

Generation Z Consumer's Behaviors and Values during and Post-Pandemic: A Systematic and Critical Review

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the literature on Generation Z consumer's intentions, behaviors, and values related to the Covid-19 pandemic published within the management and marketing fields, adopting a systematic literature review (Slr), alongside a critical review. Elsevier's Scopus database is scanned to access publications. The analysis sets out the main topics of the papers under investigation and allows a first overview of Generation Z consumer's behaviors, values, attitudes, intentions and purchasing and consumption styles during the health crisis. By systematizing and collecting fragmented knowledge from the literature under review, the paper attempts to design a preliminary profile of the current Generation Z consumer. The study provides insightful suggestions to companies to adequately respond to the changing habits of Generation Z consumers. The results can contribute to map the new links between Generation Z and other generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials) and to formulate assumptions for deeper research in the field. The paper concludes with an insightful summary involving the challenges and future outlook.

Keywords: Generation Z, consumer behavior, Covid-19, systematic literature review, critical review.

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1. Introduction

Generational theorists Strauss and Howe (1991) define a generation as a set of people born in the same time span of about 20 years, a period in which historical events, external influences, education, and values shape attitudes, beliefs, and the sense of belonging.

Numerous definitions, including «digital natives» (Turner, 2015), particularly connote the members of Gen Z – loosely, people born from 1995 to 2010 (Eberhardt, 2017) – testifying to how their attitudes are continually shaped by the incessant and overwhelming technological progress. In fact, they are exposed from the earliest youth to the internet, social networks, and to mobile systems (Singh and Dangmei, 2016). That virtual context has given life to a hypercognitive and hyper-connected generation very comfortable with collecting and cross-referencing many sources of information and integrating virtual and offline experiences (Csobanka, 2016).

This generation is spending their youth and adult years in an era of economic and social renewal (Sidorcuka and Chesnovicka, 2017). Furthermore, viral attack, such as that of Covid-19, has dramatically transformed people's daily lives, as well as their shopping and consumption routines (Prestowitz, 2021). According to Accenture (2020), during the pandemic, consumers have changed attitudes, behaviours, and values. The pandemic trauma changed individual behaviors, reliance and lowered trust among people and has accentuated the need to satisfy basic necessities.

The limitations imposed by the pandemic have brought to light experiences of widespread unease among all citizens and especially among these adolescents, who face a phase of life in which the transition from child to adult status implies, among other things, the need to be able to relate and experiment in different life contexts: «a life lived essentially online undermines all those processes of social capital activation that occur through leisure and face-to-face encounters, from which Gen Z may have suffered in particular» (Vacchiano, 2022, p. 1).

Before the health crisis, the lifestyle of Generation Z members revolved around a realistic, «communaholic» and «dialoguer» behavior and unique, unlimited, and ethical consumption (Dolot, 2018; McKinsey, 2018).

Nearly two years and a half later, Covid has changed their outlook. Today Gen Z is one of the most damaged by the long-term consequences of the pandemic, in the form of higher rates of mental distress, anxiety, and depression, including the least positive life outlook, lower levels of emotional and social well-being than older generations (Rao and Rao, 2021; McKinsey, 2022; Vacchiano, 2022).

Thus, a crisis of this magnitude has had an impact on the behaviors and values of Gen Z individuals.

However, this research intends to focus on what attitudes and values today distinguish and characterize the profile of Gen Z members as consumers.

There is a strong need to verify and systematize the current state of research on Gen Z consumers and determine the emerging sentiment affecting their decision-making processes. Based on these assumptions, this analysis aims to summarize and collect fragmented knowledge on Gen Z consumers, highlighting the global impact of the Covid-19 epidemic, in terms of values, behaviors and motivations with which today Gen Z consumers «attack» the world of consumption. Furthermore, this work could help retailers, marketers, and leaders to identify any changes in Gen Z consumers' purchasing and consumption habits, as they plan for the future and develop commercially successful strategies.

