Generation Z – how can digital natives be influenced through online tools?

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Abstract: *Generation Z (also known as Gen Z or The Net Generation) is the demographic cohort after the Millennials. Gen Zers were born between 1995 and 2010 and they represent a third of the world's population. Most of them have used the Internet since a very young age and are confortable with technology and social media. They believe in diversity, equality and authenticity; this generation is rather optimistic and motivated to always aim higher. For the digital natives, self actualization is of high priority, as well as a fulfilling job and a good working climate. The people of Generation Z are considered the future of global economy simply beacuse they are the largest group of consumers worldwide. The buying process of the generations before was simple: see and buy, but this generation is different. Before they go shopping, they look for inspiration online, on social media and ask for reviews. In other words, technology is a very important part of their buying habits. Another aspect that is merely interesting about Generation Z is the way they choose their career. But we will find more about that soon. This paper shows how employers and brands can use Internet and online tools in order to influence Generation Z's decisions regarding their career or buying habits.*

Keywords: *career planning, content creators, digital natives, generation Z, social media*

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this research is to understand and shape the image of a person belonging to Generation Z, as well as, to describe the personality of the digital native in interaction with the online environment. Through this paper we would like to discover how the mind of a digital native functions and which are the aspects he considers most when making a decision. As it was mentioned before, we have decided to study two main aspects that help define the personality of Generation Z, setting out the following two goals: establishing how the purchasing habits of Generation Z can be influenced and discovering the issues that digital natives take into consideration when they choose a job. The hypothesis from which we started writing this paper was that the Internet plays an essential role in the life of young people, having the "power" to influence the decisions of the digital natives. The objectives of this study were the following: discovering the 5 main aspects that employers should take into consideration when recruiting digital natives, discovering at least 3 advantages/disadvantages of using the Internet as a way of promoting, determining how brands can use Social Media in order to persuade digital natives to purchase a product or service and also determining how digital natives can be influenced through online tools.

2. Methodology

In order to accomplish our goals, we have applied several research methods, both quantitative (opinion poll) and qualitative (focus group), within the applicative section. Initially, we started researching by creating a questionnaire through which we wanted to find out how important is the role that the Internet plays in Generation Z's decision to purchase a product/service, and then, based on the results, we created an infographic with some tips that brands should take into account when promoting their products/services among digital natives. Some of the questions used in this questionnaire were:

Q1. Which do you consider to be the optimal ways of promoting a product or service in the online environment?
1. *Creating a promotional video and posting it on the official account of a brand;*
2. *Collaborating with a content creator (blogger, vlogger, etc.);*
3. *Collaborating with an artist;*
4. *Organizing a giveaway through which the new product or service can be tried by the followers;*
5. *Others.   Which?*
....

Q2. Do you use to follow the online activity of content creators?
1. *To a great extent;*
2. *To a large extent;*
3. *To the right extent;*
4. *To a lesser extent;*
5. *To very small extent.*

Q3. To what extent are you willing to try a product or service when your favorite content creator promotes it?
1. *To a great extent;*
2. *To a large extent;*
3. *To the right extent;*
4. *To a lesser extent;*
5. *To very small extent.*

After completing this stage, we moved on to research the second aspect that interested us about Generation Z, more precisely, the factors that they take into consideration when choosing a job. Therefore, we created a second questionnaire. Both questionnaires have been applied online to about 100 digital natives. Some of the questions used in the second questionnaire were:

Q1. Would you be willing to relocate if you encounter a job opportunity?
1. *To a great extent;*
2. *To a large extent;*
3. *To the right extent;*
4. *To a lesser extent;*
5. *To a very small extent.*

Q2. Which are the main aspects you take into consideration when a choosing a job?

1. *Flexibility of the schedule;*
2. *Salary;*
3. *Stability;*
4. *Benefits offered (for example, health inssurance);*
5. *Learning opportunities;*
6. *Work environment;*
7. *Others.*   *Which?*

    ...

