

The Value of Knowledge Management and Digital Innovation in Brand Communication for Generation Z

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Abstract: The development of digital technologies creates new opportunities for marketing communication while shaping the expectations of young consumers regarding how brands present their products, values, and innovative approaches. Generation Z represents one of the most active groups in the digital environment, and its consumer behaviour is closely connected with online content, interactivity, and the immediate availability of information. In this context, organisations increasingly need to understand the value of digital innovations in brand communication and how these innovations influence brand perception among young consumers. The value of knowledge management and digital innovations in brand communication with Generation Z lies in their ability to support a deeper understanding of young audiences and to transform this knowledge into authentic, interactive, and personalised digital communication. Insights derived from these interactions can represent an important source of organisational knowledge that may be utilised within knowledge management processes, particularly in identifying and applying insights about consumer behaviour when designing more effective marketing communication strategies. The aim of this paper is to examine the value of digital innovations in brand communication from the perspective of Generation Z. The study focuses on identifying which elements of digital communication are perceived as valuable by young users and how these elements influence their engagement, trust in brands, and overall perception of marketing communication. The research also considers the communication of ecological and sustainability values of brands in the digital environment, which has become an increasingly important component of contemporary marketing strategies. The empirical part of the study is based on a quantitative questionnaire survey conducted among respondents from Generation Z. The analysis focuses on selected aspects of digital communication, particularly preferred online content formats, factors influencing attention to digital advertising, and the perception of innovative elements in marketing communication. The methodological approach applies gap analysis to identify differences between the expected value of digital innovations from the perspective of Generation Z and their actual perception in brand communication. The findings highlight the importance of innovative communication elements that enhance user engagement and strengthen brand credibility in the digital environment. The identified gaps between expectations and perceived communication practices provide organisations with valuable insights for the more effective use of digital innovations in marketing communication. These insights may contribute to knowledge management practices by supporting organisations in better understanding the needs and expectations of Generation Z.

Keywords: Knowledge management, Digital innovation, Generation Z, Marketing communication, Sustainable brand communication

1. Introduction

In an environment characterized by continuous technological advancement, organisations must continuously adapt their processes, tools, and communication strategies to emerging digital trends. The development of digital technologies has transformed interactions between organisations and customers, enabling more efficient, personalised, and data-driven communication (Murár et al., 2024). Digital innovations have shifted organisations from traditional one-way communication toward interactive approaches that support continuous consumer engagement and generate large volumes of data for strategic decision-making and customer relationship management (Asbeetah et al., 2025; Al-Husain, 2025). In such an innovative environment, knowledge management is closely linked to digital innovation and communication, as digital technologies enable the creation, capture, storage, sharing, and application of knowledge within organisations. Tools such as cloud platforms, collaborative systems, artificial intelligence, and analytics improve information accessibility, support organizational learning, and facilitate the generation of data-driven insights. Communication plays a key role in transferring knowledge among individuals, teams, and communities of practice, thereby supporting experience sharing, coordination, and the diffusion of innovation. The literature emphasizes that successful knowledge management depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on organizational culture, processes, and the ability to integrate human knowledge with information and communication technologies (Choi et al., 2024; Stan et al., 2025). A major manifestation of digital transformation is brand communication. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, programmatic advertising, social media, and interactive digital tools provide new opportunities to understand customer needs, personalize communication, and enhance customer experience (Kovács et al., 2024; Daiva et al., 2025). At the same time, information overload and growing skepticism toward commercial content have increased demands for credibility, transparency, and authenticity. These challenges

are particularly relevant when communicating with Generation Z, one of the most digitally connected consumer groups. As digital natives, they extensively use online platforms for information acquisition, social interaction, and purchasing decisions (D'Acunto et al., 2025). Their preferences are characterized by a strong orientation toward visual, interactive, and personalised content, while emphasizing authenticity, transparency, and corporate social responsibility (Dašić, 2023; Kovács et al., 2024). Understanding their perceptions of digital communication therefore represents a valuable source of knowledge for organisations seeking to improve marketing communication effectiveness. From a knowledge management perspective, digital communication serves as a mechanism for acquiring and utilizing insights derived from customer interactions (Sánchez et al., 2022). Digital platforms provide information about customer preferences, behaviour, and expectations that can be transformed into actionable knowledge supporting communication strategies and organizational performance (Alavi et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2025). However, the effectiveness of this process depends not only on technological capabilities but also on the credibility, clarity, and relevance of communicated information. Despite the growing importance of digital innovation in marketing communication, limited attention has been devoted to how Generation Z perceives these innovations in relation to trust, communication effectiveness, and knowledge management processes (Alavi et al., 2024). Furthermore, identifying discrepancies between consumer expectations and their actual perceptions of digital brand communication may help organisations improve communication strategies and strengthen relationships with digitally oriented customers. The aim of this paper is to analyze the value of digital innovations in brand communication from the perspective of Generation Z and examine their significance within knowledge management processes. Particular attention is devoted to identifying differences between consumer expectations and perceived levels of digital communication through gap analysis.