In fact, understanding the current profile and new preference paths of Gen Z consumers could help practitioners seeking to build and maintain sustainable businesses that meet the needs of this young generation. Therefore, the paper aims to analyze the current management and marketing literature on this topic, identify possible research gaps, provide useful suggestions for future research, and make recommendations for practitioners and policymakers. Specifically, the paper aims to answer the following questions:

Rq1: *What is known about Generation Z consumers' behaviors and values produced by the Covid-19 pandemic in the management and marketing research domains?*

Rq2: *How has the profile of the Gen Z consumer been characterized during a global crisis of this magnitude?*

In this direction, this research work will contribute to new theoretical knowledge in the exploration of the new consumers of Generation Z, in terms of preferences, priorities, and the most relevant factors affecting their decision-making processes, in improving youth policies and providing useful information in the transition to the «next normal» scenario (Sneader and Singhal, 2020). Furthermore, the analysis uncovers flourishing research fields that need to be investigated to expand the ongoing debate on the topic.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 illustrates the methodology used for the study. Sections 3 and 4 provide the results and the discussions of the analysis. Sections 5 and 6 present the theoretical, mana-

gerial, and policy implications. Finally, Section 7 sets out conclusions, limitations of the study, and future research agenda.

2. Materials and methods

In order to investigate the topic of Generation Z consumer's behaviors and values during and post-pandemic, a systematic literature review (Slr) (Cook *et al.*, 1997; Cooper, 1998; Denyer and Tranfield, 2009) was conducted, as it provides «collective insights through theoretical synthesis into fields and sub-fields» (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003, p. 220). Slr methodology is an effective technique to identify key findings of complex research areas (e.g., Vrontis *et al.*, 2021; Vrontis and Christofi, 2021) and it is particularly effective for systematically evaluating a body of literature in a rigorous and discriminating way, thus leading to a robust conclusion of what is existing and unknown in a specific area under investigation (Cook *et al.*, 1997; Cooper, 1998; Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). Furthermore, by applying a rigorous research protocol, Slr is characterized by transparency, scientificity, and replicability (Leonidou *et al.*, 2020) which are useful for future studies and support researchers in investigating phenomena.

This systematic review included all the contributions on the topic present in literature until August 24, 2022. The analysis was articulated in the series of *planning and scoping*, *execution*, and *evaluation* steps, suggested by Tranfield *et al.* (2003). Two independent researchers were involved in the overall analysis of the review process.

The different phases for systematically reviewing the literature of our interest are described below.

1. Planning. First, a preliminary analysis of the subject was undertaken, identifying the research topic and the set of keywords for article extraction.

2. Execution. The research began by identifying the scientific database, from which the papers were extracted, following a rigorous pre-established research scheme. Elsevier's Scopus database, the largest database of peer-reviewed literature, was scanned to access publications of relevance for this review (Gusenbauer and Haddaway, 2020). Record extraction was conducted through the following set of concatenated keywords using Boolean modifiers (Brereton *et al.*, 2007): «generation Z» OR «gen z» AND Covid-19 OR sars-cov* OR coronavirus OR pandemic. At the first, the extraction was applied to title, abstract, and keywords; 164 papers were extracted from the database. The second step involved a rigorous data search for shortlisting relevant publications. In particu-

TABLE 1. Overall overview of research

	Step	Scopus
Step 1	Research keywords	164
Step 2	Themes	110
Step 3	Type	73
Step 4	Abstract	28

Source: Authors' elaboration.

lar, only the themes that fall within the managerial field or contribute in some way to business literature were selected. In fact, to establish the boundaries of the review, the selection was limited to business, management and accounting, social science, and decision science fields. This further step led to 110 results. From this pre-selection, to exclude contributions that could have less scientific rigor (such as monographs, book chapters, conference proceedings, etc.), we decided to restrict the review to peer-reviewed scholarly journals written in English. This additional filter reduced the contributions from 110 to 73. Next, the authors read the abstracts and article keywords to exclude duplicates and eliminate records unrelated to the research subject, according to the chosen «fit for purpose» method (Abatecola *et al.*, 2013). The articles selected for analysis deal with Gen Z members as consumers. This screening resulted in a final sample of 28 papers.

Table 1 summarizes the entire review process.

3. Evaluation. The articles were manually coded through two phases (Saldaña, 2021). First, data were processed through descriptive coding. Second, through pattern coding, the main themes were identified and qualitatively analyzed. Specifically, Excel data set sheet was created to classify the selected studies. The final database included information such as type of author (single author or collaboration); journal of publication; type of paper (conceptual, empirical); research design (quantitative, qualitative); applied methodology (case study, survey, literature review etc.).

3. Results

In order to clearly present the findings, in the first phase the main futures and methodological aspects of the 28 papers were analyzed.

