

From Scrolling to Enrolling: A Qualitative Exploration of How Instagram Content Shapes Generation Z's Engagement with E-Learning Platforms

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines how content strategies deployed on Instagram influence the engagement of Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) towards e-learning platforms. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 university students and 10 young Tunisian professionals, until data saturation was reached, and then manually analyzed according to the thematic analysis method of Braun and Clarke (2006), with independent double coding to ensure the reliability of the interpretation. Three main results emerge. First, advertising effectiveness on social networks follows a two-step mechanism: a passive awareness phase that builds awareness, followed by an active search phase that triggers conversion once the need for training has become conscious. Secondly, the mobile phone has become the central means of access to online learning platforms, which poses a strong requirement for technical simplicity. Finally, the authenticity of branded content and the opinions of other learners act as a signal of perceived risk reduction and weigh more heavily in the final decision than the advertising speech itself. These results make it possible to propose six concrete recommendations, accompanied by monitoring indicators, for e-learning organizations seeking to better reach this audience. The study also reminds us that Generation Z is not a homogeneous bloc: behaviors vary according to field of study and professional situation more than according to age, which calls for more differentiated messages than existing literature suggests.

Keywords: Generation Z; Instagram; e-learning; content marketing; commitment; qualitative research; Tunisia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, composed by people born between 1997 and 2012, grew up with a phone in their hand and a social network already installed on the screen. This is the first generation that has never known a world without smartphones (Prensky, 2001; McKinsey & Company, 2022). For e-learning platforms, this audience is both a priority target and a difficult audience to define they consume online training while spending a considerable amount of time on social networks, with habits that often escape traditional numerical studies.

Among these networks, Instagram occupies a special place. In Tunisia, as elsewhere in the Maghreb, it is one of the most used networks by 16–25-year-olds, far ahead of television or the press as a source of information on products and services (Diplomeo/BDM survey, 2023; Hima *et al.*, 2024). Understanding how content posted on Instagram pushes a young person to register or not on an online learning platform is therefore a question that is

both useful for research and useful for training organizations themselves.

The research question is: how do Instagram content strategies influence engagement and adoption decisions of e-learning platforms among Gen Z? To answer this question, we interviewed 20 young Tunisians (10 students, 10 young professionals) by means of semi-structured interviews and then analyzed their statements with the thematic analysis method of Braun and Clarke (2006).

The objective of this study is to contribute to existing literature through three main contributions, in an exploratory manner. First, it seeks to distinguish between two key moments in the effectiveness of social advertising: passive exposure that promotes the construction of notoriety, and an active search approach that intervenes more in triggering conversion. This distinction is still not very detailed in previous works. Second, the study is part of a Tunisian context, which is

still largely underrepresented in the literature, which is dominated by research conducted in North America, Europe or Asia. Thirdly, it aims to propose concrete managerial implications, likely to guide the strategies of the marketing teams of e-learning platforms.

The following sections first present the theoretical framework used to construct this study, then the methodological approach, the results, their discussion and the conclusions.

1.1 Generation Z: A cohort with sometimes contradictory behaviors

The literature on Generation Z describes a generation with sometimes opposite traits: a strong desire for independence but also an intense need for social ties, a tendency to zap from one content to another but a real loyalty when trust is established. A recent study on the values of this generation shows that social ties are no longer limited to the small family circle: they extend to a wider network of emotional proximity, maintained on an ongoing basis via digital tools, which feeds a strong expectation of authenticity towards brands and peers alike (Tirocchi, 2024). Several recent studies also

note higher levels of shyness and social anxiety among this generation than among Millennials (Schmidt, 2023), which may partly explain why online contact, perceived as less expositive, is often more suitable for them than direct contact.

In terms of values, environmental sustainability is important: 78% of young people surveyed by Google and Ipsos (2023) say they are ready to leave a well-known brand for a more environmentally friendly alternative. This attachment to values is not limited to ecology: it is also found in the expectation of authenticity towards brands, a thread that we will find later in our results.