Q3. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

	To a great extent	*To a large extent*	*To the right extent*	*To a lesser extent*	*To a very small extent*
I want to work in a private company;					
I want to work in the public sector;					
I wish to start my own business.					

The results obtained after applying this questionnaire were debated in a focus group of professional recruiters. The conclusions that we have formed after moderating the focus group have been written in a brochure which contains tips that employers can consult when recruiting digital natives.

3. Results

After applying the questionnaire regarding the importance of the Internet in Generation Z's decision to purchase a product/service, we obtained the following results:

1. Instagram is the most commonly used social media platform by Generation Z; Youtube is the most used platform;
2. 45.4% of respondents use the Internet and Social Media platforms to follow the online activity of their favorite brands;

3. 40.7% of respondents search for online reviews before purchasing a product or service;
4. 85.2% of respondents consider the Internet to be the best way to promote a product or service;
5. 71.3% of respondents believe that the best way to promote a product or service in the online environment is to collaborate with a content creator (vlogger, blogger, etc.);
6. 35.2% of respondents said they are willing to try to a large extent a product or service promoted by their favorite content creator;
7. Most respondents said they would spend about 60 seconds watching a promotional video;
8. Most respondents said they prefer images or videos instead of texts;
9. According to the people surveyed, a brand must have the following characteristics to be successful in the online environment: to be authentic, to be communicative (to answer questions, comments, etc.), to post content constantly and to make consumers known in the online environment.

Based on the results obtained in the first questionnaire, we created the following infographic in which we outlined some aspects that brands should take into consideration when promoting themselves online and want to influence Generation Z to purchase a product or service.
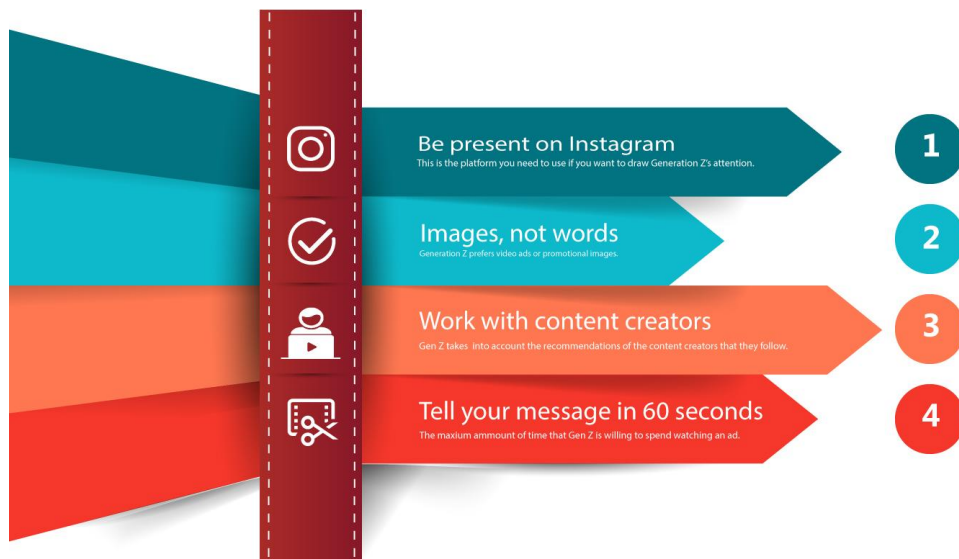
Fig. 1 Infografic

Some of the results obtained after applying the second questionnaire and moderated the focus group:

1. 38 out of 89 respondents consider that they can prepare by themselves for a job;
2. 47.2% of respondents are willing to relocate if a career opportunity arises;
3. Online platforms (bestjobs, e-jobs, hipo, etc.) are the main channel Generation Z calls when looking for a job;
4. Marketing, Social Media, IT, HR, PR, the entertainment industry are the main areas of activity that digital natives prefer;
5. The main benefits that the native digital requires at the workplace are: schedule flexibility, the ability to work from home a few days a month, medical insurance, discounts on various services and sports activities, increasing the number of holiday days from one year to the next, courses and trainings offered by the employer, the 13th salary, performance bonuses etc.

