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Project Title: Generation Z: Exploring trust building strategies for marketing communications in the e- retailing sector

Supervisors: Dr Vicky O'Rourke Dr Sarah Diffley

Keywords: Brand Communications, Gen Z, Trust, E-Retailing, Advertising Appeals.

Project Summary

Francis and Hoefel (2018: 2) highlight the difference in Gen Zs consumption patterns and brand relationships relative to preceding generations. Further, the behaviours of Gen Z have a significant impact on all generations. As a result, “the possibilities now emerging for companies are as transformational as they are challenging. Businesses must rethink how they deliver value to the consumer, rebalance scale and mass production against personalization, and—more than ever—practice what they preach when they address marketing issues and work ethics.” Central to the behaviours of Gen Z consumers is ‘the search for truth’. Companies chosen by consumers will be those are ethical in nature and Gen Z tend to be highly informed. As a result, trust is key. Kitchen and Proctor (2015) draw attention to the differences between Gens X, Y and Z, noting that the behaviour patterns among these groups vary considerably. As a result, so too may their reactions to marketing actions, thus representing an avenue for further research. Representing approximately 40% of customers world-wide with a purchasing power of \$143 billion in the US alone, it is critical that retailers effectively connect and engage with Gen Z customers (Davis, 2020). Priporas et al. (2017: 374) note that “the biggest future challenge for marketing and consequently for retailing seems to be Generation Z, since members of this generation seem to behave differently as consumers and are more focused on innovation”. At present, practice demonstrates that these differences are not always acknowledged. In 2020, e-commerce revenue for retailers grew by a 159% (Coleman, 2021). Online-only brands and fast fashion are succeeding while some of most recognisable high street retailers are struggling. A greater degree of research is necessary to understand how retailers can develop strategies that enable the building of trust among Gen Z consumers, supporting their unique information search and purchase behaviours.

The overarching aim of the research is to determine how trust can be fostered among Gen Z audiences as a means of marketing more effectively to them.

Specifically, the objectives of this research are to:

- To explore Gen Z’s perceptions of brand communications.
- To investigate the impact of various advertising appeals on the perception of brands.
- To contrast the perceived trustworthiness of message content and information source.
- To explore the means by which brands can enhance perceived credibility of brand communications
- To develop a framework for developing trust in e- retailing marketing communications



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The methodological approach will be primary research in the form of a sequential exploratory research design. Following this approach, the first phase entails qualitative data collection and analysis. The results of the qualitative phase then inform the second phase of quantitative data collection and analysis. This approach is suitable “when a researcher needs to develop an instrument because existing instruments are inadequate or not available” (Creswell, 2009: 212). Given that research is in its early stages, this approach is deemed most suitable. Qualitative data collection and analysis will facilitate exploration of this phenomenon, while also allowing expansion of findings. The qualitative findings will allow a quantitative research instrument to be developed. As a result, this research will adopt a three-phase approach where “the researcher first gathers qualitative data and analyzes it (Phase 1), and uses the analysis to develop an instrument (Phase 2) that is subsequently administered to a sample of a population (Phase3)” (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007, as cited in Creswell, 2009: 212). This approach allows a rich understanding of the research area to be obtained (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

Candidate Qualifications/Requirements: Level 8, Degree in Marketing (minimum 2.1) or equivalent. Applicants will be called for interview, please note that shortlisting may apply.