Social Media in Building Relationships Between Companies and Representatives of Generation Z in the Customer Relationship Management Concept

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***Abstract*— Building social media relationships with Generation Z members is a huge challenge for today's enterprises, not only because they are the least studied generation, but also because they represent different values than those of the previous generations. It is important that both sides of the relationship – the customer and the entrepreneur – are on social media at the same time and in the same place. This would enable communication and relationship building. The aim of the paper was to identify social networking portals, which are most often used by the representatives of Generation Z as an element of building relationships with companies. The study of Generation Z attitudes towards brands on social media is part of broader research conducted by the authors among students in Poland and Great Britain in 2020. The method used in the study was a survey, as part of which the CATI surveying technique was used. For analysis of the study material, descriptive statistics measures were used. Analysis of the collected empirical data provided the basis for verifying the research hypotheses. The results of the research, although not conducted on a representative sample, allow to deepen the knowledge on the behaviour of the Generation Z representatives in social media. The findings show which social networking portals are most often used by respondents of Generation Z in customer-company relationships. The paper also provides important information on how differences in gender or place of residence play a role in building the customer-company relationships.**

***Keywords*—** *CRM; social media; Generation Z*

1. Introduction

The ability to strengthen relationships with customers, perceived as a source of enterprises' competitive advantage, is becoming more and more important today [1]-[4]. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a critical success factor impacting business performance, as confirmed by ample theoretical and empirical evidence [5]–[9]. Companies have for many years been implementing CRM to build long-lasting relationships with customers [4],[10]–[12], and in an age of new technologies they more and more often do so using social media. Integration of CRM with social media resulted in social CRM [13].

Entrepreneurs should learn about Gen Zers in order to make them part of their business strategy [14]. This is due to the fact that Generation Z will constitute the largest consumer base by 2030 [15], its members play an active part in purchasing decisions within their families [16], and given their increasing purchasing power, they will be the main target of brands [17].

The existing research conducted among Gen Zers concentrates around two areas. The first is concerned with factors impacting purchasing decisions. For instance, Maziriri et al. [18] examined the impact of satisfaction with food consumption and restaurant loyalty on repurchase intention and positive word-of-mouth opinions about fast food restaurants in the RSA. Djafarowa and Bowes [19] examined which types of marketing tools on Instagram were most successful in regard to Generation Z's impulse purchasing in the fashion industry in Great Britain. Vasan [16] conducted research on the use and impact of promotional marketing in Web 2.0 tools on Gen Zers' purchasing decisions.

The second area concerns the way Generation Z consumers use and perceive the current applications of smart technologies. Priporas et al. [14] studied expectations of young consumers and the future of smart e-commerce. Meghisan-Toma et al. [20] analysed the impact of online advertising, social influence, and usage motivation on the behavioural intention related to m-commerce use among Romanian young adults. Recent research focuses on the potential dark side of the use of social media among Gen Zers during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown [21]. The literature still lacks findings, verified by means of quantitative empirical studies, that precisely identify Gen Zers' behaviours of customer-company interactions on social media. In order to fill this gap, the authors stated the research problem by formulating the following research questions:

1. What social networking portals do Gen Zers most often use?
2. Does a Gen Zer's gender or place of residence impact their choice of the social networking portal?
3. Before purchasing a product/service, do Gen Zers search for the company's accounts on social media?
4. Does a Gen Zer's gender or place of residence have an impact on whether or not they search for a company's accounts on social media before purchasing its product/service?

The aim of the paper was to identify social networking portals, which are most often used by the representatives of Generation Z as an element of building relationships with companies.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1 Customer Relationship Management

From the point of view of enterprises, customer-related knowledge as a resource can be perceived from four perspectives: knowledge for the customer (knowledge about the enterprise, its products and services as well as suppliers), knowledge about the customer (knowledge that helps to identify and understand consumer behaviours, motivations, preferences), knowledge from the customer (knowledge originating from the customer) and knowledge co-created with the customer (knowledge resulting from combining the enterprise's knowledge and the customer's knowledge) [22]-[23]. Consequently, one can distinguish Knowledge Management (KM), Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Customer Knowledge Management (CKM). In the literature, CKM is often defined as combination of KM and CRM [24]-[25].