At a later time, we identified the main topics, related to Generation Z's behaviors and values during the pandemic, which emerged until now in management literature, in order to understand the research orientation, as well as the main observation lenses used by scholars. The topics were defined using an inductive approach (Mayring, 2004), mov-

ing from the specific to general (Polit and Beck, 2004), useful because it provides categories from the raw data without the use of any theory-based categorization matrix (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008).

The resulting categories indicate the main general topic of the papers. Each paper is placed on only one topic.

The latter analysis, therefore, allows a first overview of the main emerging characteristics of the current Gen Z consumer profile during the pandemic, and identifies gaps in the literature and future steps.

Table 2 summarizes the main results of the study.

4. Discussion

The findings has allowed us to answer our research questions:

Rq1 *What is known about Generation Z consumers' behaviors and values produced by the Covid-19 pandemic in the management and marketing research domains?*

Rq2 *How has the profile of the Gen Z consumer been characterized during a global crisis of this magnitude?*

Indeed, analyzing in depth the 28 papers, it was possible to track them back to 2 different macro topics that reveal the current state of literature and the ongoing debate on Gen Z consumer's behaviors and values related to the Covid-19 pandemic in the fields of management and market .

Specifically, the analysis highlights how today Gen Z consumers are, feel, consume and/or purchase, and interact with products/services. These are characteristics related to the Covid-19 pandemic but probably destined to last, which allow us to identify the current Gen Z consumer profile (see Figure 1). Figure 1, specifically, encapsulates the characteristics emerging from the systematic study – which were fragmented in the various documents analyzed – in the two macro topics identified, so as to allow us an overview of the behavior, values, and intentions of the Gen Z consumer during and after the health crisis. This is obviously an attempt at profiling, resulting from the evidence that emerged from the systematic study conducted.

We now discuss the areas that appear to be gaining attention in relevant literature so far.

The first topic encompasses all those papers that analyze *Gen Z on-line behavior and technology acceptance* during the pandemic period, two intermingled matters – for this reason they cannot be divided into

TABLE. 2. *The key features of the reviewed papers*

Author/s	Title	Journal	Evidence type (empirical- e/ conceptual – c)	Research design (qualitative – qual/ quantitative – quan)	Research method	Gen Z consumer's main emerging characteristics	Main theory/ model of reference	Topic
Windasari <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Digital-only banking experience: Insights from gen Y and gen Z	Journal of Innovation and Knowledge	e	qual and quan	interview and survey	attention to economic value, ease of use, social influence, firm reputation, features, and reward	n.a.	
Molina-Prados <i>et al.</i> (2022)	The role of customer brand engagement in the use of Instagram as a «shop window» for fashion-industry social commerce	Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management	e	quan	survey	more active than affective	n.a.	
Indriyarti <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Online Food Delivery App Distribution and Determinants of Jakarta's Gen Z Spending Habits	Journal of Distribution Science	e	quan	survey	attention to previous experience of the service, orientation of time and price savings; attention to «prioritizing need»	Utaut	
Pinochet <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Smart technologies in supermarket retail and their influence on citizens' quality of life during the Covid-19 pandemic	Revista de Gestao	e	quan	survey	users of all smart technologies, especially with «assisted purchase» but digital platforms must convey credibility	n.a.	Online behavior and technology acceptance
Freeman <i>et al.</i> (2022)	«Defined by the #CoronavirusOutbreak»: Youth Studies characterizing Gen Z in Twitter discourse surrounding Covid-19	Journal of Youth Studies	e	qual	content analysis	societal delinquents versus model citizens, fragile versus resilient, and negative versus positive users of technology	Social identity theory	
Khanna and Kataria (2022)	Introducing Fairy Comments: Gen Z's Instrument of Online Kudos	Journal of Creative Communications	e	qual	interview	users of «fairy comments» in the online public sphere	n.a.	
Christian <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Generation Z in Jakarta's Attitude Towards Covid-19 Ad Distribution on YouTube	Journal of Distribution Science	e	quan	survey	attitude towards advertising is affected by the content and value aspects embedded in advertisements	n.a.	