The study addresses the following research question:

RQ1: What gaps exist between Generation Z's expectations of digital brand communication and their actual perceptions of communication performance, and how can these gaps be interpreted from a knowledge management perspective?

2. Theoretical Background

Digital innovations have become an important subject of contemporary research in marketing communication and knowledge management. From a knowledge management perspective, they not only transform communication processes but also support the acquisition, processing, and utilisation of insights derived from digital interactions (Asbeetah et al., 2025; Al-Husain, 2025). In marketing communication, this development is reflected in the shift from traditional one-way communication toward an interactive and data-driven environment characterised by continuous information exchange between brands and consumers (Kovács et al., 2024; Dašić, 2023). Digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, programmatic advertising, generative AI, and augmented reality enable more precise communication targeting, greater content personalisation, and more effective customer engagement (Daiva et al., 2025; Gündüzyeli, 2026; Murár et al., 2024). These technologies provide organisations with new opportunities to analyse customer data, improve customer experiences, and respond more effectively to changing market demands (Komarova et al., 2021; Dašić, 2023). Despite challenges related to expertise, resources, and increasing customer expectations, digitalisation has become a valuable source of customer knowledge and an important driver of competitive advantage (Komarova et al., 2021; Murár et al., 2024). Generation Z represents one of the most significant user groups of digital technologies and an important target audience for marketing communication. As digital natives, they extensively use online platforms for information acquisition, communication, and interactions with brands (Dašić, 2023; Kovács et al., 2024). Social media have become their primary source of information and a key space for building relationships with brands (D'Acunto et al., 2025). They prefer visual, interactive, and personalised content, while short-form videos and influencer marketing significantly shape their attitudes and purchasing decisions (Kovács et al., 2024; Rezníčková & Zaušková, 2019; Shankar et al., 2021; Giannattasio et al., 2024). At the same time, Generation Z is characterised by selective attention and a more critical evaluation of marketing communication. Due to information overload, authenticity, transparency, and trustworthiness have become increasingly important, with users paying attention primarily to content they perceive as relevant and valuable (Dašić, 2023; Gündüzyeli, 2026). Their sensitivity to environmental and ethical issues communicated by brands is also growing (Kovács et al., 2024; Runtukahu et al., 2025). These characteristics increase the importance of knowledge management in digital environments (Sánchez et al., 2022). Organisations face growing volumes of data generated through digital interactions, and the ability to transform these data into actionable knowledge has become essential for effective communication and customer relationship building (Yang et al., 2025; Alavi et al., 2024). The concepts of data, information, and knowledge represent fundamental levels of knowledge

processing. Data consist of raw facts, information emerges when data are organised and contextualised, and knowledge represents interpreted information applicable to decision-making and problem-solving. This understanding is based on the DIKW model, in which each level builds upon the previous one and contributes to more effective decision-making (Choi et al., 2024). However, data collection alone creates little value unless transformed into actionable knowledge (Choi et al., 2024). Knowledge management encompasses processes related to the creation, acquisition, sharing, storage, and application of knowledge to enhance organisational performance (Sánchez et al., 2022). Unlike information management, it also incorporates human interpretation, context, and experience, which convert information into meaningful insights (Stan et al., 2025). Modern technologies, including artificial intelligence and advanced analytics, enable organisations to process large volumes of data, identify customer behaviour patterns, and generate insights that support decision-making and marketing communication optimisation (Alavi et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2024; Gündüzyeli, 2026). In digital brand communication, knowledge management serves as a link between data, technology, and strategic decision-making. It enables organisations to transform data from digital interactions into information about customer preferences and subsequently into knowledge that supports more effective communication strategies. The systematic use of such insights contributes to communication personalisation, trust building, and the development of long-term customer relationships (Daiva et al., 2025; Sánchez et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

