kaikissa käsiteltiin samoja teemoja, mutta kysymykset riippuivat haastateltavasta ja tarpeen mukaan muokautuivat haastattelun edetessä.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että nuorilla on sukupolvista riippumatta tarve ryhmän hyväksynnälle – ajanviettotavat ovat kuitenkin siirtymässä fyysisistä tapaamisista verkko-ryhmiin ja -keskusteluihin. Sosiaalinen media on eittämättä oikea kanava nuorten tavoittamiseen, mutta organisaatioiden täytyy valita relevantit kanavat ja sisällöt huolellisesti. Visuaalisen sisällön rooli on nuorten kanssa viestimisessä suuri, ja vaikuttajamarkkinoinnilla tulee olemaan tärkeä rooli nuorten tavoittamisessa myös tulevaisuudessa. Vaikuttajamarkkinoinnin syvempi ymmärtäminen sekä sen tuomat mahdollisuudet voisivat toimia myös tärkeänä jatkotutkimuksen kohteena.</p> |                                  |
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and justifications

The focus of this study is to find out how organizations can engage and interact with generation Z through digital channels. Generation Z, the digital natives, in most studies refers to the youth born somewhere around the year 2000 (Vetter 2017). Generation Z is the first generation that was born to a technologically advanced era and due to this influence, they are often viewed as eager users of digital world and technology – the generation “does not know the world without the Internet”. (Chicca & Shellenbarger 2018, p.181).

As our world is rapidly developing, so are digital marketing platforms and tools. Karjaluoto & Mustonen (2015) explain the concept of digital marketing communications (DMC), as a process that enables organizations to build deeper relationships with their customers and where customers themselves can also create content. Digital marketing refers to all organization’s actions and operations online: social media, email, online advertising and organization websites are all examples of digital channels (HubSpot 2019). Digital marketing increases efficiency, nurtures customer communication, raises general awareness and boosts two-way interaction; it is often low cost, creates conversions, appears in front of people wherever and at a right time (HubSpot 2019, Kannan & Li 2017).

A typical Finnish teen uses Internet 31-40 hours a week, of which social media covers half, and the most common social media platforms used are WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat. Furthermore, they use three to five hours a day on their smartphones on social media and view social media as the main channel for organizations to reach out to them. (Ebrand Group 2019, Viestintäliiga 2019). A study conducted by Shatto & Erwin (2016) revealed that generation Z in the U.S. spends up to nine hours a day on their mobile phones, and a major part of their social communication happens online as well. 95% of US teens use smartphones, of which 45% state they use social media constantly (PEW Research Center 2018). This means organizations need to find new ways to reach out to today’s youth by using tools, channels and platforms popular among the generation.

The topic of this research was composed as the case company, a Finnish sport organization, is planning a youth movement -project for schools. The project’s target is to help in the growing concern of inactivity and obesity among Finnish youth. According to a survey conducted by THL (2018), one out of every four teens is overweight. Only one in every three children reaches the recommended daily activity time, however in the recent years there has been an increase in the youth joining sport clubs and being active during school breaks (Liikuntaneuvosto 2016).

One of the main reasons for increased passivity and inactivity among the youth is the increased use of technology, and this research aims to study how generation Z uses digital channels; what interests them, what motivates them and what enables two-way communication with them. The findings can potentially be used to create a marketing strategy for case organization, and furthermore help the organization to engage and inspire the youth to partake in the upcoming projects and become more active during their daily routines.

Earlier literature about generation Z and the ways they use digital and social media does exist to some extent. Besides the earlier literature, this research also includes a qualitative study where both experts as well as representatives of generation Z were interviewed. After the theoretical framework and the qualitative study, the findings are presented and analysed, and the final conclusions are declared.

## 1.2 Conceptual framework and definitions

The main variables of this research are shown in this simplified conceptual framework (Figure 1, p. 9) figure below.

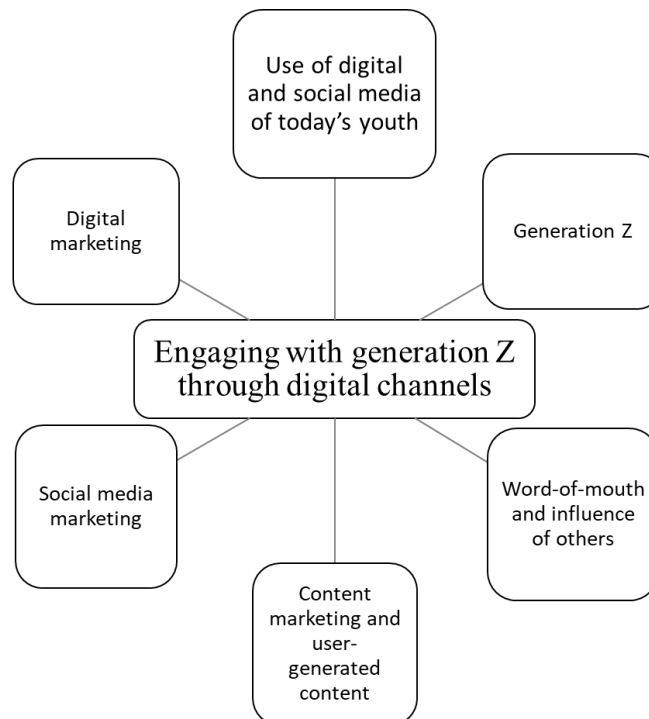


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for engaging with generation Z.

### Generation Z

Generation Z refers to the first generation born into already technology advanced environment. Although researchers differ in the exact years they define

as the raise of generation Z, most say the firsts of generation Z were born somewhere around 1995 to 2000 (Jeys 2019, Roseberry-McKibbin 2017, Wee 2017). Generation Z is comfortable with all types of technologies, as the Internet was already widely used when they were born (Miller et al. 2012, Roseberry-McKibbin 2017). Youth of generation Z has been described as tech-savvy, highly educated, globally connected and creative (Gupta & Gulati 2014, Priporas et al. 2017).

### **Digital marketing and communications**

Digital marketing was a known concept already in the 1990s, although during that time it mostly referred to the act of a business advertising their product or services to customers through digital channels (Fierro & Gavilanez 2017). Nowadays, digital marketing is a broader concept than just advertising a product with the intension of increasing sales; it is an adaptive process that technology improvements have enabled, where businesses and organizations can cooperate (create, communicate, deliver, sustain value) with their stakeholders (Kannan & Li 2017).

### **Social media marketing**

One of the main techniques of digital marketing is social media. Social media marketing can be simply defined as the use of social media channels to promote a company and its products (Nadaraja & Yazdanifard 2013). Social media platforms allow big networks of people to connect by sharing information and experiences and this has influenced the ways customers behave (Fierro & Gavilanez 2017, Lamberton & Stephen 2016). Social media is also the best channel to communicate with a youth audience, compared to more traditional methods like e-mail or a phone call (Viestintäliiga 2019).

### **Youth online usage**

Social media covers the majority of technologies and platforms that today's youth spends time on while online. In 2018, 70% of 13-17-year old Americans checked social media multiple times a day and 95% of US teens use smart phones, of which 85% use YouTube. (PEW Research Center 2018, Statista 2018). A typical Finnish teen uses Internet 31-40 hours a week, of which social media covers half, and the most common social media platforms used are WhatsApp, YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram (Ebrand Group 2019, Viestintäliiga 2019). Social media is described to enrich and complete youth's social life.



### 1.3 Research methodology & questions

The aim of this research is to reveal and analyze the online behaviour of generation Z. This research looks to find out the needs and attitude of the generation in the digital world and understand what kind of content this generation is most likely to use, appreciate and relate with. The results may be used for the strategies of organizations and companies when creating campaigns directed to generation Z.

#### Objective of the study and research questions

To find out the characteristics of generation Z as digital users and the channels and tools this generation prefers. The goal is to find out how to make the most of interacting and creating two-way communication between generation Z and organizations. Therefore, the main research question and its two sub-questions are the following;

*RQ: How being born to a technologically advanced society is reflected in the needs and attitudes of generation Z?*

*Supporting RQ: What are the key characteristics of generation Z in a digital environment?*

*Supporting RQ: What is the impact of marketing tools (such as influencer marketing, eWoM and user-generated content) in interaction and two-way communication with generation Z?*

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Generation Z

There exists a tendency of generalization and grouping of individual humans by various variables, and one of the creations is a term “generation”. Generations are identified groups of humans that share birth years, age location and significant life events at developmental stages (Dolot 2018). Generation Z refers to the first generation born into already technology advanced environment. Although researchers differ in the exact years they define as the raise of generation Z, most say the firsts of generation Z were born somewhere around 1995 to 2000 (Jeys 2019; Roseberry-McKibbin 2017; Wee 2017). Generation Z, also known as digital natives, postmillennials and centennials is the first generation that grew up with smartphones (Dolot 2018, Southgate 2017).

According to Gupta & Gulati (2014), it is the major impact of technology on generation Z's behaviour that sets them apart from previous generations. Generation Z is comfortable with all types of technologies, as the Internet was already widely used when they were born (Miller et al. 2012; Roseberry-McKibbin 2017). Roseberry-McKibbin (2017) pointed out that most of generation Z have never known the world without social media, which results in them being earlier adapters of technology compared to previous generations. Besides sleeping, media is the second biggest activity on the daily lives of generation Z; researches show that the youth describe they feel emotionally attached to the digital world (Turner 2015; Wee 2017).

Same observations were also discussed by Gupta & Gulati (2014), who argued that due to the emotional attachment the generation Z feels towards digital channels and online society, they tend to stay online huge amount of times. Wee (2017) conducted a study that showed teens using up to nine hours a day on different digital channels, and 41% of those teens used all of their screen time on mobile devices; for example, watching TV took place through a mobile device instead of a traditional TV screen. According to Dolot (2018), some even call generation Z as “Generation C”, where C stands for the word “connected”: members of generation Z are connected to the Internet, computerized, content-centric and community-oriented. Generation Z does not only use the content of Internet, they also create and control it.

#### 2.1.1 Recent generations summarized

Since around 1945 and until the establishment of generation Z, there exists three non-arguable generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials, also often referred to as Generation Y. (CGK 2016; Sandeen 2008; Strauss & Howe 1997). To better understand generation Z, it can be compared to earlier genera-

tions to acknowledge similarities and differences. There does exist known generations before 1945, but the newer ones are introduced in this research due to more similarity in economical and societal matters.

