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INFLUENCER MARKETING: A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF GENERATION Z IN CROATIA AND TÜRKIYE

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Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour, this research paper examines how influencer marketing affects Generation Z in two different countries: Croatia and Türkiye. The goal of this study is to examine whether the attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control of Generation Z impact their intentions to follow influencers in the future. The research was conducted by means of a questionnaire and focus groups. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling were used to test the hypotheses and the relationships between the variables. Both subjective norms and perceived behavioural control positively impact Generation Z's intention to follow influencers in Croatia and Türkiye. The findings of this study will allow brands in Croatia and Türkiye to adapt their content strategies, campaign designs, and engagement methods by considering the influencer preferences and cultural trends of Generation Z, which will, in turn, help brands in effectively reaching and engaging their target audiences.

Keywords: theory of planned behaviour, generation Z, influencer marketing, focus group



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INTRODUCTION

Generation Z comprises about 26% of the global population with approximately 2 billion people, making it the most populous generation. Growing up amidst rapid technological advancements, Generation Z has unique interactions with technology which shape their lifestyle, communication, and decision-making (Thangavel et al., 2022, p. 2). Influencers, who hold sway over their followers' choices through expertise and compensated social media posts, have become central to marketing strategies. The influencer marketing industry has expanded significantly, valued at \$16.4 billion in 2022, with projections to reach nearly \$70 billion by 2029 (Statista, 2022a). Social media usage is widespread, with 5 billion users in 2023, and around 50 million identifying as influencers or content creators (Statista, 2023). Key platforms for marketers include Facebook (90%), Instagram (79%), LinkedIn (61%) and YouTube (52%) (Statista, 2022b), while influencers opt for Instagram (93%), TikTok (68%), Facebook (68%) and YouTube (48%) (Campbell, 2023), with preferences varying depending on the product, demographics, and culture.

In this context, the cultural structures of countries and the social media platforms Generation Z uses are important for companies' marketing activities. Therefore, this will be the starting point of this research. Although influencer marketing impacts Generation Z significantly, little is known about how this impact varies across cultures. Most studies overlook cultural nuances, which are key in shaping consumer behaviour and influencer effectiveness. This study addresses this gap by comparing Generation Z's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours towards influencer marketing in culturally distinct countries (Croatia and Türkiye). The main goal is to determine whether differences exist between these countries in relation to influencer marketing by using the Theory of Planned Behaviour as the framework.

Cross-cultural comparisons are essential for understanding how influencer marketing is perceived within different cultural contexts. While Generation Z is globally connected through digitalisation, local cultural values still shape their consumption habits profoundly. Comparing Generation Z's responses to influencers in culturally distinct countries like Croatia and Türkiye can offer valuable insights, enabling influencers and brands to devise more culturally sensitive and effective marketing strategies.

This study contributes both theoretically and practically to understanding influencer marketing across cultures. It will deepen insights into how cultural differences affect Generation Z's responses to influencers, particularly regarding trust, loyalty, and influence levels. By examining perceptions in Croatia and Türkiye, this study highlights the need for cultural

sensitivity in marketing. The findings emphasise that while Generation Z is digitally connected, cultural contexts still shape their behaviours. For marketers, this study offers guidance on tailoring influencer strategies to align with each country's cultural values and preferences, enhancing campaign effectiveness and personalisation.

After all, the primary goal of this study is to analyse how cultural differences in Croatia and Türkiye shape Generation Z's attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and behavioural intentions towards influencer marketing using the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

In the first section, the theoretical framework is presented and conceptual information about influencer marketing of Generation Z is given. After a demographic comparison of the two countries, the last section includes the research results, discussion, and conclusion.

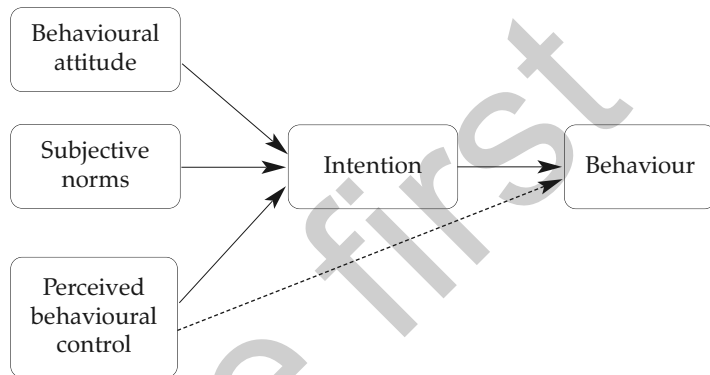
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR

The examination of influencer marketing can be based on various theoretical frameworks in order to gain insight into and inform the guidance of consumer behaviour. The Social Influence Theory posits that individuals' behaviours are shaped by their social environment, and that influencers can exert a strong social influence on their followers (Latane, 1981), while the Social Cognitive Theory suggests that individuals modify their behaviours through observational learning, thereby deeming influencers acceptable as role models and susceptible to imitation by their followers (Bandura, 1986). The Social Identity Theory proposes that individuals strive to align themselves with social groups by emulating influencers in the formation of their social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), while the Social Capital Theory argues that influencers play an active role in the dissemination of information and resources through their extensive social networks (Bourdieu, 1986). According to the Source Credibility Model, the credibility of influencers increases the likelihood of consumers accepting messages (Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

In this research, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was used. The Theory of Planned Behaviour emphasises the role of factors such as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in understanding individuals' intentions to perform a certain behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), attitude towards a behaviour is a person's feeling (positive or negative) towards a particular behaviour. Attitudes are based on beliefs about the consequences of the behaviour, such as how it makes them feel or how it af-

fects their social relationships (Ajzen, 2011). Subjective norms, according to Sheeran et al. (1999, p. 403), are "the perception of social pressure exerted by significant others to perform the behaviour." Perceived behavioural control "reflects an individual's prior knowledge of how to perform the behaviour and the obstacles that inhibit the behaviour", as Chopra et al. (2021, p. 83) point out. Strong or weak intentions show the person's desire to perform a certain behaviour, while intentions are the motivational factors that control behaviour (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). As can be seen in Figure 1, intention always comes before behaviour, but behaviour does not necessarily come from intention.

➔ FIGURE 1
The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Model) according to Ajzen (1991)



The Theory of Planned Behaviour is frequently used as a model for studying behaviour and purchase intention including research focused on influencers (Singh & Aggarwal, 2024). Such studies are more prevalent compared to those examining the intention to follow influencers online. Previous studies that have integrated influencer marketing into the framework of the Theory of Planned Behaviour confirm the suitability of this model in the context of influencer marketing. Magrizos et al. (2021) used the model of the Theory of Planned Behaviour to study behaviour in the context of influencer marketing and extended it to include two variables: price and self-identity. Rohde (2020) included the element of parental mediation in his study, as the target audience of his research were children. It can be concluded that this model was applied for the purpose of researching influencer marketing, but also that different authors adjusted the model with new variables in order to measure the research objectives more accurately.

INFLUENCER MARKETING OF GENERATION Z

Generation Z has a wide age range, from 1996 to 2010 (McKinsey, 2023). Described as online- and communication-savvy, Generation Z (Reinikainen et al., 2021; Mueller & Perreault, 2021) not only consumes online content, but also produces much of it. Research on Generation Z has found that 60% of this gen-

eration can spend a maximum of four hours without internet access (McKinsey, 2023). In their online world, they have a unique lifestyle that is detached from reality.

Generation Z is addicted to the internet and attaches great importance to social media and the opinions and thoughts of people with whom they interact. Along with family, friends, and peers, influencers occupy an important place in their lives, and, because they view influencers as peers, Generation Z places a high level of trust in them (Martinez-Lopez et al., 2020, p. 599). Companies and brands targeting younger generations are, therefore, acting on this awareness and using influencers as ambassadors for Generation Z. Social media, which appears as a platform where companies can make quick comparisons, see for themselves the reliability, and sincerely observe the satisfaction and experiences of those who use the products, is the main channel Generation Z prefers in their consumption activities (Paker, 2022, p. 59). Research has shown that influencers have a positive impact on Generation Z's consumption decisions (Chetioui et al., 2020, p. 361; Nguyen et al., 2022). However, there are studies with a contrary opinion about Generation Z's views and opinions towards influencers (Leung et al., 2022). Some members of this generation consider brands' interactions with influencers to be morally indefensible (Pradhan et al., 2023). At this point, the question remains whether influencer marketing really is an effective marketing tool for Generation Z.

METHODOLOGY

In the continuation of this paper, the comparison of Generation Z between Croatia and Türkiye is observed. The research design and results are then presented.

Comparison between Croatia and Türkiye

Research results from a 2021 study involving 40.000 people from different continents and cultures showed that consumers trusted recommendations from people they knew more than any other channel, and tended to buy products they encountered on social media (Nielsen, 2021). This situation can vary depending on the country, culture, and demographic characteristics of the individual. Croatia, which is in Europe, and Türkiye, which is in West Asia and Europe, differ in geography, religion, beliefs, culture, and demographics. Moreover, the distribution of Generation Z in relation to the population of both respective countries is 23% in Türkiye and 17% in Croatia (Perić, 2020; TUIK, 2022).