CRM is regarded as a strategic marketing method supported by the theory of relationship marketing [26]. CRM was defined as a comprehensive strategy that enables an organisation to identify, win, retain and attend to profitable customers by building and maintaining relationships with them [7],[27]. Also Cerchia [28] defines CRM as a business strategy, strongly related to relationship marketing, that is based on the evolution of technology and customer orientation. An essential element of a CRM strategy is interaction in two channels between the customer and organisation (external communication). The aim of CRM is to maintain strong relationships between customers and the organisation that will meet customers' needs and ensure their loyalty. Payne and Frow [29] suggested that CRM is more often used in the context of technological solutions, and it was described as information-based relationship marketing [30].

There is no single, generally accepted definition of the concept of CRM in the literature. This is due to the fact that CRM is viewed from at least five different perspectives – as a process, strategy, philosophy, capacity (potential) of an organisation or technology [31]. The variety of the approaches to defining CRM was also pointed out by Dalla Pozza et al. [4], according to whom CRM means a set of business operations referring to four areas of intervention corresponding to the four dimensions of CRM – strategy, organization, technology, and customer management – and the main aim of CRM is to improve relationships with customers.

Different scholars combine these perspectives in different ways or define CRM through the lens of one of them. Soltani and Navimipour [32] define CRM as a strategy that is designed to generate a new business atmosphere, providing actual customer relationship management. Meanwhile, Payne and Frow [29] stress that CRM is an approach to management that is focused on creating, developing and strengthening relationships with carefully selected customers in order to maximise the value and profitability of the enterprise. The most popular approach in the literature is to define CRM through several perspectives. According to Bose [33], CRM is integration of business technologies and processes applied to satisfy the customer's needs during a given interaction. More precisely, CRM is about acquiring, analysing and using knowledge about customers in order to sell more goods or services and do so more effectively. Parvatiyar and Sheth [34] indicate that CRM is a comprehensive strategy and process of gaining, maintaining and engaging in partnership with selected customers in order to create the highest value for the company and customer. This involves integrating the organisation's marketing, sales, customer service and supply chain functions in order to achieve increased efficiency and effectiveness in providing value for the customer. Khan et al. [35] stated that CRM consists of guidelines, procedures, processes and strategies that enable organisations to match interactions with customers and trace all the information related to customers. A broad perspective of this term is presented by Greenberg [36], who equates CRM with technology, customer-oriented system, strategy and/or a set of business processes, methodology – according to him, CRM is all of them combined or whichever a given entity chooses.

Actions taken as part of CRM have specific objectives that determine measurable effects to be achieved. They include, among other things: converting customer information into knowledge for a company [37], offering a tailored product [38]-[39] or increasing customer retention [39].

Nowadays, CRM is regarded as a customer-oriented strategy designed to manage relatioG Because there are various approaches to defining CRM, there is also a variety of approaches in the literature to distinguishing its key elements and stages. Sin et al. [7] indicated four components of the concept of CRM: (1) customer orientation (2) organisation of the customer relationship management, (3) customer knowledge/data management, (4) IT support. According to Gummesson [40], CRM is a systematised procedure comprising the following stages: identifying individual purchasers and determining a way to reach them; dividing customers into groups according to their values and needs; interaction and creation of a dialogue with customers; adjusting the message and offer to the needs of individuals through a direct contact or an automated process; continuous improvement of the relationship.