According to the Center for Generational Kinetics (2016), the three key trends shaping generations are parenting, technology and economics. Generations exhibit similar characteristics, such as communication, shopping and motivational preferences. It is vital to remember that big events can affect a generation in a certain part of the globe, influencing also the characteristics of that generation for some time.

Recognizing the driving characteristics helps organizations in communication: for instance, content and copywriting, marketing channels and marketing messages can be adjusted according to the known characteristics and preferences of the generation in question (Sandeen 2008).

In Table 1 below, the recent generations are summarized based on previous literature from CGK (2016) and Sandeen (2008).

| <b>Generation</b>        | <b>Born between</b> | <b>Trends &amp; characteristics</b>  |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Baby Boomers             | 1945 - 1965         | <i>Individualistic</i><br>Optimistic and ambitious<br>Support equal rights<br>Freedom of speech<br>Extremely work-centric;<br>driven work ethic, productive<br>Value face-to-face interactions |
| Generation X             | 1965 - 1980         | <i>Pessimistic</i><br>Economic status decreased,<br>divorce rates increased<br>Independent<br>Resourceful<br>Work-life balance<br>Higher consumer awareness<br>Family-oriented                 |
| Millennials/Generation Y | 1980 - 2000         | <i>Optimistic</i><br>Highly networked<br>Multi-taskers<br>Mission-driven<br>Focus on continuous learning<br>Confident<br>Team-oriented   |
| Generation Z             | Around 2000 -       | <i>Realistic</i><br>Tech-savvy<br>Highly educated<br>Globally connected<br>Prefer visuality<br>Teamwork & togetherness<br>Mutual respect & lower hierarchy                                     |

*Table 1. Recent generations summarized.*

### **2.1.2 Characteristics of generation Z**

Previous literature of the characteristics of generation Z is quite harmonized, and in this chapter the findings of several researchers are discussed.

Generation Z is often generalized as tech-savvy, highly educated, globally connected and creative (Gupta & Gulati 2014; Priporas et al. 2017). Generation Z is also described as “the wired generation”: they access and comprehend information fast, are very international in their perspective yet seem to be easily offended and vulnerable (Jeys 2019). Roseberry-McKibbin (2017) argued that besides being tech-oriented, generation Z is also realistic and individualistic, and a study conducted by Vision Critical (2018), revealed that generation Z feels self-assured and optimistic about their future.

Characteristics of their learning style have also been researched, but the researches show some overlapping: some researchers recognize these teens and young adults as private, preferably individually working, yet some highlight their need for interaction. Moreover, generation Z seems to prefer visual tools and gets easily bored when the subjects are not challenging or quickly enough changing (Roseberry-McKibbin 2017; Williams 2015). Generation Z expects communication to be visual, precise, easy and constantly evolving (Spooner 2018; Williams 2015). In workplace or other social settings, generation Z appreciates creativity, flexibility, mutual respect, adaptability and lower hierarchy (Peres 2018). Dolot (2018) described generation Z as a highly educated generation that appreciates changes and versatility.

Generation Z requires creative-development tactics and creative experimentation (Southgate 2017). The need for visuality was highlighted in many researches, as generation Z teens and adults are aesthetically inclined and prefer videos over written text. According to Rammopo (2016), generation Z is not prone to text heavy content and they prefer symbols and images over formal written English. Generation Z relies on communication with images, and written communication should be limited to only necessary information (Swanzen 2016). These statements are supported by a study conducted by Vision Critical (2018), which recognized generation Z's main purchasing driver being the image and aesthetic of the product or service.

Blair et al. (2015) studied the combination of youth and technology in general. They conducted a study of 16-19-year-old Italian teens, which fits in the category of generation Z. They called digital environments as ideal place for youth to communicate with friends or create new friendships. According to the study, social networking and instant messaging facilitate interactive engagement and cultivate connectedness. Peres (2018) and Swanzen (2016) also recognized “togetherness” as a personality trait among generation Z, and listed team climate and team work as important factors in generation Z's learning needs.

### 2.1.3 Generation Z in digital environment

“When I think of Generation Z, technology is the first thing that comes to mind” (Williams 2015). The youth of generation Z was born to technologically advanced, first-world environment, which impacts their media consumption and behaviour; digital channels are not just for entertainment but a big part of politics, work life and identity formation (Wee 2017). Generation Z is used to engaging and sharing information across multiple online platforms simultaneously (Gupta & Gulati 2014), and they can be described as “experts in technology” – it is integrated to every aspect of their lives (Peres 2018). Generation Z is interested in new, easy-to-use technologies and are overall heavy users of technology: they look to escape the reality in the digital world. Furthermore, their purchase experiences and intentions are heavily impacted by the digital features involved (Priporas et al. 2017).

Digital channels have enabled generation Z with numerous ways to interact, participate and control their digital behaviour – advanced innovations allow them support, encourage and create content on their own. This has created feelings of solidarity due to shared contexts and communities as well as helped the youth to shape their identities (Wee 2017). According to Wee, digital innovations have supported and encouraged sense of self and one’s place in and view of the world at large. Generation Z uses Internet and digital channels for personal networking and relationships: social networking, GPS tracking, learning apps, blogs and e-books are all popular among the generation (Gupta & Gulati 2014; Peres 2018).

For generation Z, technology is an instrument – their lifestyle is driven by it and they were born to an era of high-tech communication (Gaidhani et al. 2019; Van den Bergh & Behrer 2016). Some studies have discovered norms that characterize generation Z in digital environment:

- Strong interest in new technologies
- Instant ease of using new technologies
- Desire to feel safe
- Desire to “escape realities” to digital environment (Priporas et al. 2017; Rammopo 2016).

Especially social media use has become an integral part of life for most teens, and it is one of the key trends that shapes the whole generation Z (Gaidhani et al. 2019; Tulgan 2013). In recent years, youth social media use has evolved and become more sophisticated, as studies show the frequent use of social media among youth within and across multiple social media platforms (Kranzler & Bleakley 2019). In 2018, 70% of 13-17-year old Americans checked social media multiple times a day and 95% of US teens use smart phones, of which 85% use YouTube. (PEW Research Center 2018; Statista 2018). Although highly engaged to digital channels, especially social media and being online in general, generation Z does not seem to be as brand loyal as, for instance, millennials (Gupta & Gulati 2014; Rammopo 2016). This statement is also supported by Priporas et.

(2017), who describe the generation as innovative and creative, yet different in their consumer behaviour in comparison to earlier generations. Generation Z uses social media to, for instance, read content, browse around, listen to music, like others' content and have real-time conversations (Ebrand Group 2019).

Generation Z was born to a different era, a digitalized one, than earlier generations and therefore they behave different. One trend that is discussed in multiple researches is the need and expectation for visual media. The visual language trend is a significant part of relating and being relevant to generation Z (Rammopo 2016). One way to communicate with generation Z is to use YouTube -videos, as they appeal to two characteristics of generation Z: visuality and social media (PEW Research Center 2018; Roseberry-MicKibbin 2017). The importance of visuality is also supported in a survey focused on teens, social media and technology conducted by PEW Research Center (2018), as the survey states that 85% of US teen respondents use YouTube (See Figure 2, p. 16). Besides visuality, a sense of humour and high-quality photos attract the young audience (Viestintäliiga 2019).

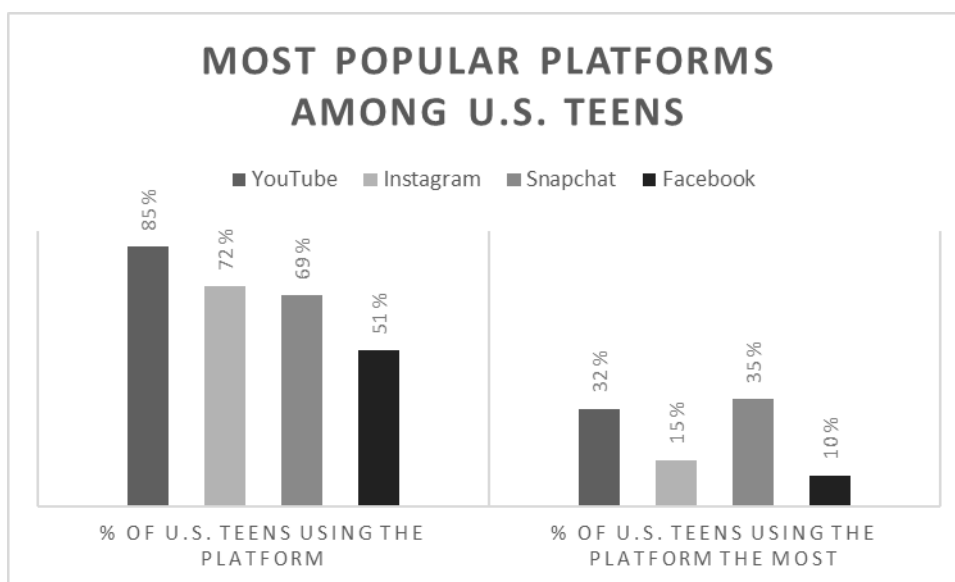


Figure 2. Popular online platforms amongst U.S. teens

Another important feature for this generation is interaction: they want to share thought, feelings and emotions. Engaging through various online platforms is a norm for generation Z, and instead of only consuming, they also want to create and exchange user-generated content. User-generated content refers to content that any Internet user can create themselves, and it is one of the functions that has helped to transform Internet towards a more communication medium instead of a publishing medium: generation Z values engagement and interaction as they want to be involved and be given a sense of ownership and participation (Wee 2017). Generation Z is active, interactive and for this, Internet and

moreover social media are the perfect fits. (Chitat & Holosko 2016; Vesnic-Alujevic 2013). According to a survey conducted by Ebrand Group (2019), 78% of Finnish teen respondents use social media to read and view content and to show their support to content by reacting to it some way, for example by a like or a comment. To most of the respondents, social media enriches and completes their social life. Same assumptions were found in PEW Research Center's (2018) study: the youth uses social media to communicate with friends and family, and also to meet and communicate with new people that share the same interests.

## 2.2 Digital marketing

The growth of the Internet over the past decade is one of the most widely used examples to help explain globalization. The globalized world has correspondingly provided the opportunity to have a digital platform as a communication tool in common. This has also enabled marketing and communication to expand from their traditional natures to digital platforms as well (Fierro & Gavilanez 2017). Marketing and communication that takes place in digital environment is not dependent on geographical locations or time constraints – development of technology and digitalization are providing businesses and communities with new, wider opportunities (Blair et al. 2015).