The empirical part of the study was conducted through a quantitative survey using a structured questionnaire. The aim of the research was to analyse Generation Z's perceptions of digital innovations in brand marketing communication and to identify their impact on consumer engagement, trust, and decision-making. To address the research question formulated in the introductory section of the paper, the empirical study was designed as an exploratory investigation focused on identifying attitudes, preferences, and differences in perceptions of digital communication among Generation Z respondents. Participants were selected using a convenience sampling method based on accessibility within the academic environment. Data collection was conducted over a one-month period between October and November 2025. Data were gathered through an online questionnaire created using Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed primarily among undergraduate and graduate students of marketing communication through electronic communication and digital channels. The research sample consisted of 348 respondents belonging to Generation Z. Women represented 72.6% ($n = 253$) of the sample, while men accounted for 27.4% ($n = 95$). Respondents were aged between 18 and 27 years. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire contained closed-ended questions, primarily using a five-point Likert scale (1–5), as well as multiple-choice questions focused on digital behaviour, content preferences, and marketing communication. The questions were grouped into four main areas: (1) perceptions of digital brand communication, (2) perceptions of digital innovations and their benefits, (3) trust, transparency, and perceptions of greenwashing in digital communication, and (4) preferences regarding content, communication formats, and digital platforms. The collected data were exported from Google Forms and processed using Microsoft Excel. The analysis included the calculation of frequencies, percentages, and mean values for individual questionnaire items. It was complemented by an interpretive approach aimed at identifying patterns and differences in respondents' perceptions of digital communication. The analytical procedure also included the application of gap analysis, which enabled the identification of discrepancies between Generation Z's expectations and their actual perceptions of brand digital communication. Expectations were derived from the declared importance of selected factors, such as transparency, innovativeness, and information accessibility, whereas perceptions were based on respondents' evaluations of current brand communication practices. Given the study's focus on knowledge management, the identified gaps were interpreted through three key knowledge management dimensions. The credibility of communicated information was interpreted as a knowledge credibility issue, the clarity and transmission of information as a knowledge transfer issue, and the influence of communication on consumer decision-making as a knowledge utilisation issue. This approach enabled the findings to be interpreted not only from a marketing perspective but also from a knowledge management perspective. The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This indicator was applied to evaluate the internal consistency of the measurement scales and to verify the reliability of the research instrument. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the digital communication, digital innovation, and trust scales, each composed of multiple questionnaire items. Values above 0.70 are generally considered indicators of good reliability, while values close to 0.60 may be acceptable in exploratory research. The digital communication scale demonstrated moderate internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.69$), whereas the digital innovation scale showed good reliability ($\alpha = 0.75$). The trust-related items did not form a reliable scale ($\alpha = 0.30$) and were therefore analysed separately. The results of the gap analysis provided

the basis for interpreting the identified differences between respondents' expectations and their actual perceptions of brand digital communication. The selected methodological approach thus enabled the identification of areas in which digital communication activities fail to meet Generation Z's expectations while simultaneously interpreting these gaps from a knowledge management perspective.

4. Results

The results suggest that the digital environment represents a natural space for the daily interactions of Generation Z. The high level of social media content consumption (4.59) confirms that digital platforms play a dominant role not only in entertainment but also in the acquisition and processing of information. Digital brand communication is perceived as a standard and expected form of communication (4.11) and, according to respondents, contributes to a better understanding of brands (4.01). However, the influence of digital communication on purchasing decisions remains lower (3.48), indicating that the availability of information does not automatically translate into decision-making support. The clarity of communication also received a moderate evaluation (3.53), suggesting that the effectiveness of information transfer may be limited despite the high level of digital engagement (Figure 1). This finding highlights a gap between the availability of information and its effective utilisation in consumer decision-making, representing an important challenge from a knowledge management perspective.