2.2 Generation Z on social media

Generation Z is the first generation to be born in the digital world and grow up surrounded by advanced technologies, social media and smartphones. For that reason, they feel fine in the virtual world, and being online all the time, they cannot imagine life without the smartphone, the Internet or social media. Generation Z is referred to by various names in the literature and the media. Most often, these names refer to the technology with which this generation is associated: Digital Natives (reference to the virtual world), Generation Like (reference to the *like* symbol on Facebook), iGeneration (reference to devices from Apple), Selfie Generation (reference to taking selfies) or Screeners Generation (reference to the screens of the devices in front of which Gen Zers spend a lot of time). One can also encounter the term Rainbow Generation, which refers to the diversity of this generation [41]. The authors adopted the term Generation Z in their research, as it is most popular in the literature and social media.

In keeping with the views of Kavounis [42], Francis and Hoefel [43], Bassiouni and Hackley [44], Kamenidou et al. [45], Priporas et al. [14], Hampton and Keys [46], the authors assumed for the purpose of the research that the term Generation Z means a generation of people born in the years 1995–2009 (2010 is the first year of birth of Generation Alpha [47]).

Based on the existing research results, one can characterise Gen Zers as: responsible, loyal, cautious, compassionate, open, determined [48], realistic, creative, hyper-connected, open to sharing with other people via mobile devices and social media their good and bad experiences resulting from the customer-company relationship, and preferring contact via technology to face-to-face interaction [49]. Generation Z is the most diverse generation of all [50], which makes it open to ethnic diversity [51].

Websites and apps have a greater impact on Generation Z's purchasing decisions than TV commercials or online banners [52]. Hence, social media is where relationships with Generation Z should be built. Enterprises should develop communities and encourage customer engagement on social media, as relationships with a brand community, i.e., between customer and brand, customer and product, and customer and company, facilitate trust in the brand [53]. Since trust is an important factor in the purchasing process [54], it is vital for entrepreneurs to know whether and how brand communities on social media affect brand trust [53].

In addition, representatives of Generation Z more than other cohorts prioritise convenience as far as brand is considered. They experiment with both known and emerging, novel ways to simplify shopping. Brands, even highly reputed ones, may lose customers, if they ignore their expectations and do not focus on the development of innovative ways to increase customer convenience when shopping [55]. Gen Zers more than other generations expect personalised products or services and a clear statement of values by companies [55]. Members of Generation Z are characterised by high mobility. They want to have everything right away – once they become interested in a product, they search for information about it on the Internet, and compare its prices and quality online. They like being active on social media [56]. They spend more hours in front of the screens of their mobile devices than computers, and most of them prefer online shopping using their mobile phone [17]. The average attention span of an average Gen Zer is 8 seconds compared to 12 seconds among Millennials [57]. The technological landscape of Generation Z has evolved over the last few years. According to a 2014–2015 study, Facebook was until recently the most popular social networking platform with teenagers, but it was overtaken by such platforms as YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat. Today, smartphone is an integral element of life – 95% of Gen Zers declare possession of or access to a smartphone. This, in turn, facilitates online activity – 45% of Gen Zers are nowadays online almost constantly, compared to 24% a few years earlier [58]. The most important reasons why Gen Zers use social media are: desire to talk to friends (73%); being interested in what others are doing (54%), learning about new topics (41%) and sharing one's views or private matters with friends (25%) [59].

The authors notice lack of empirical studies in the area of marketing that address Generation Z, which seems to be the greatest marketing challenge of the future. This generation has a huge purchasing power, and in 2017 it accounted for one fourth of the population of Great Britain [14]. In Poland, Gen Zers made up 23.4% of the population in 2017 [60].

The role of social media in shaping the relationships between customers and enterprises may differ depending on the type of the platform used [61]. Results of a 2019 study show that Gen Zers most often use three social networking platforms – Instagram (65%), YouTube (62%) and Snapchat (51%). Facebook came in a distant fourth position (34%). Around 25% of the respondents declared using these platforms every day. A study conducted by Piper Jaffray in the first quarter of 2021 shows that the most favourite social media platforms among Gen Zers are Snapchat (31%), TikTok (30%) and Instagram (24%) [59].