With a population of 85 million, the number of active internet users in Türkiye is 71.38 million. In this case, the young population has a considerable impact. Almost all internet users

access the internet through mobile devices and spend an average of 8 hours per day online, while the global average is 3 hours (Statista, 2023). The number of social media users is 62.55 million (Kemp, 2023a). Looking at the distribution, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook are at the forefront (Dierks, 2023). When analysing the research on Generation Z and influencer marketing in Türkiye, it is evident that the obtained results are similar to the studies in the literature. In the qualitative research conducted by Paker (2002, p. 459), it was found that Generation Z, who are frequent shoppers, were particularly influenced by Instagram influencers in Türkiye and that the frequency of shopping increased with the introduction of the "scroll up" feature. Another study showed that Generation Z individuals do not only actively use YouTube, but most of them also follow a vlogger, and consider vloggers' recommendations when deciding on purchases (Oyman & Akıncı, 2019, p. 441).

In Croatia, there are approximately 3.34 million internet users (83% of the population) and 2.94 million social media users (Kemp, 2023b). A 2022 study (DZS, 2022) showed that 86% of households had access to the internet and that it was mainly used by individuals who were from 16 to 24 years old. According to data for advertisers on social media platforms, the number of users for 2023 was as follows: 2.94 million people used YouTube, 1.75 million used Facebook, 1.35 million used Instagram, 820 thousand used LinkedIn, 585 thousand used Snapchat, while 298 thousand people used Twitter (Kemp, 2023b). Kecek et. al (2022) studied the impact of influencers on Generation Z's shopping in Croatia. According to their research, influencers have the lowest impact on the purchasing decisions of undergraduate students and the highest impact on graduate students.

Research design

This research was conducted at the beginning of 2023. The goal of this research was to conduct a comparative analysis of Croatian and Turkish Generation Z in terms of the influencer marketing impact on them. For the purposes of this paper, two studies were conducted: a quantitative research based on questionnaires, and a qualitative research which included carrying out interviews in focus groups. The advantages of mixed methods research (quantitative and qualitative) lie in its complementarity in capturing nuanced cultural perspectives. They enable both a broad understanding through quantitative data and in-depth insights into cultural nuances through qualitative focus groups.

The first study was conducted by creating a Google form survey. The first part of the questionnaire was a general part

about influencer marketing. The second part was based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Respondents were asked to express the degree of agreement according to the Likert measurement scale (1 – strongly disagree; 5 – strongly agree). The last part of the questionnaire referred to the socio-demographic data of the respondents (Table 1). The sample consisted of a total of 138 students from Türkiye and 361 students from Croatia (who were born between 2000 and 2006). Since the research was conducted at higher education institutions, the sample included 30% of the total number of students from each institution. The selection of this particular sample was intentional and constitutes an integral part of the research design, shaped in accordance with the research objectives.

TABLE 1
Sample description

		Croatia		Türkiye	
		N	%	N	%
Gender	Male	101	28	68	49.3
	Female	260	72	70	50.7
Monthly budget	<135 €	89	24.7	70	50.7
	136-400 €	205	56.8	50	36.2
	401-800 €	50	13.9	12	8.7
	801-1200 €	8	2.2	2	1.4
	Over 1201 €	9	2.5	4	2.9
Do they work alongside their studies?	Yes	147	40.7	29	21
	No	214	59.3	109	79

The second study was a qualitative research which included focus group interviews. Using focus groups alongside quantitative research provides a deeper understanding of individuals' motives, perceptions, and reasons, adding context and enhancing result validity. Focus groups allow participants to share spontaneous insights that may not emerge in quantitative data, opening up new perspectives and enriching the research findings. The focus groups consisted of Generation Z participants, born between 1996 and 2000, who had not taken part in the prior quantitative research. Following McKinsey's (2023) definition of Generation Z's age range (1996–2010), this selection targeted older Generation Z members. Questions were designed around constructs of the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Each group included 6 to 10 participants, an ideal size according to Krueger and Casey (2014) to ensure diverse opinions while allowing each person to contribute. The focus groups included nine participants from Croatia and eight participants from Türkiye.

The questionnaire was based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and the items used in each construct are provided in Table 2.