Digital marketing was a known concept already in the 1990s, although during that time it mostly referred to the act of a business advertising their product or services to customers through digital channels (Fierro & Gavilanez 2017). Then around the year of 2000, with Web 2.0 there was no overhaul of technology as the name might suggest, but more a shift in the way that websites are created. This allowed the web to become a social place, it was an enabler for online communities and social networking without boundaries (Kingsnorth 2016).

Since then, the definition of digital marketing has evolved – according to Fierro & Gavilanez (2017), digital marketing nowadays creates experiences that engage consumers. Similar definition was given by Kannan & Li (2017), who described digital marketing as a set of activities and processes facilitated by digital technologies for creating, communicating and delivering value for customers and other stakeholders. Digital marketing consists of several tools presented

in the Figure 3 (p. 18) below, which help organizations to stay connected to customers and consumers (Professional Institute of Marketing Strategy 2020).

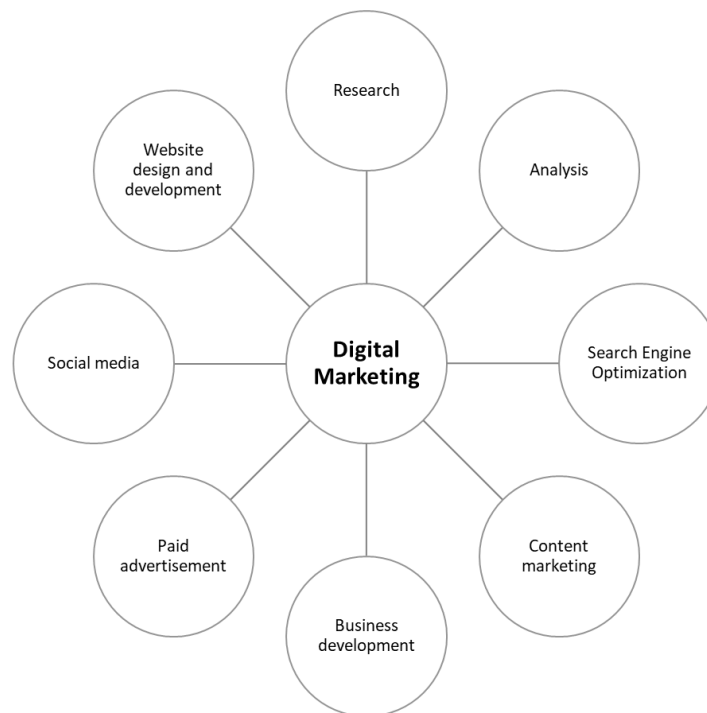


Figure 3. Digital marketing tools.

Digital marketing is a broader concept than just advertising a product with the intension of increasing sales; it is adaptive process that technology improvements have enabled, where businesses and organizations can cooperate (create, communicate, deliver, sustain value) with their stakeholders (Kannan & Li 2017). Lamberton & Stephen (2016) stated that since the beginning of the century, digital platforms have shaped marketing, offering new ways to reach, inform, engage, sell to, learn about and provide for customers. Digital technologies have allowed marketing to create value to consumers through new customer experiences and two-sided interaction (Blair et al. 2015), and digital marketing is almost compulsory tool to have in order to compete in the market. Lamberton & Stephen (2016) even argued that we currently live in “post digital” era of marketing: marketing is not divided into traditional marketing, digital marketing, or anything else. Instead, we are “at a point in practice where digital marketing is just marketing, simply because almost all marketing activities a firm might consider now can have some kind of digital aspect” (Lamberton & Stephen 2016, p. 168). Digital marketing channels can be split into three categories: owned, paid and earned. Owned digital marketing channels refer to, for instance, an organization’s website and their e-mail advertising; paid digital marketing includes digital advertising and paid social media posts, and earned digital marketing channels and assets include media coverage of one’s organization, online reviews and social media posts by others (HubSpot 2019).



Digital technology is revolutionizing the way people consume media, creating opportunities for more interactive opportunities such as multimedia offerings and two-way communication. The development of digital marketing strategies offers large amount of potential for brands and organisations, such as:

- Interactivity. Internet enables even real-time conversations, which can generate a positive experience of the brand, which can result in successful, long-term relationships with high engagement.
- Visual communication. Digital marketing enables the use of different photo- and video-based tools. This is an attractive way of reaching audiences that can lead to greater engagement.
- Communities. Digital channels provide a unique opportunity for organizations to connect with their audiences and users. This connectivity can improve the user-experience and enhance the relationship with the service and the brand or organization itself.
- Virality. Digital channels also make expansion of any content possible. Taking the model of WOM (word of mouth) communication, viral communication becomes relevant due to connectivity and shareability of online platforms that enhance the content spreading (Machado & Davim 2016; Yang & Coffey 2014).

### **2.2.1 Social media marketing**

Digital marketing refers to using digital channels, devices, and platforms build or promote your marketing message. Digital marketing can serve as an 'umbrella' term, because it encompasses many marketing techniques. One of the main techniques of digital marketing is social media.

Social media marketing can be simply defined as the use of social media channels to promote a company and its products (Nadaraja & Yazdanifard 2013). Social media platforms allow big networks of people to connect by sharing information and experiences and this has influenced the ways customers behave (Fierro & Gavilanez 2017; Lamberton & Stephen 2016). Social media marketing is also cost effective and enables wider reach: organizations can reach audience without temporal or locational limitations. Nadaraja & Yazdanifard (2013) summarized five big advantages of social media marketing as following:

- Cost-effective
- Social interaction
- Interactivity
- Targeted market
- Customer service.

Research in recent years has discussed the various objectives that social media marketing can successfully cover, or at least help improve, such as stimulating sales, increasing brand awareness, improving brand image, generating traffic to online platforms, reducing marketing costs, and creating user interactivity on

platforms by stimulating users to post or share content (Drury 2008). Most of all, social media as a part of digital marketing has enabled better engagement and interaction than before.

According to Drury (2008, p. 274), “marketing is no longer one dimensional; it is now a two-way process engaging a brand and an audience. Marketing within social media is not just about telling and giving a message, rather it is about receiving and exchanging perceptions and ideas.” The same argument was stated by Machado & Davim (2016), describing social media as a great opportunity to establish meaningful, dynamic relationships across variety of platforms and users. Social media is the best channel to communicate with 13-15-year-old youth, audience that appreciates high-quality picture, humorous and versatile texts, content that their friends recommend and various contests and giveaways (Viestintäliiga 2019).

Social media marketing has its downsides, too. According to Nadaraja & Yazdanifard (2013), two-way communication requires a lot of time and commitment. Besides being time and effort -consuming, social media platforms enabling interaction and communication also means that negative feedback can take place and be quite damaging to a brand image and reputation, if not handled correctly. Trademark and copyright issues also need constant monitoring on social media platforms, and organizations need to be aware of trust, privacy and security issues as well.

**Social networking sites** offer great brand awareness opportunities, where organizations can create targeted, paid campaigns for their chosen marketing segment. Liu & Ying (2010) define social networking sites as web-based services that enable consumers to create a public or semi-public profile within a platform, find and engage with other users and see who other people are also communicating with. According to a recent survey (Viestintäliiga 2019), almost 60% of Finnish youth uses social networking sites three to five hours a day on their smartphone.

Social networking sites likes Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Tumblr enable an opportunity for organizations to influence youth’s self-expression, sociability, community engagement and creativity (Livingstone 2008). According to Evans et al. (2018), especially youth likes to follow their favourite brands on social networking sites.

**Visual media sharing** is a powerful tool in used in social and digital marketing. the centre of multiple social platforms, YouTube being amongst the most well-known. Besides YouTube, also Instagram, Vine and Snapchat are video- or image-focused sites. Digital creatives are given more scope to produce engaging online advertising campaigns, thanks to new ad formats and increased use of videos. As discussed before, generation Z is keen on using visual channels and tools and expect visual communication from organizations in order to be relevant and catch their interest.

Deciding what visual media platforms works for one’s goals and needs depends on their situation: who is their target audience? How big of a factor

ease of access is? Can the platform be integrated with other social media platforms? (Kingsnorth 2016).

**Content marketing**, which lot of people also see equal to social media marketing, refers to the process of creating valuable, relevant content to attract, acquire, and engage your audience. According to Marketo (2014), marketing automation company, benefits of content marketing include:

- building awareness for your brand/organization
- establishing preference for your brand/organization
- reaching more customers with lower costs.

Content marketing refers to the creation, publication and distribution of organization's own content. Content marketing allows companies to become publishers and attract the attention of their specific target audience. A research done by Marketo (2014) revealed that 71% of consumers trust brands that provide useful information without directly trying to sell something and 85% of consumers trust brands that use content to share information. More about content marketing and especially content created by consumers is discussed in a later chapter, "User-generated content".

We are currently living in an era of customer empowerment; consumers are in increasing amounts contributing through various digital platforms by creating their own content. This process is described as user-generated content creation, and there are numerous ways in which consumers can create and distribute content, such as photos, videos, testimonials, tweets, blog posts and reviews – anything that consumers create about the brand rather than the brand creates of itself (O' Hern & Kahle 2013).

### 2.2.2 Social media platforms

As presented earlier in Figure 2 (p. 16) and discussed earlier in this research, the most commonly used social media platforms among high school aged teens are YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook. In Finland, 75% of teenagers actively use Instagram and 72% actively use Snapchat. For media consumption, up to 95% of this age group use YouTube videos (Tilastokeskus 2019). According to Meltwater (2019), a media intelligence company, 92% of Finnish teens use YouTube regularly, and 66% of them use Facebook. Furthermore, Instagram is one of the fastest growing channels in Finland, with an 5% increase from the previous year.

*Facebook* was founded in 2004 and reached a million users during its first year. It is an online social media and social networking service that has been actively updating its functions: within 15 years, it has added photos, mobile-version, video option, chat and messenger, like and other reaction -buttons. Facebook currently serves over 2 billion monthly active users, and the company also own WhatsApp and Instagram, two other networking platforms. 96% of Facebook users access the site via mobile device (Facebook 2019; Omnicore Agency 2019).