Undoubtedly, social media have never been more important to young consumers than today. As was found in the research conducted by Ypulse [62] into how the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way social media are used, Gen Zers described YouTube as funny and used that platform most often during the lockdown. Ypulse [62] found that watching films on YouTube was the most popular way of spending free time among members of this generation. Hence, the authors assume that:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Of all the different social networking portals, respondents of Generation Z most often choose YouTube.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *A Generation Z respondent's gender does not impact their choice of a social networking portal.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Of all the different social networking portals, respondents of Generation Z residing in big cities most often choose YouTube.*

Companies, by increasing the amount of content published and made available to customers on social networking platforms, increase the level of interactivity and association with customers [63]–[65]. Pereira et al. [66] explained the impact of the use of Facebook on the association between customers and brands on Facebook. They also found that despite following brands on that portal, customers are less interested in remaining in touch with them or re-sharing their content on their own pages. With respect to the research results cited above, the authors assumed that:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Before using a service/purchasing a product of a specific company, respondents of Generation Z search for the company's social media accounts.*

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *A Generation Z respondent's gender does not impact their tendency to search for a company's social media accounts before purchasing its service/product.*

Hypothesis 6 (H6). *A Generation Z respondent's place of residence does not impact their tendency to search for a company's social media accounts before purchasing its service/product.*

3. Research methodology

For the research problem formulated by the authors, the aim of this paper was stated, namely: identification social networking portals, which are most often used by the representatives of Generation Z as an element of building relationships with companies. The research into the attitudes of Gen Zers towards brands on social media is part of broader research conducted by the authors among students in Poland and Great Britain in 2020. In both the cases, which included qualitative and quantitative aspects, the method of indirect measurement in the form of survey research, the technique of a survey, and the research tool of a survey questionnaire were used. The catalogue of the variables used in the research was proposed based on critical analysis of the literature [67],[68]. There is no agreement in the literature regarding the year of birth of representatives of Generation Z. The most often cited date is the year 1995, which the authors of the paper adopted as the cut-off year in their study.

The authors also assumed that the independent variable is the tested group of respondents, not the entire population of generation Z. The difficulty in unequivocally indicating the age range of generation Z makes it problematic to treat this variable as an independent variable. The authors found that using Gen Z as a heuristic is useful because generational profiling now exists as description in popular media and popular culture.

Before commencing the main research, the authors conducted a pilot study in 2018, which allowed them to identify and eliminate errors in the survey questionnaire before proceeding to the main research. A total of 157 students participated in the research conducted in Poland, and responses of 151 students (126 females and 25 males) were qualified for the analysis. A total of 150 students participated in the research conducted in Great Britain, and responses of 150 people (80 females and 70 males) were qualified for further research. The research was conducted using the CAWI technique. In Poland, an online survey questionnaire was made available on the Webankieta.pl platform, while data collection in Great Britain was commissioned to an external institution specialising in conducting surveys. The sampling for both studies was non-probabilistic. Using non-probabilistic selection, the authors also applied statistical inference, treating it only as an opportunity to identify relationships in the studied groups, which descriptive statistics does not allow. It is also important to stress the high degree of feminisation of the group of the Polish students qualified for the research, which impacted the gender structure of the respondents.

Based on the research results, the authors calculated the number and frequency of the respondents' responses to the individual questions on the survey. The authors are aware that the applied sampling technique does not allow the researcher to estimate the error appearing when generalizing the regularities observed in the sample to the entire population. In order to identify possible relationship occurring in the studied groups, the authors used statistical inference for which they assumed a certain level of significance – descriptive statistics does not provide such possibilities. Statistical inference was conducted with ex ante significance level at $\alpha = 0.05$, and p value was calculated for each test. In order to find out whether there is sufficient proof to reject H_0 against H_1 ($p < \alpha$) or not ($p \geq \alpha$), p value was compared with the level of statistical significance. All the analyses were conducted using software Statistica v.13.