Construct	Items	
Attitudes	ATT1	I believe that influencers publish content only according to their own choice and motivation.
	ATT2	I believe that influencers are paid by businesses to publish content according to the wishes of the brand.
	ATT3	I believe that influencers greatly influence the creation of attitudes, opinions, and decision-making of their followers.
	ATT4	I believe that influencers greatly influence my own formation of attitudes, opinions, and decision-making.
	ATT5	I believe that influencers can greatly help businesses in the promotion of their products and services.
Subjective norms	SN1	The opinion of my close family members is important to me when it comes to following influencers.
	SN2	The opinion of my friends regarding following influencers is important to me.
	SN3	It is important to me that the society (environment) accepts me more if I follow an influencer.
	SN4	It is important to me that the society (environment) accepts me more if I copy an influencer.
	SN5	It is important to me that the society (environment) accepts me more if I buy influencer's products.
Perceived behavioural control	PBC1	I believe that I target influencers depending on the content that interests me.
	PBC2	I believe that I have control so that the influencers I follow do not influence my decision to purchase a product.
	PBC3	I believe that it is easy to become an influencer depending on the content.
	PBC4	I believe it is easy to follow the content of an influencer.
	PBC5	I believe that influencers can easily reach their followers.
Intention	INT1	I intend to continue following the influencers I have been following to date.
	INT2	I intend to start following an influencer in the near future (if I haven't been following them until now).
	INT3	I intend to recommend an influencer to my friends so that they can start following him/her.
	INT4	I intend to buy products promoted by an influencer.
	INT5	I intend to attend gatherings, concerts, and other events of the influencers I follow.
	INT6	I intend to create content with which I could become an influencer.

TABLE 2
Items of each construct

The creation of these items led to establishing the research question and hypotheses. Consequently, the established research question was: Are there differences between the Turkish and Croatian Generation Z based on observing the Theory of Planned Behaviour and influencer marketing? This further led to the development of three hypotheses:

H1: Generation Z's attitudes towards influencer marketing have a significant positive impact on their intention to follow influencers in the future.

Trust is an important factor positively affecting attitudes towards influencers (Nguyen et al., 2022). Balaban et al. (2020) added that attitude is also influenced by the perceived quality of information, while Tiwari et al. (2024) found that attitudes towards fashion influencers are positively influenced by perceived trust, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Although Balaban et al. (2020) confirmed that an attitude towards influencers affects the intention to follow them, generally, most studies investigate the relationship between attitudes and purchase intention, which in practice may or may not imply the mere act of following the influencer.

H2: Generation Z's subjective norms towards influencer marketing have a significant positive impact on their intention to follow influencers in the future.

Given the lack of literature studying this phenomenon, the motivation and benefits for researching this hypothesis are, therefore, even greater. In a study investigating the influence of subjective norms on attitudes towards influencers, it was shown that subjective norms have the least influence on attitudes compared to other variables (Chetioui et al., 2020). Elmousa et al. (2024) reported that subjective norms have a significant influence on attitudes towards promotion (influencer marketing), which then affects the purchase intention.

H3: Generation Z's perceived behavioural control towards influencer marketing has a significant positive impact on their intention to follow influencers in the future.

As with the second hypothesis, we found no sources that would confirm or deny this statement. However, a review of similar research in the context of influencer marketing can be given. Magrizos et al. (2021) suggest that perceived behavioural control did not significantly affect consumers' purchase intentions regarding influencers' personal brands in China, while Handrimurtjahjo et al. (2022) imply that perceived behavioural control and perceived expertise have a positive impact on purchase intention in the fashion industry.

Evidently, the overall model of the Theory of Planned Behaviour was not applied, since it is not possible to examine the behaviour caused by future intentions to follow influencers without longitudinal research. Additionally, the direct effect of perceived behavioural control on behaviour, when considering influencer marketing among Generation Z, has also not been examined.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The reliability of the measuring instrument was analysed in the statistical software package SPSS 24, while confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM) were used to test the hypotheses and the relationships between variables by using the software package IBM SPSS AMOS 24. CFA is used to evaluate the effectiveness of the measured models by specifying the factors and their relationships, ensuring validity and reliability in measuring complex constructs, and supporting theoretical and empirical research (Price, 2023). SEM is a multivariate analysis method for creating, estimating, and testing causal models, allowing for the testing of cause-effect hypotheses and relationships between latent constructs (Zou and Cheng, 2024). Together, CFA and SEM are well-suited for testing research hypotheses, especially within complex theoretical frameworks.

The internal reliability of the measuring instrument was assessed by observing the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The obtained value of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges from 0.656 to 0.911. According to George and Mallery (2003),¹ Cronbach's alpha coefficient for attitudes is questionable (the Croatian model), while Cronbach's alpha coefficients for other constructs are acceptable. Even after adjusting the items in the attitudes construct, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient had not improved. Since in the Turkish model, the Cronbach's alpha for attitudes is acceptable, this construct was accepted as such and taken into further consideration and analysis. The obtained results show satisfactory reliability of the measuring instrument (Table 3).