*Instagram* is a photo and video-sharing social networking platform owned by Facebook Inc. Instagram was launched in 2010, and it allows users to share and edit photos, stories, videos: Instagram has a direct message as well as comment section -options, but the visual content is what the platform is known for. In 2018, Instagram reached 1 billion monthly active users. 72% of teens use Instagram and there is over 500 000 active influencers on Instagram (Instagram 2019; Omnicore Agency 2019; Statista 2018). According to a survey conducted by Viestintäliiga (2019), Instagram is the second most used social media platform among 13-15-year-old Finns.

*Snapchat* is a multimedia messaging app, launched in 2011. The concept of the platform is photos, videos and messages that disappear after a short period of time, and therefore is mostly used with smartphones rather than laptops or tablets. In the end of 2018, Snapchat had approximately 310 million monthly active users. 75% of Snapchat users are under 34 years old, and 40% of U.S. teens prefer Snapchat over any other social media platform (Omnicore Agency 2019; Snapchat 2019; Statista 2019). According to a survey conducted by Viestintäliiga (2019), Snapchat is the most used social media platform among 13-15-year-old Finns.

*YouTube* is a video-sharing platform and out of the four introduced social media platforms, the least versatile. YouTube enjoys tremendous popularity among the youth audiences, and its position as an influencer platform is discussed more later in this research: it is the second most visited site in the world. YouTube was launched in 2005 and it is owned by Google. YouTube currently has about 2 billion monthly active users, and 95% of global Internet users use YouTube (Omnicore Agency 2019; YouTube 2019).

### 2.2.3 E-WoM and influencer marketing

The youth creates their identity, social skills and self-concept during their teenage years. Peer relationships and interactions play a vital part in it, encouraging a youngster to engage in a certain type of behavior. There are two groups that especially influence teenagers' attitudes and actions: their own social circle and people or celebrities they look up to: so-called influencers (Manzoni et al. 2015).

Advancements in digital technologies and use of Internet have enabled better accessibility, reach and transparency. Organizations can use the power of social media and other digital technologies to listen, engage and influence their preferable audience (Sharma & Srivastava 2017). WoM, **Word-of-Mouth**, is a powerful communication tool that refers to any positive or negative statement made by customers experiences about a product or company, which is made available to a massive reach of people. E-WoM, electronic Word-of-Mouth, is the process of such statements taking place in digital environments: for instance blogs, forums, networking sites, reviews are all tools used by consumers to get, share and communicate their opinions and experiences about a given organization and its products or services. It refers to any positive or negative statement

made by potential, actual, and former customers about a product or company via the internet (Naz 2014; Torlak et al. 2014).

WoM is a good way for organizations to catch the attention of their audience. If WoM message is read by its receiver, it will create awareness and possibly lead to further actions, such as seeking additional information. e-WoM encourages consumers to share their opinions with other consumers. The additional benefit of e-WoM is the ease with which any message can be shared and discussed thanks to social media networks. (Naz 2014; Sharma & Srivastava 2017).

A study conducted by Das et al. (2016), about 65% of the respondents aged between 18 to 25 check online reviews on social media. The same age group seemed to be very active to share their experiences and influence the buying behavior of others. Similar conclusions were conducted by Yang & Coffey (2014), who first recognized interactive audiences to be younger (13-year difference to non-interactive audience), more engaged online, and have visibly high e-WoM value. Social influence seems to have a strong impact on adolescents' choices and attitudes (Iyengar et al. 2009), which is why organizations that succeed in positive WoM among generation Z and youth in general can benefit from social media platforms.

In addition to Word-of-Mouth and its influence among teenagers, another tool to communicate and direct the attitudes and actions of for instance generation Z is influencer marketing. According to Yurdakul-Şahin and Atik (2013), young people are influenced by famous people more than any other segment.

**Influencer marketing** refers to a form of marketing that focuses on using specific leaders to drive the organization's message to the audience: influencers represent the organization by sharing content on personal platforms or as the "face" of the organization through various platforms (Glucksman 2017). Some researchers view influencer marketing as a form of Word-of-Mouth marketing as well, since it is based on the same principle of "real people" sharing their opinions about a certain organization and brand (Byrne et al. 2017). Kadekova & Holiencinova (2018) pointed out that influencers are not just marketing tools, but social relationship assets. The rise of social media has opened more channels for organizations to connect with their audience and using brand influencers as a marketing tool has broken the wall between the organization and the consumer, and social media influencers can be viewed as a modern phenomenon with a powerful impact on especially the younger generations (Glucksman 2017; Kadekova & Holiencinova 2018).

According to Glucksman (2017), influencer marketing has been one of the biggest marketing and PR trends in the recent years. Social media influencers are third-party endorsers who shape the attitudes of their audience through blogs, tweets, photos, and other social media elements – other types of influencers are for instance industry experts, bloggers and content creators. Young consumers can admire influencers for both their physical as well as personality traits, and look to create their own identity by consumption and support of personality traits and values of influencers that they see as an ideal version of

themselves; generation Z looks to reach and communicate their ideal self by adopting and supporting the values and ideologies of a certain influencer (Xiao et al. 2018; Yurdakul-Şahin & Atik 2013).

One of the most popular platforms for online influencers is YouTube; in the U.S., it outperformed all other online networks when it comes to reaching young audiences (Xiao et al. 2018). According to Xiao et al. (2018), YouTube influencers are more popular among teens than mainstream celebrities, and Kadekova & Holiencinova (2018) studied that generation Z's main reasons to follow influencers are inspiration, fun and reviews.

#### **2.2.4 User-generated content**

Social media marketing has enabled more integrated, two-way marketing communication than before as consumers actively engage with brands through various social networks and create data about their related experiences (Liu et al. 2019). User-generated content refers to content that users contribute themselves: either the production of completely new and original content, or the editing of existing content. In addition to the creation of content, the concept also involves sharing and distributing it, as the content must be accessible to public or a group (Naab & Sehl 2016; Östman 2012). User-generated content can be measured for example by volume: how frequently it takes place among customers, and by valence: the feelings and ideas within such posts (Colicev et al. 2019). User-generated content brings value in shape of more targeted marketing, better brand communication and deeper customer engagement, and surveys have also proven it has a positive impact on brand image, purchase intentions and sales (Liu et al. 2019).

User-generated content is especially influential among millennials and generation Z: they create own content in shape of photos, videos and text as a form of self-expression (Needham 2008), and they view user-generated content as the most authentic, credible and trustworthy form of information (Stackla Consumer Content Report 2019). In addition, organizations that use user-generated content in their marketing mix are encouraging more engagement with the audience, building trust and enhancing brand-customer relationship, and providing SEO value (York 2016). It has been researched that user-generated content has a stronger relationship with audience satisfaction and a stronger informative effect than FGC, firm-generated content, and that audience appreciates organizations that encourage the creation of user-generated content (Colicev et al. 2019).

## **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Case organization**

As mentioned earlier, this research and thesis were created to support a possible future project of helping generation Z and more specifically upper level students aged 13 to 15 to be more active through a schoolwide or even nationwide movement. The project is still in process, but a pilot of it is ought to be released during the year 2020.

The organization behind this project is a Finnish sport association. This association is the governing body of the given sport in Finland, and it is in charge or organizing the national competitions as well as the Finnish national teams. The sport was introduced in Finland around 80 years ago and it is one of the most popular team sports around the globe.

The organization has previous experience of participating in nationwide movements that target youth and the growing issue of Finnish youth not being active enough. The Director of Communications states that the reasonings for this future project are purely social: the project is not about maximizing profits or recruiting new players to the sport, but addressing and participating in the growing issue of youth not being active enough and the increased number of immobility and even obesity among youth and teens (Aamuset 2018).

### **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The primary goal of the organization is to help youth get active and increase their movement through enjoyment, sense of belonging and spending time with friends. Even though it is the governing body of the given sport in Finland, this project does not focus on the talents of the youth or their ability to play the sport.

The project aims to inspire upper level students to take part in a school-wide set of events where they can play a sport with their friends, support their own school, enjoy the atmosphere of the events (DJ:s, voluntary competitions for special prizes) and be active “without noticing”. According to the Director of Communications, the dream situation would be that students continued with this sport on their leisure time even after the project was over: all they need is a playground (found inside and outside in every city in Finland) and couple friends.

### **COLLABORATORS**

To complete the project, the organization will naturally need to collaborate with upper level schools in Finland. This will likely be the decision of the principal and the teachers – if they see the value in the project.

Partaking schools do not have to organize any equipment other than a school gymnasium: the organization will deliver all the additional material and equipment.

Other potential collaborators would be other sport associations in Finland that share the concern for the immobility and inactive lifestyle of today's youth. Collaborating with parties such as the Olympic Committee, the National Sport Council or the Finnish School Sport Federation would, for instance, allow the organization to raise awareness and receive financial or other assistance. Besides this, other businesses interested in collaborating and helping to assist the project should be researched and contacted; for many businesses this could bring important brand value as they're partaking in a national topic regarding our youth.

## **POTENTIAL ISSUES AND CONCERNS**

Because the organization is the governing body of the sport in Finland, most people associate it solemnly with the professional side of the sport. Its public reputation revolves around the national teams and national competitions, which are both related to competitive sports. To general public, the organization might seem distant and irrelevant, if one is not already familiar with the sport.

To tackle the potential problems, it is important to collaborate with other organizations or institutes to spread the idea of the project early enough. The organization needs to present themselves as the supporting party of the project – the real focus is not the organization itself, or even the sport, but instead the students and their wellbeing. This research studies the tools and functions that may help the organization to successfully reach out to generation Z and engage with them. It is vital for the project that not only the school board gets involved, but that the students themselves understand the project and want to participate in it.

## **PREVIOUS PERFORMANCE**

As mentioned, the organization has been involved in youth campaigns before. Since 2015, they have been collaborating with a big Finnish company in the food industry to set up events for elementary schoolers. During the last four years, over 60 000 children have participated.



### 3.2 Qualitative research method

Qualitative research is one type of scientific research. Scientific researches have typically few goals: they collect evidence and produce findings that were not determined in advance (Mack et al. 2005).

Qualitative research is an umbrella term, covering various techniques and philosophies. Simply put, qualitative research studies people's opinions and attitudes. Qualitative research method is used when large amount of information from a small number of people or organizations is wanted. Qualitative research studies people's subjective experiences, beliefs, enabling people to tell their story in a natural setting (Hennink et al. 2020; Wong 2014), and it provides information from a human perspective of a given issue (Mack et al. 2005).