The authors are aware that survey research has limitations such as providing merely superficial understanding of the phenomena being studied or inaccurate answers given by respondents. Criticism of the presented research results may be that the research was conducted on a small group of participants. Small samples may be methodologically questionable (e.g., generalisation is difficult), but they can be useful in inference if proper statistical tests are used [69].

4. Results

All of the surveyed members of Generation Z in Poland and Great Britain indicated that they used social networking portals. Figure 1 presents responses (in %) to multiple choice questions about which social networking portals were used by the respondents in 2020. The collected data allow the most popular social networking portals to be identified in the examined groups of respondents in 2020. In both the countries, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram were indicated, but the popularity of these three portals differed in the analysed countries. Huge differences were also observed in the use of Twitter (56 percentage points) and Pinterest (19 percentage points) by respondents in Poland and Great Britain.

In the category Other (than those mentioned in the question), the respondents indicated:
- in Poland: VK.com, Telegram, LinkedIN,
- in Great Britain: Etoro, LinkedIN, TikTok, Reddit.

Each of these portals was mentioned by only one respondent in a given country.

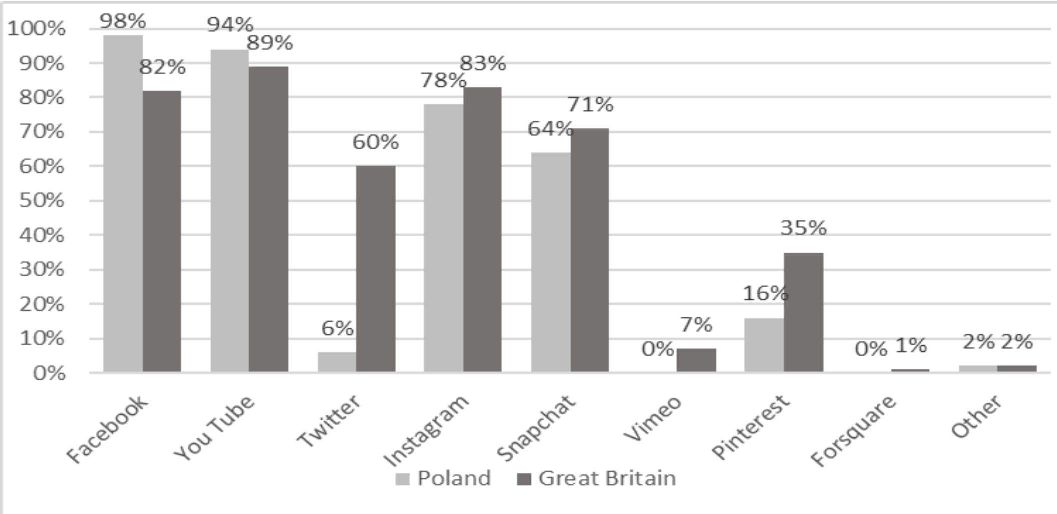

Figure 1. Use of social networking portals by respondents in Poland and Great Britain in 2020

Tables 1 and 2 contain detailed data on the use of social networking portals by respondents in Poland and Great Britain in 2020 and the result of a significance test for indicators of structure by the respondent's gender.
The data collected in Poland indicate small differences (% of cases) in the number of male and female users of a given social networking portal. The difference between the indicators of structure by the respondent's gender proved to be statistically significant only in the case of the use of Twitter and Instagram, and females more often than males used Instagram. The inverse relationship was observed in the case of Twitter – it was males that used this portal more often. Analysis of data collected in Great Britain shows that the share (% of cases) of male and female users of a given social networking portal was similar. The difference between the indicators of structure by the respondent's gender proved to be statistically significant only in the case of the use of Pinterest – females used this portal more often than males.