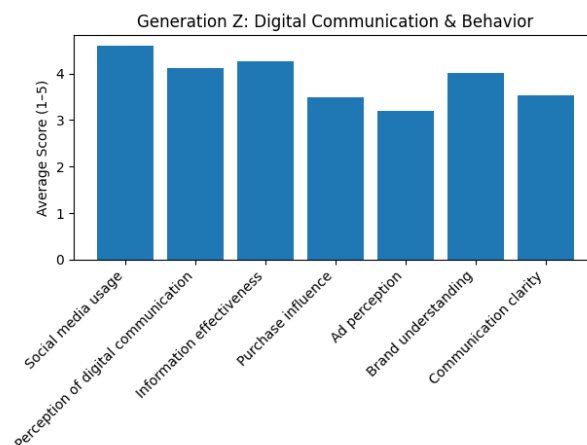


Figure 1: Digital Communication and Behavior of Generation Z

Digital innovations were evaluated positively, particularly regarding their ability to attract attention and increase engagement. Respondents indicated that innovative campaigns are more likely to capture their interest (4.02) and emphasized the importance of interactive and technologically advanced communication approaches. Digital innovations were also perceived as moderately supporting purchase decisions (3.59). However, their contribution to trust remained relatively limited (3.68), suggesting that technological sophistication alone is insufficient to build credibility. These findings indicate that Generation Z expects not only innovation but also authenticity, relevance, and meaningful communication content (Figure 2). The results further suggest that technological innovativeness alone does not constitute a source of competitive advantage unless it is accompanied by credible content and effective knowledge transfer.

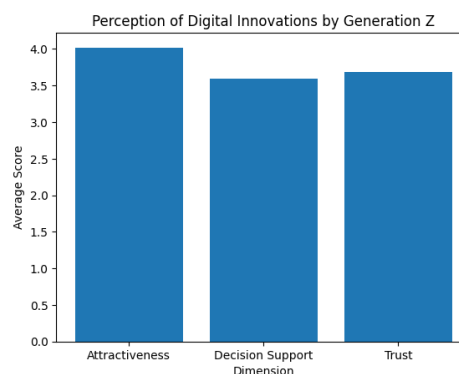


Figure 2: Perceived Impact of Digital Innovations on Generation Z

Trust emerged as one of the most problematic areas of digital brand communication. Although respondents clearly agreed that transparent communication increases trust (4.01), their actual trust in information communicated by brands online remained substantially lower (2.85). This discrepancy reflects a high level of scepticism toward brand communication and suggests that transparency alone may not be sufficient to build credibility. The situation is further intensified by the strong perception of greenwashing (4.38), indicating that respondents frequently question the credibility of environmental and sustainability claims communicated by brands (Figure 3). This finding points to the existence of a significant knowledge credibility problem, as recipients of information question not only the claims themselves but also the sources of the communicated information. The results also reveal a paradox of digital communication. Despite high levels of exposure to digital content and intensive use of social media, trust in communicated information remains low. This suggests that greater digital exposure does not necessarily lead to higher levels of trust but may instead be associated with a more critical evaluation of communicated claims and increased sensitivity to manifestations of greenwashing.

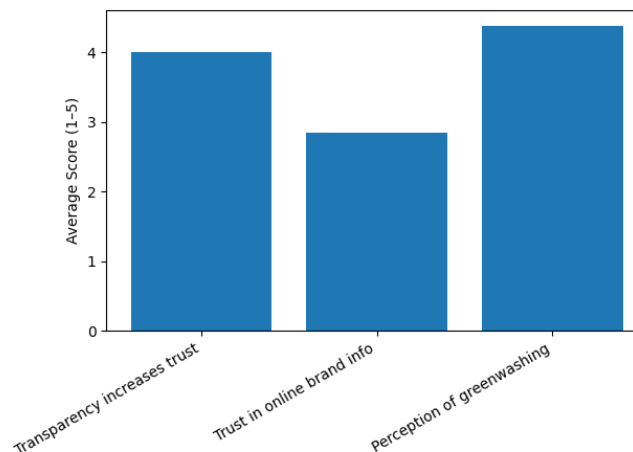


Figure 3: Perceived Trust and Skepticism in Digital Brand Communication among Generation Z

The analysis of content preferences revealed a strong orientation toward entertaining content (74.06%), while educational content accounted for 17.58% of responses. Regarding campaign formats, educational content (40.3%) and short-form videos (33.4%) achieved the highest levels of preference. These findings suggest that information is communicated most effectively when combined with engaging and accessible formats. Influencer marketing accounted for only a limited share of preferences (4.6%), which may indicate a growing critical attitude toward influencer-driven communication. The low preference for influencer marketing suggests that, in digital brand communication, Generation Z does not attach decisive importance to the popularity of the communicator but rather to the credibility and verifiability of the communicated information. This finding supports the assumption that source credibility represents an important factor in the acceptance of digitally communicated knowledge. Regarding digital platforms, YouTube (51.9%) and TikTok (24.1%) remain the dominant channels through which Generation Z consumes content and processes information (Figure 4).