Five theoretical frameworks structure our reading of the data. The fifth, social identity theory, explains why online group membership influences individual choices; recent work shows that this dynamic is directly reflected in the way Generation Z positions itself in relation to a brand's other customers, whom they perceive and evaluate to build their own image (Anton, 2024). Table 1 provides a summary of the five managers involved.

Table 1: Theoretical frameworks used and their application to the study

Theory	Key Authors	Central postulate	Application under consideration
Digital native theory	Prensky (2001)	Gen Z develops distinct behaviors due to early digital immersion	Justifies the native use of Instagram and mobile as learning devices
Uses and gratifications	Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch (1973)	Individuals actively choose media based on the needs to be met	Explains the selectivity of e-learning platforms and content formats consumed
Theory of Engagement	Calder, Malthouse & Schaedel (2009)	Deep engagement comes from relevant, interactive, and emotionally resonant content	Foundations Instagram content strategies (Stories, Reels, user-generated content)
Influencer marketing and perceived credibility	De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders (2017); Sardar & Vijay (2025)	Perceived proximity to the community weighs more than notoriety in the trust placed in an influencer	Guides the analysis of the role of micro-influencers in conversion
Social identity theory (consumer-brand perspective)	Anton (2024)	Individual identity is also built in comparison to other customers of a brand perceived online	Explains the weight of peer referrals and social proof in choosing a platform

1.2 Instagram as a space for engagement

Launched in 2010 as a simple photo-sharing app, Instagram has grown into a complete ecosystem of Stories, Reels and integrated shopping features. Its popularity among 16–25-year-olds is due to three elements: an immediate visual format, a direct conversation with the brand, and an algorithm that strongly personalizes what each user sees. This position remains dominant: at the beginning of 2026, Instagram has a higher penetration rate than TikTok among Generation Z, even though TikTok users spend more time there (eMarketer, 2026). Stories are cited as the format that generates the most interactions, especially thanks to polls and questions that invite an immediate response (Davis, 2023).

Influencer marketing remains a central lever, but its center of gravity has shifted: brands are increasingly relying on micro-influencers, between 1,000 and 50,000 subscribers, who are considered more credible than celebrities by young audiences (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017). This finding is confirmed by very recent work: Sardar and Vijay (2025), in a systematic review of 76 studies published between 2011 and 2023, show that the trust placed in an influencer depends less on his or her notoriety than on his or her perceived proximity to his or her community, with authenticity being the factor most often cited as a condition for this trust.

1.3 Adoption of e-learning platforms and the role of social proof

The literature on the adoption of e-learning converges around four criteria: the quality of the educational content, the ease of access from several devices, the reputation of the brand, and the presence of an active community of learners (Ally, 2008). A recent literature review on the adoption of e-learning in emerging economies confirms the persistence of these criteria, while highlighting that the constraints of digital infrastructure and local context weigh just as much as the perceived quality of the content (Barikzai *et al.*, 2024). The role of social proof, user reviews, testimonials, content published by learners themselves, as a factor that reduces uncertainty before registration is particularly documented for Generation Z (Kumar & Saini, 2021).

This observation is consistent with recent work carried out in contexts close to ours. A study of Algerian students shows that exposure to social media directly influences purchasing decisions via digital marketing, regardless of the gender and age of the respondents (Hima *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, a 2025 study of young Vietnamese Gen Z in digital banking shows that this generation clearly prioritizes functionality and perceived security over social recognition, unlike previous generations (Tuong *et al.*, 2025). Finally, a recent review on the use of social networks in organizations highlights that the perceived authenticity of content directly conditions the level of engagement, whether internally or with an external audience (Almadah, 2025).