Table 1. Use of social networking portals by respondents in Poland in 2020 and the result of a significance test for indicators of structure by gender

Responses	In total		Females		Males		*p*
	Number	Percentage of cases	Number	Percentage of cases	Number	Percentage of cases	
Facebook	148	98.01%	123	97.62%	25	100.00%	0.2180
YouTube	142	94.04%	117	92.86%	25	100.00%	0.0842
Twitter	9	5.96%	4	3.97%	5	16.00%	**0.0102**
Instagram	118	78.15%	103	81.75%	15	60.00%	**0.0081**
Snapchat	55	36.42%	44	34.92%	11	44.00%	0.1944
Vimeo	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Pinterest	24	15.89%	21	16.67%	3	12.00%	0.2798
Forsquare	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Table 2. Use of social networking portals by respondents in Great Britain in 2020 and the result of a significance test for indicators of structure by gender

Responses	In total		Females		Males		*p*
	Number	Percentage of cases	Number	Percentage of cases	Number	Percentage of cases	
Facebook	123	82.00%	67	83.75%	56	80.00%	0.2755
YouTube	134	89.33%	70	87.50%	64	91.43%	0.2183
Twitter	90	60.00%	47	58.75%	43	61.43%	0.3691
Instagram	125	83.33%	69	86.25%	56	80.00%	0.1528
Snapchat	106	70.67%	59	73.75%	47	67.14%	0.1875
Vimeo	11	7.33%	7	8.75%	4	5.71%	0.2380
Pinterest	53	35.33%	36	45.00%	17	24.29%	**0.0041**
Forsquare	2	1.33%	0	0	2	2.86%	0.0639

The collected data on the use of a social networking portal by the respondent's place of residence in 2020 were presented in Table 3 (data for Poland) and Table 4 (data for Great Britain).
In the case of the survey conducted in Poland, Twitter was chosen mainly by respondents residing in big cities, while Facebook and YouTube were the most frequently chosen portals by respondents residing in villages.
Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat were the most popular portals for respondents residing in big cities in Great Britain. The results showed differences between Polish and British respondents.

Table 3. Use of a social networking portal by a Polish respondent's place of residence in 2020

Responses	Place of residence (% against number of responses = 151)					
	Village	City up to 50 000 residents	City up to 100 000 residents	City up to 250 000 residents	City over 250 000 residents	Row in total
Facebook	56.95%	14.57%	4.64%	13.91%	7.95%	98.01%
YouTube	53.64%	14.57%	5.3%	13.25%	7.28%	94.04%
Twitter	0.66%	0	1.32%	1.99%	1.99%	5.96%
Instagram	45.03%	10.60%	3.97%	10.60%	7.95%	78.15%
Snapchat	39.09%	9.93%	3.97%	7.28%	3.31%	63.58%
Vimeo	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pinterest	9.27%	1.99%	0.66%	2.65%	1.32%	15.89%
Forsquare	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4. Use of a social networking portal by a British respondent's place of residence in 2020

Responses	Place of residence (% against number of responses = 150)					
	Village	City up to 50 000 residents	City up to 100 000 residents	City up to 250 000 residents	City over 250 000 residents	Row in total
Facebook	14.00%	12.00%	16.00%	11.33%	28.67%	82.00%
YouTube	14.00%	10.67%	19.33%	12.67%	12.67%	89.33%
Twitter	11.33%	10.00%	10.67%	6.00%	22.00%	60.00%
Instagram	13.33%	11.33%	16.67%	10.00%	32.00%	83.33%
Snapchat	11.33%	9.33%	17.33%	8.00%	24.67%	70.67%
Vimeo	2.67%	1.33%	1.33%	0	2.00%	7.33%
Pinterest	6.67%	5.33%	7.33%	5.33%	10.67%	35.33%
Forsquare	0.67%	0	0	0	0.67%	1.33%

The next stage of the research was asking the respondents (through a question based on an ordinal scale) whether before using a service or purchasing a product of a specific company they searched for its accounts on social media. Table 5 presents the collected data (as numbers) for Poland and Great Britain in 2020.