TABLE 3
Reliability of the
measuring instrument

Construct	N of items	Croatia			Türkiye		
		α	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>
Attitudes (ATT)	5	0.656	3.57	3.26	0.756	3.41	4.35
Subjective Norms (SN)	5	0.911	1.49	3.77	0.871	1.59	3.77
Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)	5	0.728	3.37	3.87	0.711	3.33	4.35
Intention (INT)	6	0.807	2.25	4.35	0.811	2.63	5.53

Note: α is Cronbach's alpha coefficient, *M* is items mean, *sd* is standard deviation in scale statistics.

Specifying the structural model is a key step in the development of the SEM model, where causal relationships and connections between latent variables are defined (Figure 2).

When testing the entire model, the model fit is initially examined. Thus, after the analysis was performed, the values shown in Table 4 were obtained to assess the adequacy of the model fit. As evidenced, all the goodness-of-fit indices are in accordance with the recommended or acceptable values. Thus, it can be concluded that the model fit is acceptable and the model can be interpreted.

FIGURE 2
Structural model of
intention to follow
influencers

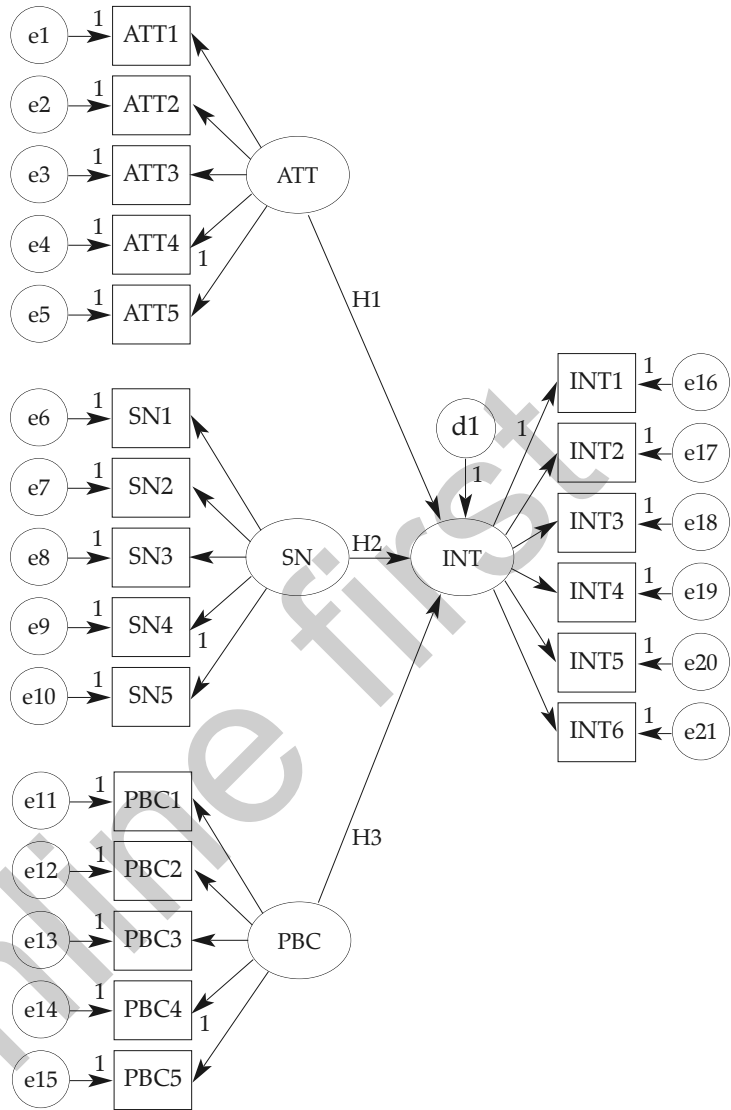


TABLE 4
Goodness-of-fit indices
of the research model

		Croatia	Türkiye	Value
χ^2/df	Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom	2.438	1.289	Between 1 and 3
CFI	Comparative Fit Index	0.938	0.961	Acceptable ≥ 0.90 Recommended ≥ 0.95
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index	0.919	0.951	Acceptable ≥ 0.90 Recommended ≥ 0.95
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	0.063	0.046	< 0.06
SRM(S)R	Standardized Root Mean Square Residuals	0.090	0.087	< 0.08
GFI	Goodness of Fit Index	0.906	0.876	> 0.95 and > 0.90

Source: Author's work according to Hooper et al. (2008); Parry (2020).