TABLE. 2. Follows

Author/s	Title	Journal	Evidence type (empirical- e/ conceptual – c)	Research type (qualitative – qual/ quantitative – quan)	Research method	Gen Z consumer's main emerging characteristics	Main theory/ model of reference	Topic
Barrientos-Báez <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Spanish Tipsters and the Millennial and Centennial Generations in the Scenario of a Pandemic	Media and Communication	e	quan	focus on impact evaluation	influenced by a specific textual, visual, and audiovisual language (iconic and symbolic narrative)	n.a.	
Romero and Lado (2021)	Service robots and Covid-19: exploring perceptions of prevention efficacy at hotels in generation Z	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	e	quan	experimental design	more conscious of health risks when traveling; they consider being attended by service automation as an appropriate means to reducing the Covid-19 contagion risk	Ehbm	
Vinichenko <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Views on working with information in a semi-digital society: Its possibility to develop as open innovation culture	Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity Publications	e	qual and quan	survey, in-depth interview and focus group	informationally mature and Internet-dependent	n.a.	
Pérez-Escoda <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Fake news reaching young people on social networks: Distrust challenging media literacy		e	quan	survey	lack of trust in social networks (the media they consume the most)	n.a.	Online behavior and technology acceptance
Liu <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Covid-19 information overload and generation Z's social media discontinuance intention during the pandemic lockdown	Technological Forecasting and Social Change	e	quan	survey	perceived information overload on social media	S-O-R model	
Sinha and Fung (2021)	How social media micro-influencers are disrupting the business of youth fashion	Rutgers Business Review	c			active participants in the production of web content and digital culture	n.a.	
Cardinal <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Communication strategies to facilitate emergency preparedness for Generation Z and college food pantries: Lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic	Journal of Emergency Management	e	quan	social media data analysis	increasing posting during an emergency is key to deterring insecurity	Socioecological model	

TABLE. 2. Follows

Author/s	Title	Journal	Evidence type (empirical- e/ conceptual – c)	Research design (qualitative – qual/ quantitative – quan)	Research method	Gen Z consumer's main emerging characteristics	Main theory/ model of reference	Topic
Koch <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Online shopping motives during the Covid-19 pandemic—lessons from the crisis	Sustainability	e	quan	survey	hedonic motivation is a better predictor of purchase intentions than utilitarian motives	n.a.	
Chayomchai (2020)	The online technology acceptance model of generation-Z people in Thailand during Covid-19 crisis	Management and Marketing	e	quan	survey	intention to use online technology is predicted by three key factors including performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and trust	variables of many models (Tam, UTA, Online behavior and technology acceptance	
Sidorenko-Bautista <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Use of new narratives for Covid-19 reporting: From 360°videos to ephemeral tiktok videos in online media	Tripodos	e	qual	review of media outlets and journalists' work reporting	interactions and media behavior focus on vertical, ephemeral content	n.a.	
Wolf <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Wine market segmentation by age generations in the Western US: expectations after the Covid-19 pandemic	International Journal of Wine Business Research	e	quan	survey	inclined to a less expensive purchase; buy products more online and less in physical outlets.	n.a.	
Kulshreshtha and Sharma (2022)	From restaurant to cloud kitchen: Survival of the fittest during Covid-19 An empirical examination	Technological Forecasting and Social Change	e	quan	survey	variety seeking behavior; value for money; «wow» feeling and «hungry for del information' about green or sustainable products or services; search for the novelty, quality, and aesthetics.	Food choice process model	
Wu and Lau (2022)	Covid-19-induced negative emotions and the impacts on personal values and travel behaviors: A threat appraisal perspective	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	e	qual and quan	focus group and survey	fear, target orientation, altruism, and hedonism	Pmt	
Azimi <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Closer together or further apart? Values of hero generations Y and Z during crisis	Young consumers	e	quan	online survey	stimulation, hedonism and achievement, worried about uncertainty in the future	hedonism cohort theory, and trait value system	Emotions and Attitudes