1.4 Synthesis and positioning of the study

The literature documents, separately, the weight of Instagram in Gen Z habits and the criteria for adopting an e-learning platform. What remains little explored is the articulation between these two areas: at what precise point in the decision-making process does an Instagram ad really act, and at what point does it give way to other sources (opinions, peer recommendations)? It is this articulation that our qualitative study seeks to illuminate,

based on a Tunisian field that is still poorly documented on this specific subject.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research posture

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach, consistent with its objective: to understand the meaning that participants themselves give to their uses of Instagram and e-learning platforms, rather than measuring frequencies on a large sample. This approach provides access to the fine texture of motivations and hesitations, where a closed questionnaire would have mainly captured declared intentions, which is in line with recent arguments in favor of interpretative frameworks to study consumer behavior in complex digital environments (Yao *et al.*, 2024).

2.2 Participants and Sample Size

The sample includes 20 young Tunisians aged 20 to 24, divided into two subgroups: 10 university students and 10 young professionals at the beginning of their careers. The choice of participants targeted a diversity of fields (computer science, marketing, design, medicine, finance, etc.) while maintaining a homogeneity of age and geographical area (Tunis region), in order to be able to compare profiles without introducing parasitic variables related to the place of residence. Table 2 details the full composition of the sample.

This sample size was justified a priori by the concept of "information power", which is more appropriate than a fixed numerical threshold: the more information a sample contains that is relevant to the research question, the smaller it needs to be (Malterud, Siersma & Guassora, 2016). Given a well-defined study objective, a homogeneous sample in age and geographical area, and a clearly defined theoretical stance beforehand, a sample of 20 participants offered a level of information deemed sufficient to answer the research question, without aiming at statistical generalization.

Table 2: Detailed Sample Composition (n = 20)

Respondent	Age	Status	Domain	E-learning frequency	Preferred platform
P1	22	Student	Computer Science	Common	Multi-platform
P2	21	Student	Marketing	Occasional	Single-platform
P3	22	Student	Design	Common	Multi-platform
P4	21	Student	Literature	Occasional	Single-platform
P5	21	Student	Sciences of the approx.	Occasional	Single-platform
P6	20	Student	Fine Arts	Rare	Multi-platform
P7	21	Student	Music	Occasional	Single-platform
P8	21	Student	Finance	Common	Multi-platform
P9	23	Student	Medicine	Common	Multi-platform
P10	22	Student	Fashion	Rare	Single-platform
P11	23	Professional	Computer Science	Common	Multi-platform
P12	24	Professional	Accounting	Occasional	Single-platform
P13	22	Professional	Design	Common	Multi-platform
P14	23	Professional	Marketing	Common	Multi-platform

Respondent	Age	Status	Domain	E-learning frequency	Preferred platform
P15	24	Professional	Computer Science	Common	Single-platform
P16	22	Professional	Mktg digital	Common	Single-platform
P17	23	Professional	Approx. Science	Occasional	Multi-platform
P18	22	Professional	Communication	Rare	Multi-platform
P19	24	Professional	Architecture	Occasional	Single-platform
P20	24	Professional	Literature	Rare	Single-platform

2.3 Data Collection

The data were collected by individual semi-structured interviews, organized around three thematic axes presented in Table 3. This format allows us to keep a common thread while leaving room for unexpected answers, which makes it a good compromise between

methodological rigour and exploratory depth (Ruslin *et al.*, 2022). The interviews, which lasted an average of 50 minutes, were conducted face-to-face or remotely (telephone call, videoconference), and then transcribed in full word for word.

Table 3: Semi-structured interview guide: axes and questions

Thematic axis	Main questions	Follow-up questions
Axis 1: E-learning uses	How often do you use e-learning platforms? Through which device do you mainly access it?	What do you like/dislike about these platforms? Do you prefer one platform or multiple platforms?
Axis 2: Advertising impact	Have you ever subscribed to a platform following a TV, billboard or press advertisement? Has an advertisement on social networks ever led you to register?	What type of advertising influenced your decision the most? Which social platform has the most impact on you?
Axis 3: Trust & decision	Are you attentive to brand messages when choosing a platform? How do you go about choosing a new platform?	How important are you to other users' reviews? Do recommendations from friends and family influence your choice?