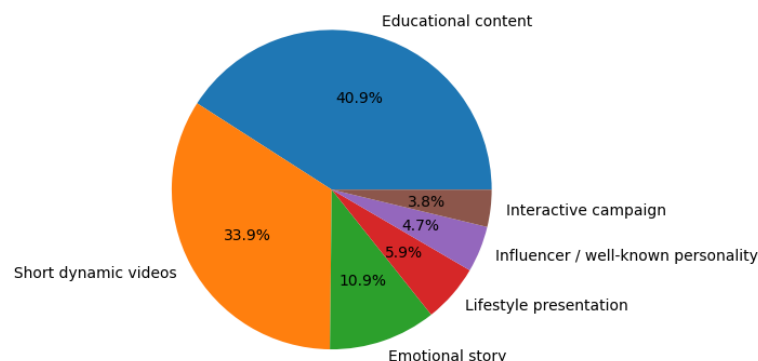


Figure 4: Preferred Campaign Formats among Respondents

The results were subsequently interpreted through gap analysis (Table 1), which enabled the identification of discrepancies between Generation Z's expectations and their actual perceptions of brand digital communication.

Table 1: Gap Analysis of Generation Z Perceptions of Digital Brand Communication

Finding	Mean Score	Interpretation	Knowledge Gap Category
Importance of transparency	4.01	Transparency is considered important for trust building	Knowledge Credibility Gap
Trust in brands online	2.85	Trust in digital brand communication remains low	Knowledge Credibility Gap
Perception of greenwashing	4.38	Sustainability claims are frequently questioned	Knowledge Credibility Gap
Clarity of digital communication	3.53	Communication is not always perceived as sufficiently clear	Knowledge Transfer Gap
Influence on decision-making	3.48	Information does not strongly influence purchasing decisions	Knowledge Utilisation Gap

The credibility gap is further reinforced by the strong perception of greenwashing (4.38). Respondents frequently questioned the authenticity of environmental and sustainability claims communicated by brands. This finding suggests that Generation Z is highly sensitive to inconsistencies between communicated values and actual organisational behaviour. Consequently, communication efforts focused on transparency do not automatically lead to greater trust if authenticity is perceived as questionable. A second gap was identified in the area of communication clarity. Although respondents generally viewed digital communication positively, the clarity of communication received only a moderate rating (3.53). This indicates that information may be available and accessible but is not always communicated in a sufficiently clear and meaningful way. The findings therefore point to limitations in the effectiveness of information transfer within digital brand communication. The third identified gap concerns the influence of digital communication on decision-making processes. Despite the high frequency of digital content consumption and the positive perception of digital communication, its impact on purchase decisions remained only moderate (3.48). The results suggest a gap between the cognitive and behavioural effects of digital communication. While digital communication contributes to a better understanding of brands and increases information availability, its ability to directly influence purchasing decisions remains limited. This indicates that knowledge transfer does not automatically result in its practical utilisation in consumer decision-making. The identified gaps confirm that the most significant shortcomings of digital brand communication relate to trust building, perceived authenticity of communicated information, communication clarity, and the ability to influence consumer decisions. These areas represent key challenges for organisations communicating with Generation Z in the digital environment. The contribution of this study lies not in identifying Generation Z's preferences themselves, which have been examined in previous research, but in interpreting the identified gaps through a knowledge management perspective. The findings indicate that the challenges of digital brand communication cannot be explained solely by content-related or technological factors but also by deficiencies in knowledge credibility, knowledge transfer, and knowledge utilisation within the communication process. The application of gap analysis in conjunction with these concepts extends existing knowledge of digital communication and provides a basis for further academic discussion on the role of knowledge management in marketing communication. The findings answer the research question by suggesting that the most significant discrepancies between expectations and perceptions occur in the areas of knowledge credibility, knowledge transfer, and knowledge utilisation within digital brand communication. The results further indicate that the greatest challenge of digital brand communication is not the lack of digital tools or innovative formats, but the ability to transform communicated information into credible and actionable knowledge. From a knowledge management perspective, effective digital communication therefore requires not only technological innovation but also trust, clarity, and practical value for the target audience.