Qualitative research aims to answer questions such as "why" and "how", and describe and explain variations, relationships, individual experiences and group norms. Where quantitative research aims to confirm hypotheses about a phenomenon and test a theory, qualitative research rather seeks to identify and explore a phenomenon for further research. Qualitative research is more open by nature, as it does not push the respondent to choose between fixed responses but rather share their own experiences and opinions. Qualitative research data is typically textual (Mack et al. 2005; Wong 2014).

The characteristics of qualitative research method are summarized in Table 2 below (Hennink et al. 2020; Matck et al. 2005). For this research, qualitative research is the right fit as the aim is to understand generation Z in a deeper level and find out their experiences and needs to serve not only organizations but future researches as well. Understanding how generation Z views organizational content on social media and what kind of needs and expectations they have will enable organizations to create more targeted and relevant content and advertisements. This research is not testing an existing theory, but aims to receive valuable, individual information on generation Z and more specifically 13-to-15-year-olds.

| <b>QUALITATIVE RESEARCH</b> |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Objective                   | To gain understanding of experiences, behaviour, motivations, beliefs |
| Purpose                     | To understand why and how   |
| Data                        | Textual   |
| Studied sample              | Small number of people/ organizations                                 |
| Data collection method      | Interviews, focus groups, observations, content analysis              |

Table 2. *Qualitative research.*

### 3.3 In-dept interviews

There are several methods of qualitative research, most well-known including participant observation, in-dept interviews and focus groups. The methods typically generate data in shape of field notes, video or voice recording and transcripts.

The qualitative research method chosen for this research was in-dept interviews. In-dept interview refers to a one-on-one discussing specific topics. In the interview setting, the goal is to make the interviewee feel comfortable to share their experiences and beliefs – however, it is not a two-way conversation but rather an open platform for the interviewee to share their subjective views (Henning et al. 2020).

By choosing in-dept interviews, the focus was more individual experiences and feelings rather than the group norms. The in-dept interview questions were mostly open-ended, the interviews themselves semi-structured: there were three different respondent groups, so the layout for each varied. Additionally, the questions reshaped during the interview, reacting to the insights and responses of the respondent.

### 3.4 Respondents

10 people were interviewed for this research. Five of the respondents were adults, either specializing in marketing communications or youth work. Five of the respondents were representatives of generation Z, teens aged between 13-15 years old. The three groups (marketing communication specialists, youth work specialists, and generation Z representatives) were all interviewed in one-on-one setting that took place either face-to-face or through a Skype call. All interviews were recorded and additionally, some hand-written notes were taken during the interviews.

Like mentioned above, the questions varied a bit among these three respondent groups, in order to get the most valuable information. The interviews with adult respondents lasted from 38 minutes to 55 minutes, and the interviews with generation Z lasted from 15 to 20 minutes.

The interviews were conducted anonymously, and without addressing the respondent's gender. For adult respondents, the focus was their relevancy to generation Z and marketing communications, and with the youth respondents, only their age was a notable feature. These were also the factors behind choosing the specific respondents.

Below is a summary of the interviews.

| <b>Respondent</b>  | <b>Interview</b>                                       |
|--|--|
| Adult 1 (A1), youth work specialist. The respondent is a teacher in the Finnish school system for 13-year olds.                          | 12 <sup>th</sup> December 2019.<br>Length: 38 minutes. |
| Adult 2 (A2), youth work specialist. The respondent has been a principal in a Finnish middle school and in school life for twenty years. | 13 <sup>th</sup> December 2019.<br>Length: 40 minutes. |
| Adult 3 (A3), communications specialist. The respondent has conducted a survey on youth social media usage in Finland.                   | 5 <sup>th</sup> December 2019.<br>Length: 55 minutes.  |
| Adult 4 (A4), marketing communications specialist. The respondent works in one of the biggest marketing agencies in Finland.             | 9 <sup>th</sup> December 2019.<br>Length: 42 minutes.  |
| Adult 5 (A5), communications and youth activity specialist. The respondent has coordinated sport-related events for schools nationwide.  | 19 <sup>th</sup> December 2019.<br>Length: 38 minutes. |
| Generation Z 1 (G1), 13 years old, located in the southwest of Finland.  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> January 2020.<br>Length: 15 minutes.   |
| Generation Z 2 (G2), 15 years old, located in the southwest of Finland.  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> January 2020.<br>Length: 17 minutes.   |
| Generation Z 3 (G3), 15 years old, located in the southwest of Finland.  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> January 2020.<br>Length: 20 minutes.   |
| Generation Z 4 (G4), 14 years old, located in the southwest of Finland.  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> January 2020.<br>Length: 18 minutes.   |
| Generation Z 5 (G5), 14 years old, located in the southwest of Finland.  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> January 2020.<br>Length: 15 minutes.   |

Table 3. In-dept interviews.

## 4 RESULTS

In this chapter, the main findings of the research are presented. The qualitative data conducted through in-dept interviews was analysed in the following way;

1. The recorded data was transcribed and written out.
2. Data was coded: words, phrases and sections regarding same subjects were labelled with same colors.
3. Labels were divided into themes. Emphasis was on repeated information and information that matches previous literature, but also on surprising findings that were found important and somehow value-adding.
4. Re-evaluating the labels (are they within the right themes) and re-evaluating the themes (which ones are the most important).
5. Presenting the seven most important themes in this chapter

First, some general findings about generation Z and social media are introduced, followed by more specific trends and needs of generation Z in digital environment, such as visuality of content, impact of YouTube influencers, cruciality of rapidly evolving and changing content, their wish to be heard but not necessarily seen, and the whole shift from face-to-face interactions to online communities.

### 4.1 Characteristics of generation Z

In the very beginning of the interview, all of the 10 respondents were asked to think of words that come to mind and how they would describe generation Z and more specifically the youth aged between 13 to 15 years old.

Among the five adult respondents, all mentioned this generation exceptional relationship to technology. They were described as “diginatives”, as a generation that was born with a smart phone in their hand. According to A2,

“Generation Z is online all the time and actually it is quite difficult to even draw the line between them being online or offline. Even when they’re offline, their phones are in their pockets or right under their pillows, ready to be used at any second. It is like it’s part of them”.

Similar argument is discussed by A3, who stated that

“those smart phones in their hand, it comes naturally for them. They started using them a lot earlier compared to earlier generations and this also means it’s easier for generation Z to use them (the smart phones)”.

Four of the five adult respondents brought up social media when asked about generation Z's characteristics and needs.

"This generation uses, for example, Snapchat for daily communication instead of the traditional tools like text messages or e-mails." (A4)

"Social media is a part of their daily lives. They spend so much time there. The community has shifted from face-to-face environment, where you spend free time together, to being online and having groups and communities there." (A1)

"Social media shapes this generation's way to communicate. They are so agile with new applications." (A3)

"Social media plays such a big role in their lives. Their self-confidence and value can be very dependent on their presence on social media: the likes and comments they get..." (A2).

"I feel like me and my friends are always on our phones and on social media."  
(G3)

All respondents, adults and generation Z, agreed that at least to some extent, this generation finds group decision-making and others accepting their choices important. Respondent A2 pointed out that it is not only this generation:

"They are human like everyone else. Group chats and such, they can create some peer pressure, but the same was for all earlier generations – the coherent decision-making just took place in a face-to-face environment."

The generation Z respondents were very integrated in their responses to the matter. All respondents said that whereas they are capable of making their own decisions, they tend to ask for an opinion and preferences of those close to them as well. G3 stated that

"We think about others' opinions a lot whether we admit it or not... at least we ask for opinions of others."

"We live in an era of individualism – but, one's individualism often ends up being in accordance and similar to the people around them. This goes beyond generations: needs for acceptance and sense of belonging is there." (A2)

Respondents A4 and A5 also argued in a very similar way, calling the question a tough one and pointing out that this generation seems to have more courage in themselves, but on the other hand, their choices are often very generic.

A characteristic discussed by respondents A1, A2 and G1 was this generation's consciousness about their own and their friends' rights. A1 called the generation "world conquerors": they know their rights, are proud to express them and furthermore, stand by their friends' rights as well, looking out for the wellbeing of themselves and their close ones.

"This generation has a strong urge to get be involved in their friend's situations. They easily get offended for others and are very quick to defend their friends."  
(A2)

"To describe myself... well, I always stand by my friends. I look out for their rights and wellbeing." (G1)

"Generation Z acts within group norms, and their behaviour and preferences can change quite rapidly. They are enthusiastic about using social media and time will tell if they will overdose on it, or if just grows into people, almost as a part of their humanity." (A5).

Other characteristics and features that respondents used to describe generation Z included self-imposed, conscious and enlightened (they know to look for information), social, happy and brave.

## 4.2 Social media as a marketing communications channel

When asked about social media as a marketing and communications channel, all respondents agreed there are both benefits and threats to it. All respondents agreed that social media enables more actions for organizations than before, and when implemented right, it can bring remarkable benefits for organizations.

"There exists a broad set of positive and helpful things in social media." (A2)

Benefits of social media as a marketing and communication channel for organization included following thoughts:

- It is fast – social media speeds up the communication
- Wider reach – one can talk to people around the globe. This was mentioned as a benefit by both adult as well as youth respondents.

"Social media allows people around the world, not depending where they physically are, to have discussions and search for information." (A3)

“It is easy to get in touch with whoever.” (G5)

“Social media is a great place to reach generation Z, just make sure you are using the right channels.” (A1)

- Target audience – you can talk directly to those who need to hear you, as people from young to old are likely to use some form of social media. This was recognized also during the interviews;

“People from age 6 to 60 can have profiles, so your audience is probably there.” (G5)

“Everyone can use it, yet you have the possibility to limit your audience however you want.” (A5)

“You can talk to your audience without having to physically be in the same place. And for this generation Z, a survey we conducted states that they rather talk to organizations on social media than through any other channel.” (A3)

- Responds to people’s social needs. Especially generation Z respondents highlighted that they use social media daily to communicate with their friends.

“All of my friends are easy to reach through there (social media).” (G4)

“I use social media because that’s where my friends are at. We hang out on social media.” (G3)

“Social media fulfils people’s social needs: talking, being part of something. It enables us to create point and relationships of interactions.” (A3)

- Makes brands more accessible – according to the interviewed marketing communication specialists, social media brings organizations and companies closer to their audience and this supports better two-way communication.