TABLE 5
Hypotheses
interpretation of the
tested models

After the model is accepted, the connections in the model are tested. Table 5 shows the results of the tested hypotheses. Hypotheses H2 and H3 were confirmed in both models (Generation Z's subjective norms and perceived behavioural control towards influencer marketing have a significant positive impact on their intention to follow influencers in the future), while hypothesis H1 was confirmed in the Croatian model but not in the Turkish model (Generation Z's attitudes towards influencer marketing have a significant positive impact on their intention to follow influencers in the future).

Hypothesis	Relation	Croatia			Türkiye		
		SRW	P value	Interpretation	SRW	P value	Interpretation
H1	ATT → INT	0.196	0.018	Confirmed	-0.174	0.412	Not confirmed
H2	SN → INT	0.461	**	Confirmed	0.362	**	Confirmed
H3	PBC → INT	0.167	0.047	Confirmed	0.656	0.013	Confirmed

Note: ** $p < 0.001$; SRW – Standard regression weights

Moreover, Multigroup analysis (MGA) in SEM was performed to compare the structural paths of the model across different groups (Croatian and Turkish). Configural invariance was supported, indicating that the basic structure of the model is acceptable for both groups ($\chi^2 = 1.968$, CFI = 0.985, SRMR = 0.049, RMSEA = 0.044, TLI = 0.955, GFI = 0.992). By using the model comparison, results show that the covariances are significant, which indicates that there are no conflicting variables between the groups ($\chi^2 = 12.508^2$, $p = 0.000$). Furthermore, there is no statistically significant difference between the groups when attitudes ($\chi^2 = 1.741$, $p = 0.187$) and subjective norms ($\chi^2 = 0.881$, $p = 0.348$) are observed. In the case of perceived behavioural control, there is a statistically significant difference between the groups ($\chi^2 = 4.939$, $p = 0.024$). The Turkish group has a stronger perceived behavioural control than the Croatian group (SRW = 0.325 vs 0.114).

This study highlights differences in social media usage and influencer engagement among Generation Z in Croatia and Türkiye. Instagram is the preferred platform for Generation Z in both countries, with frequent daily use. Interestingly, Croatian respondents favour platforms such as Facebook, blogs, TikTok, and Pinterest, while Turkish respondents rather use Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn, and vlogs more often. In Croatia, female respondents show stronger beliefs in influencers' ability to shape opinions ($F = 13.702$, $p = 0.000$), are less concerned with others' perceptions of their influencer following ($F = 6.024$, $I = 0.015$), and have a higher intention to follow influencers in the future ($F = 4.569$, $I = 0.033$), which is likely influenced by

niche interests such as fashion and beauty. Additionally, lower-income respondents feel they have greater control over influencer engagement ($F = 4.019, I = 0.003$), possibly due to budget constraints and scepticism towards ads. Those who use fewer platforms also show a greater interest in following influencers ($F = 3.213, p = 0.000$), possibly due to selective content consumption. In Türkiye, only one significant difference emerged: students who work are more inclined to follow influencers than those who only study ($F = 8.058, I = 0.005$), possibly due to professional networking or free-time content consumption.

The second part of the research was qualitative and included two focus groups, one with Croatian and one with Turkish participants. As previously stated, the research was conducted on individuals who were born between 1996 and 2000. The results of the focus group interviews are presented in Table 6, where the responses are categorised into specific constructs of the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

TABLE 6
Key constructs findings

Constructs	Croatia	Türkiye
Attitudes	Participants do not trust influencers, they believe that influencers publish sponsored content rather than content that interests influencers themselves. Participants also believe that influencers do not affect their attitudes and decisions, but do affect the wider audience.	Participants believed in influencers when they first appeared, but, in time, as influencers started to receive payments or promotions for advertising, participants' belief in influencers has undermined. Nevertheless, participants stated that influencers affect them, the whole society (especially children), and create a uniform society.
Subjective norms	Participants do not think about how family, friends, and the environment will think of them if they follow influencers, copy them, or buy products that the influencer advertises.	While subjective norms are important for half of the participants in terms of following and being impacted by influencers, participants' personal opinions and attitudes are at the forefront for the other half. Participants are most influenced by their friends and families.
Perceived behavioural control	Opinions are divided: some participants believe that they follow a certain influencer in a targeted manner depending on the content they publish, and that influencers do not affect them, while other participants do not think about the possible control that influencers have on their purchasing decisions	Half of the participants stated that influencers had an impact on them, but not as much as before. Others stated that their willingness and consumer awareness were high and that they were not affected by influencers. Following influencers may vary periodically according to the needs of individuals. Also, participants unfollow influencers from time to time.