Table 5. The numbers of the responses to the question concerning the search for social media accounts of a given company by respondents in Poland and Great Britain before purchasing its product/service in 2020

Classes	Number	Cumulative number	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Poland				
Never	9	9	5.96%	5.96%
Rarely (only in specific cases)	50	59	33.11%	39.07%
Often	63	122	41.72%	80.79%
Almost always	29	151	19.21%	100.00%
Great Britain				
Never	9	9	6.00%	6.00%
Rarely (only in specific cases)	41	50	27.33%	33.33%
Often	74	124	49.33%	82.67%
Almost always	26	150	17.33%	100.00%

When comparing the percentages of the responses provided to the individual categories (Table 5), a significant similarity can be observed between the respondents in both the analysed countries in 2020 in terms of searching for social media accounts of a given company before using its services/purchasing its product. Most respondents (67% in Great Britain and 61% in Poland) stated that before using a service/before purchasing a product of a specific company, they often or almost always searched for social media accounts of that company.

In order to examine the relationship between the variables: searching for social media accounts before using a service/before purchasing a product of a specific company and the respondent's gender, Mann-Whitney U test was applied. The test was used for analysing responses to the questions concerning differences between the analysed groups, as its great advantage is that it can be used on small samples of participants (Table 6). It can also be used when the variables to be measured are ordinal type, e.g., Likert's scale [69]. In both the studies (in Poland and in Great Britain), the respondents were divided into two groups (females and males). The authors were unable to establish that both the analysed groups were from normal distribution, as the numbers of their members were relatively small. Consequently, the authors could not rely on a parametric mean test using Student's t distribution, as it was impossible to check whether both the samples followed normal distribution [70].

Table 6. Mann-Whitney U test results concerning the relationship between the search for social media accounts of a given company before purchasing its product/service and the respondent's gender in Poland and Great Britain in 2020

Mann-Whitney U test (adjusted for continuity) the relationship between the search for social media accounts of a given company before purchasing its product/service against the variable: Gender	**Sum of ranks male**	**Sum of ranks female**	**U**	**Z**	***P***
results for the survey in Poland	1412.00	10064.00	1087.00	**2.5960**	**0.0094**
results for the survey in Great Britain	5080.00	6245.00	2595.00	−0.8335	0.4045

Analysis of the data collected in Poland in 2020 indicated that gender had a significant impact on the differences in the analysed variable (p = 0.0094). From the data presented in Table 6, it follows that women in the surveyed group in Poland are significantly more likely than male respondents to search for social media accounts of specific companies before purchasing their product/service. In the case of the data collected in Great Britain, no significant relationship was found between the variables: search for social media accounts of specific companies before purchasing their product/service and the respondent's gender.

Table 7. Spearman's rank order correlation concerning the relationship between the search for social media accounts of a specific company before purchasing its product/service and the respondent's place of residence in Poland and Great Britain in 2020

Spearman rank order correlation of the variables: the search for social media accounts of a specific company before purchasing its product/service and place of residence	**N of valid ones**	**Spearman's rank R**	**t(N-2)**	***P***
results for the survey in Poland	151	0.0796	0.9748	0.3313
results for the survey in Great Britain	150	−0.1322	−1.6220	0.1069

The next stage of the analysis was verifying whether there is a relationship between the variables: search for social media accounts of specific companies before purchasing their product/service (variable X) and the respondent's place of residence (variable Y). In order to assess the dependence between two qualitative features, non-parametric correlation coefficient – Spearman's rank correlation coefficient – was calculated (Table 7). Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is used for analysing correlation between objects in terms of a two-dimensional feature (X,Y) [71]-[72]. The obtained Spearman's coefficients R are not statistically significant. The analysis did not give any grounds for confirming statistically significant correlations between the analysed features: search for social media accounts of a specific company before purchasing its product/service and the place of residence of respondents in Poland in 2020. The same is true about the coefficients calculated for the data collected in Great Britain in 2020 – Spearman's coefficients R were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

5. Discussion

The authors' findings can be compared with the results of other studies only in a selective manner.