TABLE. 2. Follows

Author/s	Title	Journal	Evidence type (empirical- e/ conceptual – c)	Research design (qualitative – qual/ quantitative – quan)	Research method	Gen Z consumer's main emerging characteristics	Main theory/ model of reference	Topic
Magana and Fernández- Abascal (2022)	The Austerity Chic Interior, Gen Z, and Millennials' Domestic Dream	Interiority	c			sharing life, managing climate, naturalised interiors, reusing new materials, and austerity chic	n.a.	
Rahmawati <i>et al.</i> (2022)	What makes Gen Z feel stressed, anxious and interested in doing social tourism when pandemic?	Cogent Business and Management	e	quan	survey	high altruistic value	n.a.	
Rončák <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Safety concerns and travel behavior of generation z: Case study from the czech republic	Sustainability	e	quan	survey	is not afraid to go to significant events or travel, but there is a necessity that	health and safety issues will be observed	
Lisdayanti (2021)	The Influence of Geographical Information System and Experiential Marketing on Interest in Watching Virtual Concerts during A Pandemic (Survey of Generation Z in Bandung City)	Review of International Geographical Education Online	e	quan	survey	high preferential interest (participation in virtual concert) towards low experience and referential interest (watching virtual concerts again in the future)	n.a.	
Yeap <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Have coffee/tea, will travel: assessing the inclination towards sustainable coffee and tea tourism among the green generations	International Journal of Culture, Tourism, Hospitality Research	e	quan	survey	attitude towards sustainable tourism (relaxation and learning benefits)	Tpb	
Pelikánová and Macgregor (2020)	The Willingness of Generation Z to Financially Support Csr – A Central European Study	Danube	e	quan	survey	conditional and generous readiness in financially supporting Csr; extremely sensitive regarding the asymmetry and lack of information	Multi-stakeholder model	
Seabra <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Restrictions' acceptance and risk perception by young generations in a Covid-19 context	International Journal of Tourism Cities	e	quan	survey	safety perception in daily lives and future plans to travel	n.a.	

Source: Authors' elaboration.

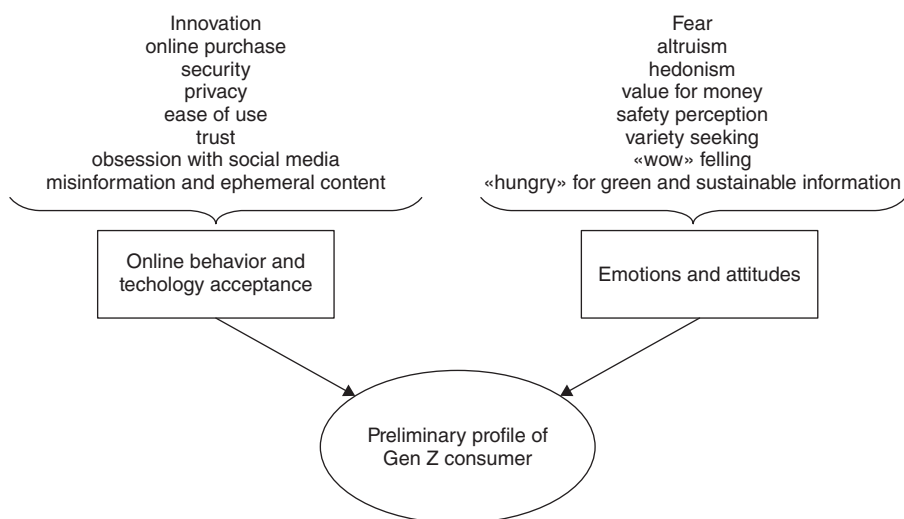


FIGURE 1. Gen Z consumer and Covid-19: a preliminary profile.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

two different topics – that have gained even more momentum during the health crisis.

In the era of Covid-19, Internet has taken on an increasingly important role as a mediator between producers and Gen Z consumers and technology gained strength due to applications that mediate these interactions (Pinochet *et al.*, 2022).

If advances in intelligent technologies incentivize these young adults to consume/purchase products and services, provoking better attitudes and higher booking intentions (e.g. in hospitality contexts) (Romero and Lado, 2021), it is also true that Gen Z consumers pay attention to online transactions and digital experience in terms of security, privacy, ease of use, firm reputation, social influence, features, reward (Pinochet *et al.*, 2022; Windasari *et al.*, 2022), trust and performance and effort expectancy (Chayomchai, 2020).

Gen Z consumers, considered «informationally mature», «innovators», «technologically savvy» and «obsessed with social media» (Vinichenko *et al.*, 2021; Freeman *et al.*, 2022), have easily embraced digital commerce and home-delivery services for acquiring merchandise previously purchased in traditional (brick-and-mortar) stores (e.g. food), in view of the orientation of time and price savings (Indriyarti *et al.*,

2022). Moreover, hedonic factors are positively related to Gen Z's online purchase behavior rather than utilitarian motives (Koch *et al.*, 2020), and Gen Z consumer involvement has a positive effect on cognitive processing and activation, but not on affection (e.g. for fashion-industry social commerce) (Molina-Prados *et al.*, 2022).