“There are some different principles depending if the company is B2C or B2B. Anyway, having social media accounts makes brands easier to approach. People feel like they have a chance to communicate or co-create content, they feel closer to the brand and with that, are more likely to take action.” (A4)

“You do not need to be out there giving flyers. People can find your brand and get to know what you’re about without extra hassle.” (A3)

Besides being a beneficial marketing communication tool, social media was viewed as an advantage in every day of generation Z from multiple aspects. Respondents, for instance, mentioned that social media enables people to express themselves by creating and publishing their own material; social media can be used as a personal portfolio of things that one values or is interested in.

There were also certain threats that respondents found in using social media as a marketing communication tool.

The inequality of accessing social media was mentioned by respondent A2; everyone might not have the same access to smart phones and therefore social media. Therefore, companies should not only rely on digital channels for marketing and communication.

Three of the youth respondents, G2, G3 and G4, mentioned that ads can be get annoying at times: seeing too many advertisements on your social media feed by the same company, or seeing advertisements that are not in any way intriguing will make the respondents skip the posts right away, cause them to unfollow the brand, or create an overall negative image of the company.

“Ads that are just trying to sell me something without any deeper meaning or content are really annoying”. (G2)

“Content has to have an additional feature to it for me to get interested. That it does not just have a picture of a piece of clothing, directly trying to sell me something.” (G3)

Ads are not, however, only seen as a negative subject among generation Z. A3 mentioned the shift among the youth towards more open-minded and positive attitude towards companies online during the recent years. This point of view was also supported by two generation Z respondents, revealing that the attitude towards advertising on social media varies a lot within the generation and youth does not feel homogeneous about it.

“Gen Z, they more willing to follow companies on social media than before. But with this open-mindedness also comes critical thinking: it needs to be something interesting for them.” (A3)

“Some ads bother me, but some are really good and funny so then I spend time checking them out. A good has another feature to it, not just trying to sell.” (G3)

“I do not find advertising annoying, except if it goes too far and I see the same ad all the time. All in all, it does not bother my life.” (G5)

With this in mind, one more beneficial aspect of social media as a communication tool for organizations is that social media enables creating ads where the main message can be decorated by interesting content.



This is one of the most crucial findings of this research and was brought up in different forms by multiple respondents.

“Social media can decorate the real message. You can not tell the youth straight up: be more active! or buy these shoes! – you need to “fool” them, so to say. Create content and hype around the subject, go around the main message and get their attention and interest with something relevant to them.” (A2)

As an example of the main message being almost secondary to the sense of belonging and doing what the hype is about, respondent A4 used climate change riots as an example.

“The content is so crucial. It needs to match their values, equality, sustainability. If they have the “why”; why to follow or support a certain brand or movement, the organization has done well. The main message could even be secondary, think for example climate change riots. Of course, it’s their values as well, but also the feeling of community, being part of something with your friends. The feeling of not being left out.” (A4)

Respondent A4 gave another example of the Finnish tax administration, Verohallinto, and how they have managed to create viral, interesting content around a subject generally viewed as unappealing and lecturing.

“No matter how dry or uninteresting the main message is, you can frame it and come up with a new point of view. Use pure humour, separate yourself from the mass, the real information can be almost secondary. Create a new point of view or a way to tell your message. Great example is Verohallinto; no one is really a fan of their messages, no one finds taxes interesting. Yet they’ve turned it around on social media, they have a brilliant Instagram account where their interesting content has been going viral.” (A4)

### 4.3 From face-to-face hangouts to online communities

In Chapter 6.1, the characteristics and trends of generation Z that the respondents shared during the in-depth interviews were introduced. The adult respondents were also asked to compare generation Z to earlier generations and examine what possible differences there exists between today’s youth and those of earlier generations.

The answers were in line with each other and furthermore, were supported by views of the generation Z respondents themselves even though the same question was not presented to them. Out of 10 respondents, seven discussed how digital environment (including tools such as chat rooms and messaging platforms) are replacing traditional face-to-face hangouts, such as after-school hobbies and spending time outside with friends.

These findings fully support the idea that organizations and companies, such as the case company X in this research, should use social media to market their activities and upcoming events for the youth. Social media has a lot of potential to first be the tool that helps organizations first become visible to generation Z, and furthermore play an integrated part in the activities or events. Using social media should not stop after organizations get the youth's attention, but the opposite: it should remain part of the project during and even after the happenings or activities are over. If organizations succeed in creating an active online audience, even a community for generation Z through social media, the youth could potentially take action outside of social media as well.

"Belonging to a group is important to youth this age. They make decisions in online groups and communities – they are very influenced by what their friends do or think." (A1)

"When there are group chats and such, that is where group decisions also happen. In earlier generations it was face-to-face environment". (A3)

"It (social media) is everyday life for gen Z. Compared to earlier generations, smart phones and digital channels have replaced some after-school hobbies and clubs. Being online is more common than being involved in some sort of school-related activity. But that means that there is potential to use social media to encourage youth to join hobbies and activities." (A2)

The generation Z respondents recognized the same trend among themselves. The youth respondents were asked to comment on a Finnish survey that states that generation Z spends three to five hours a day on their smart phones on social media. Four of the five respondents agreed that this is a typical daily amount for them, and G1, G3 and G4 brought up the subject of online communities replacing physical hangouts:

"Yes, I use social media that much. I use it mainly because that's where my friends are at, nowadays we do not go spend time together outside, we hang out on social media". (G3)

"During our free time we do not really go outside the house or have any special activities, so it's easy to just take your phone and spend time with it. I also spend a lot of time in group chats while I'm sitting in a car, on my way to sport practises." (G4)

#### 4.4 Right channels and right content: gen Z gets bored easily

“I would get into the world of YouTube. Depending of course what you want to communicate about. The first step is finding out where your target group really is, instead of making assumptions. And then getting active on those channels.”. (A5)

“It requires a lot of work from organizations and brands, to make their message relevant to the youth. This generation is not necessarily against brand messages, but it needs to be relevant, it needs to speak to them. So that does put a lot of pressure to create the right content to the right channel.” (A4)

The data gathered during the interviews about the right channels to communicate with generation Z was in line with the previous literature. There were certain channels that most adult respondents and youth respondents brought up and some channels that could have potential in the future. One adult respondent, A2, did not respond to the questions regarding the right channels. A2 said that their knowledge about current social media channel trends is not strong enough and did not want make guesses.

Below is a summary of the nine respondents who discussed the best channels for communicating with generation Z.

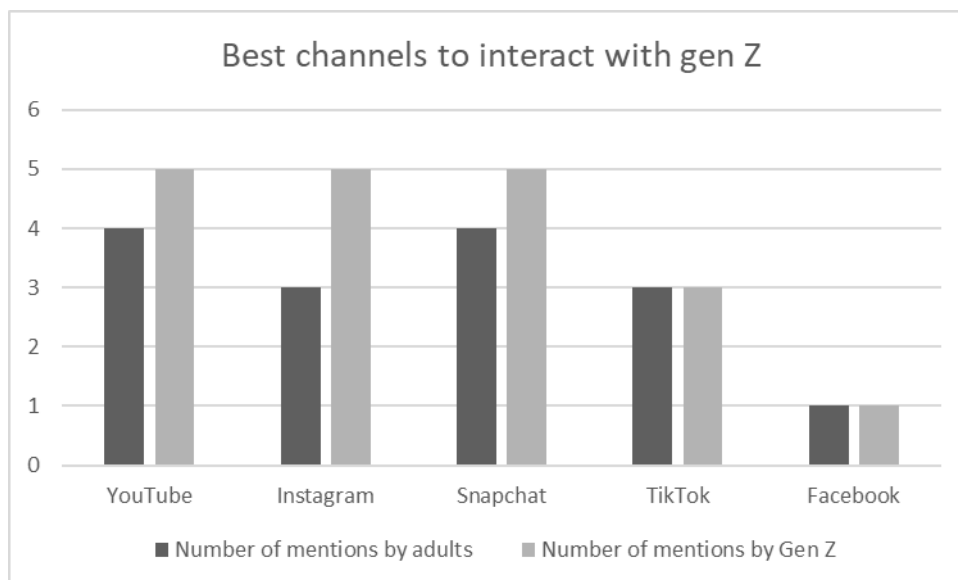


Figure 4. Best social media channels to interact with gen Z.

The chart shows that all nine respondents mentioned YouTube and Snapchat as the best channels to reach out to youth, and all but one mentioned Instagram as well. Two respondents mentioned Facebook, but two respondents also mentioned Facebook as a channel they would definitely not use for interacting with the youth.

Three generation Z respondents said they use TikTok, and it was also mentioned by three adult respondents. Among the adult respondents, TikTok was seen as a channel of the future.

“One of the upcoming channels that has been getting a lot of attention is TikTok. It is sort of a niche channel, but I like how the music is included, because music is in some sort of form quite relevant for all of us.” (A3)

Besides the channels mentioned above, most respondents also mentioned WhatsApp as a commonly used cross-messaging platform. In its current form, it does not represent a typical social media channel as the publications on WhatsApp cannot ever be made public; they are always limited to a certain person or group of people. Respondent A4 mentioned the upcoming big launch, where advertising will become possible on WhatsApp platform.

“In 2020, the rumor says that WhatsApp ads are coming. It is impossible to say yet, how they are going to be viewed by public, but of course as a huge platform for communication among all ages, there exists a great potential for companies as well.” (A4)

Besides using the right channels, various other important matters were brought up during the in-dept interviews. Firstly, some of the respondents discussed that the content on these platforms need to be updated regularly, as today’s youth has a short attention span and gets bored very easily if they do not feel entertained.

Additionally, the channels themselves should be reviewed regularly: new platforms are established so often and the youth adapts to them so fast, that even the right channels can vary within a short period of time. Being active and finding the relevant channels were brought by all of the adult respondents.

“Activity seems to be very important. Lot of the youth in our survey said new content multiple times a day is good for organizations – something new at least daily.” (A3)

“One must regularly update the content and messages: offer interesting, evolving content that keeps the generation on their toes. Avoid boredom.” (A2)

“There are certain channels that very “IN” in a moment – but they change fast.” (A1)

“Gen Z, like youth typically does, acts within the group norms and their behavior and preferences can change quite rapidly. They reshape their preferences quickly, so whenever there is something new tech-wise, they will be on it right away.” (A5)

“Multichannel marketing is important. Youth likes to find the next new thing to conquer – companies need to be ready shift between channels. If you focus only on one social media channel, you will late quite soon.” (A4)

When asked to describe what kind of content generation Z should be presented with, respondents A2, A3 and A5 discussed the need for low authority. Generation Z will not respond to organizational messages or interact with organizations, if they feel like organizations are trying to impact their views with authority.