According to the results of the focus group interviews, it seems that the participants from both countries do not trust influencers to a great extent, but they do follow them and are influenced by them. Personal views and opinions seem to be more important than subjective norms for participants from

both countries. Interestingly, the influence of friends is more prominent in Türkiye. When comparing the perceived behavioural control, the participants follow influencers to a large degree but are not fully influenced by them. There seems to be a decrease in interaction among participants and influencers, especially in Türkiye. This situation may vary according to the specific characteristics of the person being followed.

DISCUSSION OF THE HYPOTHESES

Among Croatian Generation Z, positive attitudes towards influencer marketing significantly increase their intention to follow influencers (also confirmed by Balaban et al., 2020), whereas this effect is absent for the Turkish Generation Z. Turkish Generation Z's declining trust in influencers, which is likely rooted in traditional values and scepticism, reduces their engagement with influencers (also, Nguyen et al., 2022, asserted trust to be an essential factor which affects individuals' attitudes). This difference aligns with Hofstede's cultural dimension of individualism vs collectivism. Individualism and collectivism are dimensions that describe whether people prefer to live and work independently or in a collective (Hofstede, 1980). Although both countries are collectivist, Croatia's lower individualism score (CRO 42 vs. TUR 46) (The Culture Factor Group, 2024) supports independent decision-making and personal attitudes that directly impact behaviour. In Türkiye, collectivist norms are stronger, aligning individual behaviour with family and community expectations. Despite these cultural distinctions, Multigroup analysis indicates that the impact of attitudes on following influencers is generally consistent across both groups, which suggests that the influence of attitudes on their intention to follow influencers in the future is consistent regardless of the group.

Subjective norms, or the influence of social circles, have a significant positive effect on Generation Z's intention to follow influencers in both Croatia and Türkiye. However, while family, friends, and the environment have a limited impact overall, the influence of friends is somewhat stronger in Türkiye, especially among the older Generation Z (the focus group). This aligns with the cultural patterns (if observing Hofstede's cultural dimension of individualism vs collectivism): Turkish Generation Z is more affected by strong family ties and tradition-based social norms, whereas Croatian Generation Z, influenced by Western European individualism, shows less reliance on collective expectations. Despite these cultural nuances, Multigroup analysis found no significant differences between the groups in terms of subjective norms' impact on following influencers.

Perceived behavioural control significantly, though modestly, affects Generation Z's intention to follow influencers in both Croatia and Türkiye. However, this impact is stronger among the Turkish Generation Z, indicating that an increase in perceived behavioural control has a greater effect on their influencer-following intentions (if the Multigroup analysis is observed). Based on the focus group, Turkish participants are not as affected by influencers and their choice of influencers varies according to their needs, while this is not the case with Croatian participants. When considering individualism and collectivism, it can be concluded that in collectivist cultures such as Türkiye, individuals are often more aware of the social norms and values expected within their community. Although young people in Türkiye are active users of social networks, they tend to be more selective, choosing influencers based on their personal needs, aligning with Türkiye's collectivist culture in which individuals are mindful of community norms. In contrast, Croatian Generation Z, influenced by European individualism and trends, is more readily influenced by popular culture and follows influencers with less scepticism.

CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing strongly impacts Generation Z, influencing their purchasing choices and attitudes. However, Generation Z's trust in influencers is waning. The research question was: Are there differences between Turkish and Croatian Generation Z when observing the Theory of Planned Behaviour and influencer marketing? The results of this research show that there are no big differences in most relationships. Influencer marketing is an important aspect of Generation Z's lives in both countries. Nevertheless, there are minor nuances that present challenges for brands and influencers in both countries.

The practical implications of this study can be observed according to communication styles and the adaptation of content and marketing strategies of brands and influencers. In Türkiye, individuals favour shorter and faster forms of communication, such as Twitter. Additionally, vlogs, which provide a more personal and visual form of expression, may also be more appealing to Turkish Generation Z, while Facebook and TikTok are preferred in Croatia. Instagram is the social platform which is at the forefront for Turkish and Croatian Generation Z. For brands in Croatia and Türkiye to successfully reach Generation Z, they need to adapt their marketing strategies to the different cultural contexts. Brands targeting Croatian Generation Z should focus on individualism and self-expression, while in Türkiye the emphasis should be on community-oriented messages. Influencers' content in Croatia

should focus on personal development, while in Türkiye they should focus their activities on solidarity and social contribution, as well as on creating content that is in line with socially accepted values and norms. Brands and influencers could use these findings to adjust campaigns or choose platforms.