The analysis also highlighted social media's ability to reach Gen Z – the largest consumers of social networks (Pérez-Escoda *et al.*, 2021) and active participants in the production of web content (Sinha and Fung, 2021) – during an emergency (Cardinal *et al.*, 2021). Unfortunately, this reach often occurs with information overload that increases social media fatigue (Liu *et al.*, 2021), with the bombardment of fake news causing distrust in media literacy (Pérez-Escoda *et al.*, 2021) and fueling the stereotype that Gen Z consumers are «socially reclusive spreaders of misinformation through media» (Freeman *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, consumers of this generation exhibit features such as searching for information on online channels and expressing an interest in receiving entertainment from the advertisements they watch (Christian *et al.*, 2022).

However, the high potential of social networks for the transmission and viralization of content fits perfectly with the online behavior typical of Gen Z consumers. In fact, in terms of online participation they (1) use the «fairy comment» as an instrument of expression (Khanna and Kataria, 2022); (2) are influenced by iconic and symbolic narrative (Barrientos-Báez *et al.*, 2022); (3) have interactions and multimedia behavior that focus on vertical and ephemeral content (Sidorenko-Bautista *et al.*, 2020); (4) pay attention to rich, visually appealing content, often modeled by the influencers (Sinha and Fung, 2021).

As shown in Table 2, most of the documents included in this macro-topic do not provide specific observation lenses to investigate *Gen Z online behavior and technology acceptance*, but merely illustrate and comment the results of empirical research.

Overall, some papers under investigation addressing the topic refer to (1) models and theories from behavioral and social Psychology as the main theoretical reference, such as the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Liu *et al.*, 2021), Social identity Theory (Freeman *et al.*, 2022), Extended Health Belief Model (Ehbm) (Romero and Lado, 2021), and socioecological model (Cardinal *et al.*, 2021); or (2) information systems theories that model how Gen Z users come to accept and use technology, such as Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (Utaut) (Indriyarti *et al.*, 2022), and variables of different models (Technology Acceptance Model – Tam, Unified Theory of Acceptance – UTA, Use of Technology Model – Utm) (Chayomchai, 2020).

The models used have often been integrated by further variables or combined with other models to increase their explanatory power, and the pandemic has been considered a situational factor, either mediating or moderating the relationships between the analyzed constructs.

The second topic shifts the focus to the issue of *emotions and attitudes*. These sentiments and propensities are amplified during the crisis and impact the overall Gen Z consumer decisional and consumption process, significantly affecting their favorable image and leading to the purchase intention and decision.

The analysis revealed different nuances of the emotional spectrum of the Gen Z consumer, paradoxically not always associated with negative inclinations, which we naturally expected to arise from a crisis/trauma (i.e. stress, anxiety, fear, worried about uncertainty in the future) (Seabra *et al.*, 2020; Azimi *et al.*, 2021). It must be said that fear was the most salient emotion that induced positive inclinations, also in line with the pertinent literature on emotional arousal from health-threatening circumstances (Wu and Lau, 2022). Further value orientations, in fact, such as altruism, have shown distinctive impacts on individuals' protective behaviors (e.g. in the tourism and travel landscape), to the point that «instead of caring for their personal future, individuals living through the pandemic tempered expectations of the future, so they tended to care for others and concentrate on the present» (Wu and Lau, 2022, p. 149; Rahmawati *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, even during the pandemic, the Gen Z consumer was looking for novelty, the «wow» feeling, and aesthetics, became «hungry for information» about green or sustainable products or services and behave in a responsible manner, e.g. in the choice of food services (Kulshreshtha and Sharma, 2022), in architectural interests (Magana and Fernández-Abascal, 2022), and in tourism and hospitality decisions (Yeap *et al.*, 2021), proving to be a highly reliable stakeholder (Pelikánová and Macgregor, 2020).

Moreover, the younger generations, such as Gen Z, have shown an aptitude to purchase less expensive products than the older generations, paying attention to good value for money (Wolf *et al.*, 2022). Generation Z is not afraid to travel, go to restaurants, bars, discos, and physically participate in significant events (also because the experience received from virtual events it was pretty low, negatively affecting the interest in virtual participation again in the future) (Lisdayanti, 2021). Generation Z consumers want to have fun, but there is a necessity that all health rules will be observed; therefore, safety concerns will still play a critical role in their decision-making processes (Rončák *et al.*, 2021).