2.4 Data analysis: approach, saturation and reliability

The analysis was conducted manually, without the use of computer-aided qualitative analysis software, in order to maintain direct and continuous contact with the verbatim material throughout the coding. It follows the six steps of Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, grouping into draft themes, revision of these themes, definition and final nomination, and then writing the report. In line with recent recommendations on the conduct of thematic analysis, coding was conducted in successive cycles, with each new cycle being compared to the previous ones until no new code or sub-themes emerged from the transcripts, marking the achievement of data saturation (Naeem *et al.*, 2024).

In concrete terms, saturation was assessed after each block of five additional interviews: from the sixteenth interview onwards, the last two blocks did not reveal any new themes, only additional illustrations of the themes already identified, which made it possible to consider the saturation threshold as reached for the twenty interviews carried out.

To limit the risk of subjectivity inherent in any manual interpretation, an independent double coding was carried out: all twenty transcriptions were coded separately by two encoders, then the code grids were compared to identify the convergences and divergences of interpretation. Discrepancies were discussed until

consensus was reached on the final formulation of the themes, in line with methodological recommendations on inter-coder reliability in qualitative research (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). This double-coding procedure, although time-consuming, reinforces the credibility of the themes presented in the next section by reducing the weight of isolated individual reading.

2.5 Ethical considerations

All participants gave their free and informed consent prior to the interview, after being informed of the purpose of the study, the anonymous nature of the processing of their comments, and their right to withdraw at any time without justification, knowing that the participants' first names are hidden in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Very different uses of e-learning depending on the profile

The analysis reveals three fairly clear usage profiles. The first profile, which is frequent, corresponds to participants for whom e-learning is part of the study or work routine:

"I use e-learning platforms frequently for my computer science courses. It has become as natural as opening a textbook. (P1, 22 years old)

The second, occasional profile treats e-learning as a complement, not a substitute:

"I use e-learning occasionally, especially for additional content. I don't see it as a replacement for my classes. (P4, 21 years old)"

The third profile, which is rarer, retains a marked preference for face-to-face work:

"I prefer face-to-face classes. The screen puts a distance from the teacher and this distracts me. (P18, 22 years old)"

In terms of the device used, mobile largely dominates for its simplicity of access at any time, while the computer remains preferred for tasks that require more concentration. Two logics of loyalty also coexist: some stay on a single platform to save time to adapt, others use several to choose the most suitable content for each need.

3.2 Social ads convert better, but not at any time

The participants are almost unanimous: the ads seen on social networks are more convincing than those seen on television or billboards. P18 (22 years old) sums up this observation well:

"Social media ads are very persuasive. I have signed up for classes directly from an Instagram ad. "

Part of the reason for this is that these ads are embedded in the News Feed rather than interrupting it, reducing the natural resistance to persuasion. Television advertising, on the other hand, is perceived as outdated for this audience ("it's for my parents," says P11, 23), and outdoor advertising generates attention without pushing them to act, for lack of a way to interact immediately. Table 4 summarizes the perceived effectiveness of each channel based on our data.

Table 4: Advertising effectiveness matrix perceived by Generation Z (5-star rating from thematic analysis)

Channel	Awareness generated	Power of conversion	Targeting level	Possible interaction	Gen Z Overall Assessment
Instagram Ads	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	Dominant
TikTok Ads	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	Emerging
YouTube Ads	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	Complementary
Facebook Ads	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	Declining
Outdoor Signage	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	Low
TV Advertising	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	Low
Print media	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	Very Low

However, an important point qualifies this result: the effectiveness of Instagram advertising depends heavily on when it is seen. When a need for training is already conscious in the person, advertising acts as a direct trigger. When this need does not yet exist, the same advertisement builds above all notoriety, without triggering immediate action, a priming effect that P19 (21 years old) describes as follows:

"I notice the ads even when I'm not looking. It installs the brand in my head. When I need them, I will naturally think of them."

This distinction between passive sensitization and active research, which is not well developed in the existing literature in this specific field, is an important empirical contribution of this study.

3.3 The decision-making process: a six-step process

Brand storytelling doesn't convince everyone in the same way. Some participants see this as a sincere signal of shared values; Others, more pragmatic, judge above all the real quality of the content and its price. This difference in posture confirms that Generation Z is not homogeneous, even within a small and culturally close sample.