“Do not lecture the youth. In a way, you need to get on their level – do not use high authority. Rather keep your messages funny than to serious and formal.” (A5)

“You should always talk to youth with the idea that they are equivalent. Companies can not position themselves up high, giving orders to youth with high authority. Talk to youth as individuals, ask their opinions, value their values. Take them along: do together, instead of separating yourself and telling them what to do.” (A2)

Another important feature of organization’s published content discussed during the in-dept interviews was humor. Respondent G4 said “*content should never be negative*”, and other respondents also mentioned humor often being a sign of successful post.

“Some ads are really good and funny; I will spend lot of time checking them out”. (G3)

“Humor-filled content was one of they most voted answers in our survey, among 13 to 15-year old’s, regarding good social media posts.” (A3)

“Keep your messages funny. The youth has a good sense of humor and they can relate to such content better.” (A5)

## 4.5 Visuality

With Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat being the most popular social media channels among generation Z, it is easy to recognize the raising trend of visual content. Developments in social media channels have enabled the content to become more and more eye-catching, and visuality seems to be one of the biggest requirements that generation Z expects from advertisements and quality content in general.

When asked whether the youth prefers written or visual posts, all five generation Z respondents said they prefer visual content. They explained it, for example, with the following statements;

“I’ve never been a big reader. For me, visuality is important. Beautiful content catches my eye.” (G2)

Respondent A4 mentioned visuality as one of the biggest differences between generation Z and earlier generations in their digital behavior. According to A4, earlier generations use e-mails, phone calls and WhatsApp messages for communication, whereas generation Z often uses Snapchat for daily communication and even on WhatsApp, audio messaging is rather popular.

“This is interesting to me, as our generation still writes quite often. Generation Z, on the other hand, us visual content for basic daily communication as well.” (A4)

Respondents A1 and A3 also discussed the importance of visuality when it comes to catching the attention and interacting with generation Z.

“Visuality plays a big role in youth expressing themselves on social media. With all these platforms focusing on photos and videos, the youth can create mini-art and express themselves.” (A3)

“Generation Z spends a lot of time just browsing through the social media channels. You are not given a lot of time to convince them with your content: what seems to work well is visual content. For example, the first three to five seconds of your video are crucial – making the first impression interesting is the best way to catch their attention.” (A3)

“Less text and more visual content like photos and videos... that seems to work for getting the information through with this generation.” (A1)

## 4.6 Importance of influencer marketing

As mentioned earlier in this research, social media influencers have a powerful impact on younger generations and they seem to be one of the biggest trends in modern digital marketing and PR (Glucksman 2017, Kadekova & Holiencinova 2018). The data collected from in-dept interviews supported these claims, as all the adult respondents agreed influencer marketing plays a big role in communication with generation Z, and all youth respondents said they follow some social media influencers.

When asked about influencers that the youth follows, all respondents mentioned YouTubers. Some of the generation Z respondents also admitted that the behavior of influencers has impacted their behavior or attitudes and

that they're more open to ads when the information comes from a third-party source.

"I follow YouTubers, such as Miisa. Their behavior and interests may have impacted me, at least to where I have started looking for more information of a specific thing they are talking about. I would trust an ad by an influencer more than an ad straight from the organization – it is more authentic." (G2)

"I follow some, such as Justimus Films. I feel like their content affects my behavior. I am more open to paid content when it comes from someone from the outside, like a YouTuber, rather than the organization itself only." (G1)

"I follow a lot of influencers. Athletes, YouTubers like Roni Bäck. I do not think their opinions shape my opinions, but they can direct me to get interested in something I did not know about before." (G4)

"I follow some, such as YouTubers. They have motivated me to, for example, be more active and do more sports. They do not affect my decision-making, but they can encourage me to search more information about something they're talking about." (G5)

Even though role models have played crucial parts among youth for decades, there has been a transition. According to respondent A5, for earlier generations the role models were somewhat "unreachable", whereas nowadays they can be even same age with the youth. Social media has brought the role models closer to their target audience and made easier to relate to. Similar thoughts were shared by respondent A4, who said

"I think gen Z views lot of these influencers as, if not friends, at least acquaintances – someone they feel like they know. And I think it's a great thing, they feel like they're safe with such role models and it can also help with possible senses of loneliness."

This phenomenon of youth viewing influencers as more reachable and closer to themselves is supported by how respondents viewed not only influencer marketing, but also e-Word-of-Mouth, e-WoM, marketing. When asked to analyze which one of these marketing tools is more crucial within generation Z, four adult respondents said the tools go hand in hand; influencer marketing may be the first and original source if interest, but it quickly spreads to a circle or group of friends and evolves into e-WoM.

"When the first person in a group hears something from an influencer, the impact of the YouTuber is significant. For the circle of friends afterwards, it is probably WoM that really brings the subject to life." (A5)

“Maybe a YouTuber does or says something that creates the original interest in the subject. But then the real, proper steps of action, they will take place with recommendations from a friend or as a group decision.” (A1)

“I strongly believe in influencer marketing. I think it serves as the pusher for WoM: youth grabs the idea from somewhere, maybe from an influencer, and then starts talking about it and sharing opinions”. (A2)

There were some crucial points related to effective influencer marketing that the respondents brought up. One of them was finding the relevant influencers: even if a specific YouTuber is famous, if they do not correlate to the target group, the youth will not pay attention.

“Influencer marketing is remarkable. But the question is, who is relevant to your target group? If you market a sporting event, bringing an athlete may not be the smartest move. It will be only those already familiar with the sport that can relate to such influencer. Someone a bit more out of the event content but otherwise relevant to the age group could potentially encourage more people to take part.” (A2)

“Having influencers in marketing campaigns is a big thing. It gets attention, and it gives depth when it’s not just “boring organization adults” telling the target group what to do. But the big question is the relevancy: you need to actually study the target group and analyze who the right influencer would be. Some influencers might be famous, but if they are not familiar within the target group, it’s a money wasted.” (A5)

Another subject that raised during the in-dept interviews was the authenticity and content that the influencers deliver. According to respondent A3 and a survey his team conducted; half of the paid collaborations seem fake to 13-15-year-old youth. However, even if content is viewed fake at times, youth is so into following trends, it will get some attention and the message will spread widely among the target group.

According to respondent A4, the direction with relevant content is right: in the early stages of influencer marketing, influencers were agreeing to any kind of paid collaborations which was eventually judged by the audience. Now it seems that influencers are learning from this and making more considerate choices, which furthermore means better engagement with their audience.

“In the early stages, influencers were taking any kind of collaborations without really thinking of their values. Then followers started giving feedback: they are not interested in this kind of content: it does not match their values or interests and the reasons they originally followed this influencer. Audience was getting annoyed, which resulted in influencers being more aware and pickier with the organizations they cooperate with.” (A4)



## 4.7 Gen Z wants to be heard, not seen

One of the marketing communications tools that was discussed during the in-dept interviews was use-generated content. Previous literature discussed the importance of user-generated content among youth: earlier research pointed out that today's youth has a lot of thoughts and emotions that they want to show, and they expect two-way interaction where they are also valued.

The results of the in-dept interviews partly supported the earlier literature. It is important to youth that their values are met, and that the content that organizations create is relatable and interesting to them: and this can be best achieved by listening to what generation Z does want and need. However, most of the respondents were quite unanimous that this age group does not yet necessarily want their own content to be shared publicly: they want to be heard, but not yet seen.

Earlier in this chapter the importance of relevant content was discussed, and the generation Z respondents highlighted the importance of content that matches their values: they want organizations to know what kind of content they want. This concept was put in words by respondent A4,

*"I think it's important for youth, to be a part of it. They want to feel like an organization hears them, respects their values and develops their actions according to youth's feedback. Maybe not necessarily at that age (13-15-year-old) create their own content yet, but definitely have a word in the content they consume."*

Respondent A3 agreed that user-generated content may not be the most effective tool among this age group.

*"I would say youth this age, they're not the people who post daily on public platforms. That is popular among a bit older youth; generation Z on the other hand, they like to scroll through and follow. They will use Snapchat to share stuff within their own circle of people. They discuss send photos on Snapchat rather than share them on Instagram feed. So, I think they could be a little reluctant and hesitant to share their own content on a public platform, even if they were encouraged."*

This seemed to hold the truth, as all of the five generation Z respondents said that if there was a social media campaign where an organization encouraged them to create a certain kind of content, such as participate in a jump rope challenge and post the video online for a chance to win a prize, they would not participate.

*"I would not participate. It's just not for me. I do not want my own content to be shared in public." (G1)*

“That sounds very commercial: only companies benefit from it by getting more coverage. I guess if the prize was something I really wanted, I would consider joining... but I would not want them (the company) to share my material, though.” (G2)

“There are lots of challenges like that going on right now. I do not really see the point in it, so I have not participated. It does not bother me when others do, though. I just do not want my own content to be shared.” (G4)

“Personally, I would not participate, but I like following such challenges.” (G5)

## 5 DISCUSSION

This master's thesis aimed to examine and understand the needs and attitudes of generation Z on digital platforms and find out how organizations could more effectively engage generation Z into a two-way interaction with the right marketing communications.

This final chapter responds to the original research questions based on the earlier literature and the data collected through in-dept interviews and introduces managerial implications for the case organization as well as other organizations that want to market and communicate to generation Z. Additionally, some limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are suggested.

### 5.1 Theoretical implications

There exists immense amount of previous literature about digital marketing and social media as a marketing communications channel. Organizations and companies cannot evade the fact that digital channels bring benefits to marketing strategies that did not exist before; the opportunity to reach audiences no matter the geographical location, to target specific audiences, to enhance two-way interaction and real-time communication are among the benefits that developments in technology enable us. Social media has especially become an integral part of life for most teens, and it is one of the key trends that shapes the whole generation Z (Gaidhani et al. 2019).

There also exists previous researches about generation Z, however most of the literature focuses on either their personality traits or their adaption to workplaces. This information could be used to create a basic understanding of generation Z's preferences and needs, but the in-dept interviews regarding their attitudes towards organizations using digital channels as a way to market and communicate presented value-adding data.