The academic debate on the emotions and attitudes that characterize the Gen Z consumer during (and post) the health crisis has also

been mainly carried out through empirical research and discussions of the results.

The concept underlying some studies on the subject was proposed by (a) generational cohort theory, (and age-period-cohort framework) (Azimi *et al.*, 2021), which considers generation as a set of individuals who share the same political, economic and social events during the early stages of life and, for this reason, develop a similar set of beliefs, values and behavior; (b) Personal values research (e.g. application of Schwartz's portrait value system, Azimi *et al.*, 2021); (c) Food choice process model, that indicates how through their food behaviors people also shape their life course experiences, influences, and personal food system (Kulshreshtha and Sharma, 2022); (d) Protection motivation theory (Pmt), which describes how individuals are motivated to react in a self-protective way towards a perceived health threat (e.g. in travel sector; Wu and Lau, 2022); (e) Theory of Planned Behaviour (Tpb), that explains human behavior as a consequence of an intention which in turn is the result of the interaction between different beliefs (e.g. in tourism industry; Yeap *et al.*, 2021) (f) multi-stakeholder model (to interpret the link between Generation Z and financial support for Corporate Social Responsibility – Csr, Pelikánová and Macgregor, 2020).

5. Theoretical implications

Our research provides a systematic literature review of scholarly contributions on Generation Z consumers' behaviors and values during the Covid-19 pandemic published within the management and marketing research fields until August 2022. This systematic literature review has implications for academia.

Firstly, the study represents the first attempt at a structured review in the topic area, through selection, evaluation, and summary of other studies regarding the specific area of interest, thus producing an accurate synthesis of the evidence available in the literature.

Furthermore, this format's established methodological protocols result in a study that is transparent and replicable, which allows for minimizing the risk of bias.

Secondly, the review contributes to understanding the current state of Gen Z consumer research and the major research streams on this topic.

Third, the findings and evidence of this review have allowed us to draw a preliminary profile of the Gen Z consumer during and post

Covid-19 pandemic, with the characteristics emerging from the systematization and collection of fragmented knowledge extrapolated from the material under investigation.

The profile provides fruitful avenues for academics to undertake future research, presenting a range of opportunities to extend the understanding of the current Gen Z consumer domain (see paragraph 7).

6. Managerial and policy implications

The characteristics determining the current profile of the Gen Z consumer, as outlined in section 4, can be qualified as guidelines for management and paves the way for policy-makers to develop commercially successful strategies.

In fact, the observations in this paper unearth important insights concerning what we can learn about Gen Z consumers' behavior in response to (future global) crises and how practitioners can act accordingly. The focus is certainly on the emotions and on the factors affecting users' acceptance of the technology; as revealed by the systematic study, both represent the engine of the changing habits of Gen Z consumers and influence their intentional and real purchasing and consumption behavior.

The following are some of the practices that, on the one hand, guarantee an effective fit with the Gen Z consumer's online behavior and acceptance of technology and, on the other, suggest a match with the emotions and attitudes that impact overall the current Gen Z consumer's decisional and consumption process.

In this domain, companies could certainly focus on communication and branding strategies to drive consumers' emotions and to efficiently target Generation Z's leading future segment (Wolf *et al.*, 2022). They should consider revising their strategies in terms of channels (e.g. direct channel or consider intermediaries such as «assisted purchase»; synergistic management between online and offline channels) (Pinochet *et al.*, 2022), messages (e.g. utilization of inclusive language and images) (Cardinal *et al.*, 2021), price (lower-priced products need to be available to attract Generation Z), mix and investments allocated to each media and campaign. All this appears necessary in order to strengthen the brand assumptions (Barrientos-Báez *et al.*, 2022), to make more clear the brand values, enrich them, or create new and more appealing brands for post-crisis consumers by showing attention to aspects that influence the Gen Z consumer's decision making processes, such as value for money, sustainability, safety, security, and health (Wolf *et*

al., 2022; Rončák *et al.*, 2021; Cardinal *et al.*, 2021; Romero and Lado, 2021; Magana and Fernández-Abascal, 2022; Kulshreshtha and Sharma, 2022).