5. Discussion

The findings confirmed that digital communication represents a natural way for Generation Z to obtain information and interact with brands. The high level of social media use and the positive perception of digital communication indicate that digital platforms play a significant role in shaping attitudes and consumer behaviour. This finding is consistent with previous studies highlighting the dominant position of digital media in the everyday lives of Generation Z (Kovács et al., 2024; Dašić, 2023). The results also suggest that digital

innovations increase the attractiveness of communication and enhance brands' ability to capture users' attention. Respondents particularly valued interactive and innovative communication elements, confirming the importance of personalisation and technological innovation in fostering customer engagement (Daiva et al., 2025; Gündüzyeli, 2026). However, technological sophistication alone does not guarantee higher levels of trust. A key finding is the discrepancy between respondents' expectations and their actual perceptions of digital brand communication. Although transparency was considered an important prerequisite for trust, overall trust in brand-communicated information remained relatively low. Combined with the strong perception of greenwashing, this finding highlights the importance of authenticity and communication consistency. The application of gap analysis revealed the most significant discrepancies in the areas of information credibility, transparency, and the ability of communication to support consumer decision-making. The findings suggest that organisations should focus not only on technological innovation but also on the quality and credibility of communicated information. From a knowledge management perspective, the identified gaps point to limitations in knowledge credibility, knowledge transfer, and knowledge utilisation. Organisations should therefore ensure that acquired insights are communicated in a manner that is credible, understandable, and relevant to users. The results further confirm the strategic importance of knowledge management in brand communication with Generation Z. As a generation characterised by intensive online interaction, constant access to information, and expectations of authentic and personalised communication, Generation Z requires organisations not only to communicate through digital channels but also to systematically acquire, analyse, and utilise knowledge about customer preferences, behaviours, and values. Digital innovations such as analytics tools, personalisation systems, social media, and artificial intelligence facilitate this process by transforming data into actionable knowledge. The value of knowledge management lies in its ability to convert data and feedback into communication decisions that enhance relevance, credibility, and audience engagement. The findings indicate that the availability of data and technology alone is insufficient. Organisations must also be able to understand and effectively apply acquired insights, as the ability to integrate knowledge with digital innovations is essential for building trust and long-term relationships with Generation Z. From a practical perspective, organisations targeting Generation Z should combine digital innovation with authentic, transparent, and personalised communication. The long-term value of digital innovations lies not only in increasing user engagement but also in supporting the creation, transfer, and utilisation of knowledge between organisations and their customers. The ability to transform data from digital interactions into actionable insights represents an important prerequisite for building trust, brand relevance, and long-term customer loyalty.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyse the value of digital innovations in brand communication from the perspective of Generation Z and to examine their role in knowledge management processes. The findings confirm that digital innovations are an important component of contemporary marketing communication, particularly in enhancing user engagement and improving access to information. Generation Z perceives digital communication as a natural form of interaction and prefers interactive, visual, and personalised content. The results also indicate that digital innovations do not automatically increase trust or significantly influence purchasing decisions. The study identified notable gaps between respondents' expectations and their perceptions of brand communication, particularly regarding transparency, credibility, and authenticity. These findings highlight the importance of communication quality and its ability to create value for users. The main contribution of the study lies in the application of gap analysis, which revealed shortcomings in knowledge credibility, knowledge transfer, and knowledge utilisation. The findings provide organisations with practical insights for developing more effective digital communication strategies and better aligning communication with the expectations of Generation Z. From a knowledge management perspective, the study emphasises the importance of transforming data from digital interactions into actionable insights that support decision-making and customer relationships. The effectiveness of digital innovations therefore depends not only on technology but also on an organisation's ability to create, transfer, and utilise relevant knowledge. The study is limited by the use of a convenience sample from an academic environment, which restricts the generalisability of the findings. Nevertheless, it integrates digital innovation, brand communication, and knowledge management into a single analytical framework and offers practical implications for organisations operating in digital environments. Future research could compare different generations or countries and further examine the impact of emerging technologies, including generative artificial intelligence, on communication and knowledge management processes.

Acknowledgements

This paper was elaborated within a national research project supported by the Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Research, Development, and Youth of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Academy of Sciences (VEGA) No. 1/0304/24 titled 'The Impact and Value of Digitalization of Innovations of Products Marketing Communication for Generations of Ecological Users'.

Ethics Declaration: The research presented in this paper was conducted using an anonymous questionnaire survey. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents provided informed consent for the processing of their data. No personally identifiable data were collected. Therefore, no formal ethical approval was required.

AI Declaration: Artificial intelligence tools were used in the development of this paper solely to assist with language translation and editing. All outputs generated by AI were critically reviewed, revised, and adapted by the author to ensure accuracy, originality, and academic integrity.

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