The conclusions that respondents in Poland and Great Britain search for social media accounts of a given company before purchasing its product/service can be related to the results of research by Vasan [16]. This scholar observed that promotional ads displayed on social networking portals (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) provided important information on products/services to Generation Z consumers. The present findings can also be compared to the views of Kotler et al. [56], who pointed out that Gen Zers like to have everything right away – once they become interested in a product, they search for information about it on the Internet, compare its prices and quality online.

Moreover, the findings of the research presented by the authors reveal differences between the attitudes of respondents in Poland and those in Great Britain. The differences may be due to the different level of development of those countries. The hypotheses formulated by the authors were verified with a different result depending on the respondent's home country. This can be substantiated by the views of Alalwan et al. [73], who noted that the nationality of individuals reflects significant differences between customers when it comes to choosing social networking platforms, attitudes of the individuals and motivation to use such technologies. These differences can be explained by the impact of cultural, social and economic factors.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to identify social networking portals, which are most often used by the representatives of Generation Z as an element of building relationships with companies. Analysis of the literature was conducted to present the current state of knowledge and confirm the relevance of the research problems. Not all of the hypotheses formulated by the authors were confirmed. In the case of Hypotheses 2 (H2), different interpretations were obtained depending on the social networking portal being analysed.

Analysis of the collected data confirmed Hypothesis 1 (H1 stating that of the different social networking portals, respondents of Generation Z most often choose YouTube) only in the analysed group in Great Britain. In Poland, the most popular social networking portal with the respondents was Facebook. However, it should be stressed that the Polish respondents rated You Tube high as well (the score was only 4 percentage points less than Facebook). This may indicate a new trend within Generation Z in Poland, which means that in the near future entrepreneurs will reach Gen Zers mainly through YouTube, as is now the case in Great Britain.

Analysing the impact of gender on the choice of the social networking portal (H2), the authors found no such impact in the case of Facebook, You Tube, Snapchat, Vimeo and Forsquare in both the analysed groups. Female respondents in Great Britain more often than men chose Pinterest, whereas female respondents in Poland preferred Instagram. In Poland, male respondents more often than women chose Twitter. Analysis of the collected data did not confirm Hypothesis 3. These findings can provide guidance for entrepreneurs when developing a market strategy aimed at a specific group of customers.

In both the countries, the research findings also confirmed Hypothesis 4 (H4), which states that before using services/purchasing a product of a specific company respondents search for its social media accounts. Hypothesis 5 (H5) was confirmed in the case of the data collected in Great Britain, but rejected in the research conducted in Poland. Thus, it can be inferred that female respondents in Poland are significantly more likely than men to search for social media accounts of specific companies before purchasing their product/service. In the case of the data collected in Great Britain, no significant relationship was found between these variables. In both the analysed groups, the research confirmed Hypothesis 6 (H6), which states that the respondent's place of residence has no impact on their tendency to search for a specific company's social media accounts before purchasing its service/product.

The results of the research, although not conducted on a representative sample, allow to deepen the knowledge on the behaviour of the Generation Z representatives in social media. The research conducted by the authors have implications for both scholars and entrepreneurs/managers. The present research may provide scholars with new information that will extend the knowledge on the behaviours of Gen Zers and their expectations of customer-company interactions on social media. It also provides important information on how differences in gender or place of residence play a role in building the customer-company relationships.

The authors hope that the present research findings will encourage managers to identify the needs of Gen Zers and make use of such knowledge to develop an innovative offer. The use of social media by Gen Zers is already changing the market, and will ultimately lead to the emergence of new business models, processes and products.

Future research could be conducted in other countries to find out whether the same patterns can be identified among Generation Z customers. Further research would allow to find out the impact of the use of social media by Generation Z on the financial performance of companies. Future research in the context of sustainability requires not only recognition of the difference that online buying makes and the social interaction that takes place in relation to this, both on the websites of online providers like Amazon and eBay and on social media, but also recognition of the social impact of blogging and its importance relative to the sites researched.

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