One main research question and two supporting research questions were presented in the beginning of this thesis. The previous literature collected, together with data from the interviews aimed to answer to the following questions:

*RQ: How being born to a technologically advanced society is reflected in the needs and attitudes of generation Z?*

The impact of technology is the biggest separator between generation Z and earlier generations (Gupta & Gulati 2014). The findings of this research support previous literature: generation Z is very agile when it comes to using new tech-

nologies, they adapt to new digital tools effortlessly and they are eager and interested to try them. Generation Z are called digital natives, and they typically spend hours a day browsing through digital, especially social media, platforms. Generation Z is “tech-savvy”, and the line of being online and offline is sometimes blurry as they always carry a smartphone with them (Jeys 2019).

Developments in technology and the rise of social media has shaped the way the youth interacts. Sense of belonging and the acceptance of friends still play the same important role as among previous generations, but the hang outs have shifted from face-to-face, after school activities to online communities, WhatsApp chats and Snapchat photo messages. Generation Z spends three to five hours a day on social media applications, and two of the biggest motives were communication with friends and entertainment.

Snapchat, Instagram and YouTube are the most popular platforms among generation Z, and the use of these platforms has also influenced the way they communicate; instead of written text messages and e-mails, representatives of generation Z prefer visual communication, such as short videos and photo messages. This is a visible difference compared to earlier generations and the interviewees were unanimous about the existence of this trend.

In the theoretical framework, generation Z's need for constantly evolving, relevant and entertaining content was brought up (Roseberry-McKibbin 2017). The findings supported this statement, as they show that generation Z has the upper hand: they can decide what kind of content they make use of. Therefore, the youth expects the content to be relevant and versatile and if it's not, they get bored. Generation Z needs to be entertained and triggered with new content all the time across the right channels.

*Supporting RQ: What are the key characteristics of generation Z in a digital environment?*

One of the major characteristics describing generation Z is their need for creativity and visuality. Generation Z prefers visual content over written text (Ram-mopo 2016), and they expect visual communication from organizations as well as their circle of friends.

When communicating with organizations, generation Z should be addressed with low authority (Peres 2018), instead of trying to lecture and use power or position as a tool. Generation Z can be characterized with a thrive for equality, they know their rights and values and want to be respected as equal counterparts in two-way communication. Findings were in line with this literature, as multiple respondents agreed that generation Z holds strong values of equality.

In digital environment, generation Z is quite demanding. Due to the youth being so at ease with new technologies and adapting to changes, they expect to be surprised with fresh applications and content. This goes together with the

generation's habit to get bored easily when it comes to digital world; they welcome change and are not afraid to take up on new technology developments. Although generation Z can be characterized as self-confident in a digital environment, the acceptance of their decisions and values among their circle of close ones still exists strongly.

*Supporting RQ: What is the impact of marketing tools (such as influencer marketing, eWoM and user-generated content) in interaction and two-way communication with generation Z?*

Previous research highlighting the raise of influencer marketing, especially through YouTube -influencers, was supported by the findings of this thesis. Influencers, third-party endorsers who reach out to their audiences through relevant social media channels, are one of the biggest trends of the recent years in digital marketing (Glucksman 2017). The rise of social media has enabled organizations to use third-party influencers, such as YouTubers, to generate positive awareness and impact the target group's behaviour.

Among the respondents, influencer marketing was viewed as the one single most efficient tool of marketing communications. The findings show that influencers have impacted the behaviour of generation Z and that they trust information and find it more authentic, when it comes from a third-party source. Influencers, also viewed as today's role models, are more approachable than before and therefore they're easier to relate to. All five generation Z respondents said they follow YouTubers.

Influencer marketing was often also viewed as the starting platform for another marketing communications tool, Word-of-Mouth. Social media has, again, enabled more powerful potential for such tool as the experiences and words can spread to massive amounts of people. Findings demonstrated that the opinions and values of friends and family still play a vital role in generation Z's opinions and behaviour, and e-WoM is a strong, beneficial tool for organizational marketing communication. What the findings also presented was that influencer marketing and e-WoM can potentially work in sync: to spread the word of a certain brand or organization, generation Z is very likely to hear about it first from an influencer. For example, a YouTuber introduces a service on their channel and it then becomes a spoken, familiar subject among the youth.

Although previous literature pointed that user-generated content is popular among generation Z, who value engagement and want to have a sense of ownership and participation (Wee 2017) the findings of this thesis did not support these claims. Although generation Z very much wants to be heard and expects organizations to deliver content that is relevant to them, they are not big on co-creation and having their own content shared publicly. They like to use content that matches their values and by supporting such content, generation Z feels like they are participating. But when it comes to user-generated content,

generation Z respondents were very unanimous that they did not want to have their content shared on social media platforms other than their own accounts.

## 5.2 Managerial implications

This thesis aimed to help the case organization to recognize the tools and channels for reaching and communicating with generation Z. The findings could potentially give ideas for other organizations creating or developing their digital marketing strategy.

Social media is, without a doubt, a right channel for interacting with generation Z. Generation Z spends up to five hours a day on social media platforms, and almost a double the hours a day on their smartphones (Ebrand Group 2019; Viestintäliiga 2019). Generation Z has an emotional attachment digital channels and online society (Gupta & Gulati 2014), and they are more open to commercial content as long as it feels authentic, reliable and relevant. The findings also favour social media as the right channel to communicate with generation Z. It is crucial for organizations to research the right channels their target group uses and then create content that fits the specific channel in question.

When implementing a digital marketing strategy targeting generation Z, it is essential to pay attention to visuality and creativity. Generation Z uses social media platforms like Snapchat, Instagram and YouTube, which are heavily photo- and video-focused and written information comes secondary. Verohalinto is a great example of an organization that has been able to decorate the main message and create interesting, humor-filled content that catches the youth's attention and interest. Findings indicate that sometimes the main message is not the most important thing for youth, but instead it is the sense of belonging and standing up or supporting something with one's circle of close ones.

If an organization was to use influencer as a marketing tool, it is essential to understand what kind of audience can resonate with the influencer in question. For example, even though the case organization operates in the field of competitive sports and the upcoming project is also related to school sports, having an athlete as the face of the project may not be the only option. If the goal is to excite and engage all youth, not just those familiar with the sport, using an outside influencer could help the youth to resonate better.

Generation Z is well aware of their rights and for them, equality is an important value. For organizations wanting to communicate with generation Z, it is important to use low authority and instead of just directing, take the youth along; hear their needs and preferences and respond to those.

### 5.3 Limitations of the study

There are several limitations in this research.

The data collected through interviews gives subjective answers: qualitative data is a summary of views and opinions of interviewees, not proven facts. The results are based on interviewees' feelings and are influenced by personal opinions.

The data is collected only within a limited geographical area (certain cities in Finland) and the background and personality differences of interviewees is not restricted. There could exist differences in viewpoints depending on the person's race, educational background, family background, geographical location; all the factors that are not taken into consideration in this research. Furthermore, all ten respondents were native Finns, so some findings, such as the most used social media channels, are likely to vary when compared to other nationalities and countries.

Although the case organization is a Finnish sport association and the pilot project is sport-related, interviewees' own background in sports is not considered. The goal is to find tools and channels that serve the generation Z as a whole, not just those with sport hobbies or interest in certain sports. It is likely that the attitude towards sport-related organizational advertising is dependent on the audience's own background in sports.

The sample size is small, and due to the limited scope, the results of this research are not generalizable. The results can give ideas for a new marketing strategy targeting the youth or serve as a base for further research in the field.

### 5.4 Future research suggestions

This research and its findings raised some ideas for further studies as well. As mentioned before, there exist studies of generation Z in a workplace and as an employee. However, there does not yet exist much of literature about their needs in terms of entertainment and engagement through social media: it is clear that generation Z prefers visuality and current social media channels such as YouTube and Snapchat also enable more visual material than before. Visuality itself, however, is not enough; the first impression, the relevancy, humor within the content, the value and the behaviour it provokes all play a role in creating engaging, prominent content for today's youth. There is potential in studying in detail exactly what kind of video- and photo-driven content, for example by A/B testing and finding out preferences, generation Z wants to receive.

Generation Z is not one big, unanimous generation. This research provides some ideals and tools for attracting and engaging with 13-to-15-year-olds through social media, but one generation can never be generalized to have the

exact same preferences and beliefs. To acquire more throughout understanding, there exists lot of opportunities to study the influence and impact that various variables, such as race, nationality and hobbies have on generation Z members. By deeper understanding generation Z, managers can furthermore split the generation into smaller, more targeted audiences and groups instead of reaching out to the whole generation with the same advertising content.

The popularity of influencer marketing has skyrocketed within the past years. Gaining deeper understanding of influencer marketing and the significance of influencers to today's youth is surely going to be researched more in the future. Influencer marketing is already reshaping the traditional setting of role models and audiences, as influencers are viewed to be more accessible, like acquaintances. The impact of influencers therefore goes beyond just advertising and boosting organizational sales: they can impact the beliefs, opinions and values of the target audience. Further research on influencers would provide valuable insights of all the benefits that may not be fully understood yet, and also what it requires from the organization's side to meet the needs of the target audience with the help of influencers.

On the other hand, the possible risks of influencer marketing could also be further researched: especially when generations grow older, they are likely to be more aware of situations where they are being influenced with the sole purpose of selling something. It will be crucial for organizations to have a deep knowledge and understanding of influencer marketing to avoid a situation where using a third-party person is viewed as too commercial.

In further researchers, both qualitative and quantitative data could be applied. The two research methods do not have to rule each other out, but instead support each other and give more detailed, versatile data.



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## APPENDIX 1 Interviews

There were three different interview layouts: one for marketing professionals, one for youth work specialists and one for generation Z respondents. The questions varied within the respondent groups, and due to their semi-structured nature, the questions also varied within respondent groups, depending the answers and the direction the conversation was going.

All interviews followed the same structure of five themes, and below are examples of the questions presented.

1. Theme: Differences among different generations
  - ➔ Example question: What are some of the first words in your mind related to generation Z?
  
2. Theme: Social media as a communication channel
  - ➔ Example question: What social media enables as a communication channel?
  
3. Theme: Generation Z in a digital world; social media and youth
  - ➔ What should one keep in mind when communicating with generation Z through digital channels?
  - ➔ According to a survey conducted by Viestintäliiga, a 13-to-15-year-old teen spends three to five hours a day on their smartphone, on social media. In your opinion, what are the biggest reasons to it?
  
4. Theme: Marketing communications tools
  - ➔ Do you believe in the benefits of influencer marketing when communicating with generation Z?
  
5. Theme: Free word, free discussion