Moreover, brands, from their side, could help in Gen Z consumers' recognition of needs not only to make emerge new needs but also to better fulfill needs not perfectly satisfied by already existing competitors' brands. To reach this aim, they obviously should be aware of which kind of emotion or experiential aspect (e.g. fear, variety seeking, «wow» feeling, altruism, hedonism) (Koch *et al.*, 2020; Azimi *et al.*, 2021; Lisdayanti, 2021; Kulshreshtha and Sharma, 2022; Wu and Lau, 2022; Rahmawati *et al.*, 2022) drives Gen Z consumers' purchasing intentions, so as to design their strategy and operations.

Moreover, policymakers should consider promoting specific content in the online sphere to fight distrust and misinformation (Pérez-Escoda *et al.*, 2021), considering, however, that information overload has an effect on individual social media users' psychological well-being (Liu *et al.*, 2021), and that «we are in the process of narrative evolution where vertical format, short, creative content adapts to mobile consumption and dominates in every sense» (Sidorenko-Bautista *et al.*, 2020, p. 119; Barrientos-Báez *et al.*, 2022; Christian *et al.*, 2022).

Managers should also consider involving of their Gen Z target on their issues through the development of an open innovation culture (Vinichenko *et al.*, 2021) (e.g. creating *ad hoc* online communities for sharing experiences and ideas). It has not even recalled previously, but open innovation, especially with these «digital natives», could greatly help managers in all future scenarios, taking hand companies towards the «next normal».

It is clear that all companies should be more fluid and adaptable than in the past with respect to the aforementioned elements, maintaining alternative structures, and expandable to the emergency. Rapidly adapting will be, even more than in the past, the key to better exploiting any opportunity emerging from crises.

Finally, although the large majority of Gen Z consumers want to help to make a change during the post-crisis era and showed a conditional and rather generous readiness in supporting Csr (Pelikánová and Macgregor, 2020), policy actions and incentives are needed to be established in order to raise even more awareness of sustainable behavior and definitively identify these young adults as the «green generation» (Yeap *et al.*, 2021).

7. Conclusions, limitations and further research

The analysis carried out allows us to emphasize key areas for future research.

Firstly, future research needs to get new insights and developments concerning Gen Z consumer knowledge.

Although researchers have focused in almost all cases on observing empirical evidence which should then support the conduct of conceptual studies, the research domain remains inadequately investigated.

This fact renders a need for more careful and in-depth analysis to explore this topic further, especially as regards different aspects (not only related to emotions/attitudes and technology/online environment) characterizing Gen Z consumers and affecting their intentional and real purchase/consumption behavior.

Furthermore, since most of the studies conducted have used the survey (mainly online, given the social restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic) as a research method, observations also emerge regarding future directions in the study design.

Among the most often effective methodologies, there are naturalistic ethnographic inquiries and, along with the increasing Internet penetration, netnography, that is ethnographic research adapted to different outlets of computer-mediated social interactions (forums, social networks, brand communities, etc.). The analysis of online consumer narratives and conversations could represent an extremely effective tool for digging into various buying and consumption practices.

Moreover, frameworks used can be integrated by further emotion-based constructs in order to increase the explanatory power of buying and consumption predictive models.

Further analysis would be necessary to deepen the relationship between antecedent events and consequences that evoked a certain behavior or brought out certain characteristics to arrive at the prediction of behavior classes and provide an effective observation grid for behaviors.

Furthermore, the comparison of this young generation between different countries could allow us to capture differences and similarities – explaining any inequality related to the country factor – with respect to the variables analyzed and reach more robust conclusions. Considering the need for cross-country analyses, future investigations could profitably explore cultural (country-specific) elements, such as ethnicity, gender, and individualism/collectivism, to acknowledge their impact on the buying and consumption patterns of Gen Z consumers during and after the pandemic.

It would also be advisable not to neglect the study of Gen Z consumer behavior in specific sectors of considerable size and still relatively unexplored (e.g. food and beverage).

It is possible to highlight some limitations of the paper, in particular related to the methodology adopted.

First, this work uses only one database, Scopus, which, although considered one of the most reliable for scientific research, may have omitted some important contributions.

Furthermore, the selection of papers with a systematic literature review suffers from a certain level of researcher discretion at the selection stage. Also, the choice of keywords, although rigorously identified by the authors, may have limited the search and the consequent findings and observations.

Future studies could profitably analyze also the so-called «gray literature», material that, even not published in commercial publications, could provide relevant insights to gain a complete picture of this current profile of the Generation Z consumer.

Finally, a comparative study on the impact of Covid-19 on different age groups would lead to interesting conclusions and foresee possible next scenarios, characterized by new borders between the different generations.

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