By cross-referencing all the interviews, we can reconstruct a typical decision-making process in six stages, from the awareness of a need to the final registration. Table 5 details this pathway, with its trigger for each stage, the sources of information mobilized and a representative verbatim.

Table 5: Process model of the Gen Z decision-making path towards the adoption of an e-learning platform

Step	Trigger	Sources mobilized	Key Factors	Associated Verbatim
1. Awareness of the need	Lack of identified competence, academic or professional requirement	Direct environment (course, employer)	Relevance of the need, perceived urgency	(Latent need)
2. Passive Sensitization	Unintentional exposure to Instagram ads	News feed, Sponsored stories	Relevance of algorithmic targeting	"I notice ads even without looking" (P19)

Step	Trigger	Sources mobilized	Key Factors	Associated Verbatim
3. Active search	Conscious and immediate need	Google, comparators, official websites	Completeness and credibility of the information	"I do extensive research" (P9)
4. Evaluation of alternatives	Comparison between identified platforms	User reviews, forums, YouTube	Reputation, perceived quality, price	"Opinions carry the most weight" (P3)
5. Consultation with friends and family	Reduction of residual uncertainty	Peers, trusted networks	Relational proximity, perceived expertise	"One trusted piece of advice is worth ten ads" (P7)
6. Decision & Registration	Convergence of positive signals	Platform website, mobile app	Easy to sign up, trial offer	"I register directly from Instagram" (P18)

The distinction between active receptivity (aligned with an explicit need) and passive sensitization (progressive construction of notoriety) constitutes a central analytical contribution. P19 (21 years old) describes this priming effect:

"I notice the ads even when I'm not looking. It installs the brand in my head. When I need them, I will naturally think of them."

This journey shows that the final decision is rarely based on advertising alone: it is mainly based on the opinions of other users and the recommendations of friends and family, who intervene at the end of the process to remove the last doubts. As Salma (21) says, "one trusted piece of advice is worth ten ads."

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 From "why" to "how": a two-step mechanism rather than a uniform effect

The most structuring result of this study is not that Instagram influences Generation Z's commitment to e-learning, this observation is already well established, but that this influence does not operate in the same way depending on the moment of the journey. This point deserves to be discussed beyond its simple empirical description, because it directly questions the way in which the theory of uses and gratifications is usually mobilized in the literature on social networks (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973). This theory postulates that individuals choose a medium to satisfy an already identified need; However, our data show that, in the passive awareness phase, the need is not yet identified at the time of the advertising exposure, it is the exhibition itself that prepares the ground for a future need to be recognized more quickly. The mechanism is therefore not an active choice of media according to a need, but a cognitive priming effect that precedes the conscious formulation of the need. This nuance shifts the explanatory framework from a logic of immediate gratification to a logic of delayed memorization, which is in line with, but not a substitute for, recent work on the digital fidelity of Generation Z, where perceived functionality takes precedence over brand discourse once the need has become conscious (Tuong *et al.*, 2025). In other words, Instagram's role changes in nature depending on the stage: it first acts as a brand

memorization device, then gives way to more functional and social criteria in the active decision-making phase. To our knowledge, this distinction had not been formalized so explicitly in the specific context of the adoption of e-learning platforms, which is the main theoretical contribution of this study.

4.2 Authenticity as a signal of perceived risk reduction, rather than as a value in itself

The second major result, the weight of authenticity, could be read superficially as a simple confirmation of what the literature on commitment already suggests (Calder, Malthouse & Schaedel, 2009). A closer reading of our data, however, suggests a more accurate mechanism: authenticity does not function as a value valued for its own sake, but as a signal that reduces the perceived risk associated with spending money and time on an unknown platform. When participants bring up learner testimonials or non-sponsored reviews, they are not describing an aesthetic preference for a sincere communication style; They describe a verification reasoning, close to what a person would do before a higher-risk purchase. This finding is in line with and clarifies recent work showing that content produced by users themselves inspires more trust than content produced by the brand because it is perceived as less self-interested (Kostić *et al.*, 2026), and it complements the recent review on perceived authenticity as a condition of organizational commitment by applying it specifically to a situation of decision to purchase an educational service (Almadah, 2025). The theoretical contribution here is to reposition authenticity not as a characteristic of content, but as a cognitive tool for reducing uncertainty mobilized by the consumer, which paves the way for future work to test whether this mechanism can be generalized to other categories of online services with comparable perceived risk (subscriptions, certification training, financial services).