The theoretical contribution can be looked at from several different standpoints. Firstly, this research fills a gap in the literature by providing important insights into how cultural context drives the impact of influencers. Secondly, after having analysed Generation Z's perceptions of influencers in both countries, it became clear that cultural sensitivity should become a part of marketing strategies. This expands the theoretical knowledge to understand the impact of cross-cultural marketing strategies and provides a framework for marketers to develop effective campaigns in different cultures. Finally, while this research affirms the use of the Theory of Planned Behaviour as an effective model in marketing strategies, it also reveals how the Theory of Planned Behaviour differs when considering cultural factors. These contributions provide key insights into developing more effective marketing strategies both in theory and in practice.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations of this research are primarily based on the sample for the research, as it is difficult to generalise the results due to a sample that is representative of one institution but not the entire country. Consequently, the intention for future research is to include a more diverse sample or broader geographical regions within each country. Additionally, this research is based on two countries only. Future research should include other countries, especially those countries that are culturally closer. Furthermore, the study focuses specifically on Generation Z (1996–2006). Although, according to McKinsey (2023), Generation Z has a wide age range, from 1996 to 2010, this research specifically lacks Generation Z individuals born between 2006 and 2010, or the NEET generation (*Not in education, employment, or training*). Future research should focus on other generations and examine whether there are differences between them. Furthermore, this research is based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, but future research requires the inclusion of some additional influential factors that may affect the relationships between the variables, such as personal relevance, inspiration, trust (Chopra et al., 2021) or self-identity (Magrizos et al., 2021). Future research could also explore how the rapid change in social media platforms over time impacts influencer dynamics and engagement. Moreover, the questionable value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.656) for attitudes suggests a problem with the internal con-

sistency of the scale. The suggestion is to include new items to the construct, such as attitudes towards trust in influencer recommendations: "I believe that influencers share useful and reliable information about products and services.", perceptual connections between influencers and followers: "I believe that influencers understand the needs and interests of their followers.", and influence on social norms and values: "I believe that influencers have an impact on social norms and values among young people."

Although the study primarily focused on perceived behavioural control from the followers' perspective, several items of the construct referred to the ease of achieving influencer status and not exclusively to the followers' perspective. To ensure greater precision in future research, it is recommended that the instrument is modified so that the items focus solely on the follower's perspective, which would ensure a more consistent and valid assessment of the construct. A final limitation of the paper is that once the respondents were asked about influencers, there was no limitation as to the influencers' niche, meaning that respondents could think of any influencer from any niche when answering. Future research ought to be more specific and consider influencers from only one niche. The additional recommendation for future research is to conduct a longitudinal study where, after a certain period of time, research will be conducted on the same respondents in order to examine their actual behaviour of following influencers. This approach will allow researchers to gain insight into how intentions can predict actual behaviour and how marketing strategies can be tailored to better engage Generation Z.

NOTES

¹ $\alpha > 0.90$ is excellent, $0.80 < \alpha < 0.90$ is good, $0.70 < \alpha < 0.80$ is acceptable, $0.60 < \alpha < 0.70$ is questionable, $0.50 < \alpha < 0.60$ is poor, $\alpha < 0.50$ is unacceptable.

² According to Collier (2020), every value with 1 df (Degree of freedom) above 3.84 means that it is significant at the 0.05 level ($\Delta\chi^2/1 \text{ df} = 3.84$ $p < 0.05$).

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Influencerski marketing: međukulturalna studija generacije Z u Hrvatskoj i Turskoj

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Koristeći se Teorijom planiranoga ponašanja, rad analizira kako influencerski marketing utječe na generaciju Z u dvije zemlje: Hrvatskoj i Turskoj. Cilj ovog istraživanja jest ispitati utječu li stavovi, subjektivne norme te percipirana kontrola ponašanja generacije Z na njihove namjere praćenja influencera u budućnosti. Istraživanje je provedeno uz pomoć upitnika i fokus-grupa. Konfirmatorna faktorska analiza i modeliranje strukturalnih jednadžbi iskorišteni su za testiranje hipoteza i odnosa između varijabli. Subjektivne norme i percipirana kontrola ponašanja pozitivno utječu na namjeru generacije Z da u budućnosti u obje zemlje slijedi influencere, dok stavovi s obzirom na influencerski marketing pozitivno utječu na hrvatsku generaciju Z, ali nemaju značajan utjecaj u slučaju turske generacije Z. Rezultati ovog istraživanja omogućit će brendovima u Hrvatskoj i Turskoj prilagodbu sadržaja i dizajna kampanja, uzimajući u obzir preferencije influencera i kulturne trendove generacije Z, čime će im se olakšati pronalaženje i angažiranje ciljne publike.

Ključne riječi: Teorija planiranoga ponašanja, generacija Z, influencerski marketing, fokus-grupa



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