6. It's very important for the digital natives to have opportunities to learn and improve at work because this generation does not want to plunge, stagnate at a certain point, they want to gain as much knowledge about a certain field of activity as they can;
7. Digital natives design their career as a portfolio of diverse and complex projects that highlight the passion they have for a particular field and their ability to adapt their knowledge to different situations and requirements.

Based on the results obtained in the second questionnaire and after moderating the focus group, we created the following brochure which contains 5 tips that employers should take into consideration when recuiting digital natives:

Fig. 2 How to recruit Gen Zers
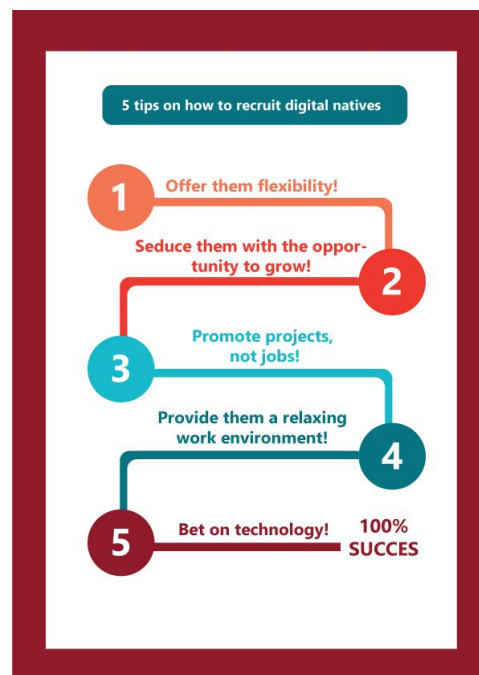*The front of the brochure*

Fig. 3 How to recruit Gen Zers
The back of the brochure

4. Conclusions

The hypothesis from which we started writing this paper has proven to be true: The Internet plays an essential role in the lives of young people, having the "power" to influence digital decisions (regardless of their nature); all their activities are all done through new technologies. At the beginning of the paper we also set some goals, namely: to discover the 5 main aspects that employers should take into considerations when recruiting young Generation Z - after our research we discovered that in order to successfully integrate the digital native into the workforce and to capture his interest, companies must ensure that they offer a stress-free, relaxed work environment, that they provide flexible work schedules, the ability to learn new things and not to stagnate, engage him in as many different projects as possible and, most importantly, the employer must always show trust and give credit to the digital native; another goal was to determine how brands can use Social Media to persuade digital natives to buy a product or service - as a result of the research, we can say that the best recipe through which brands can be promoted in Social Media is the collaboration with a content creator, the creation of images or videos (focus on the text as little as possible) and their posting on Instagram or Youtube, the organization of giveaways, etc. The third objective was the discovery of 3 advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet as a means of promotion - advantages: it is fast, it is the "place" where the audience can be easily targeted and it has a huge impact; disadvantages: fierce competition, difficulties with the originality of the product or service promotion (given the fact that there are thousands of ads on the Internet, it is hard to create something innovative) and the fact that there is a risk that advertisements promoted in the online environment might be blocked by users.

So how can digital natives be influenced through online tools? Well, at the end of the paper we came to an answer. It is clear that the online environment is a source of strong influence on the personality of

these individuals and that using online tools such as Social Media one can easily influence them, however, the aspects that digital natives take the most into consideration are authenticity and human factor. Given the fact that Generation Z has been surrounded by technology since forever, they are not easily impressed by a promotional video made with the most performing effects or a perfectly edited image or by the fact that they can apply online for a job, for example, what interests them is the message behind the materials created by online tools. Regardless of your field or topic, if you want to influence Generation Z through online tools, make sure you are real, empathetic, human. Generation Z knows very well what technology is capable of, they are interested in discovering what people are able to convey through it and how authentic these sensations can be transmitted.

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