4.3 A heterogeneity that questions the generational boundaries themselves

The third result, the diversity of behaviors within Generation Z, leads us to question an implicit observation in the marketing literature: the one that treats the generation as the relevant unit of analysis to explain digital behavior. Our data suggests that the most discriminating variable is not age, but the situation

(student or young professional) combined with the field of study, which shapes the relationship to risk, to the time available, and to the immediate need for training. This finding is in line with literature's warning against simplified generational stereotypes (Smith, 2023), but it goes further by proposing an explanation: if the ability to adapt to digital tools varies so much within the same age cohort, it is probably because this ability depends on individual psychological resources rather than generational belonging. This point finds direct support in recent work on psychological capital in an organizational context, which shows that the ability to adapt to change varies greatly from one individual to another, regardless

of generation (Barkani & Allouani, 2025). On the theoretical level, this invites us to treat generation as a context variable rather than as an explanatory variable on its own, and to favor models combining individual factors (coping resources, professional situation) and cohort factors.

4.4 Operational Recommendations

The mechanisms highlighted above translate into six concrete recommendations for e-learning organizations, each with an action and a monitoring indicator to measure their effect (Table 6).

Table 6: Operational recommendations, associated actions and monitoring indicators

Recommendation	Concrete action	Monitoring indicator
1. Differentiate between awareness and conversion	Build two distinct types of Instagram campaigns: awareness content (generic Stories) and conversion content (targeted offers, retargeting)	Click-through rate by campaign type; average time between first exhibition and registration
2. Optimize the mobile experience as a priority	Design the mobile-first interface and sign-up funnel, with a minimum number of steps	Sign-up funnel abandonment rate on mobile vs. desktop
3. Value real learners' testimonies	Embedding Unscripted Video Testimonials from Alumni into Instagram Content	Engagement rate (likes, shares, comments) on testimonial vs. traditional advertising content
4. Mobilize local micro-influencers	Collaborate with local micro-influencers (1,000 to 50,000 followers) rather than celebrities	Cost of acquisition per registration via micro-influencer partnership
5. Facilitate social proof at the end of the journey	Display verified reviews and a counter of active learners directly on the registration page	Conversion rate before/after review viewing
6. Segment beyond age	Adapt messages according to field of study and status (student vs. professional) rather than according to age alone	Conversion rate per message segment (channel/status) compared to a generic message

4.5 Theoretical and managerial implications

On the theoretical level, this study makes three contributions to the existing literature. First, it proposes to see the effectiveness of social media advertising as a two-step process: first an exposure effect that prepares the consumer's mind, and then an action-taking effect that results in conversion, rather than as a single, uniform effect. Second, it repositions authenticity as perceived as a risk-reduction mechanism rather than a mere aesthetic or ethical preference. Third, it qualifies the use of generation as an explanatory category by showing the strength of the situation variables (status, sector) within a homogeneous age cohort.

From a managerial point of view, these results invite e-learning organizations not to measure the effectiveness of their Instagram campaigns with a single immediate conversion indicator, which would underestimate the value of the awareness phase, and to present social proof not as a secondary argument but as the central element of the message at the end of the decision-making journey.

4.6 Limitations of the Study and Critical Perspectives

This study has limitations that should be clearly assumed, and which qualify the scope of the above

contributions. First, the sample is mono-contextual (young Tunisians in the Tunis region): the distinction between passive awareness and active research could be expressed differently in media environments where institutional trust in advertising, or access to the Internet, differs significantly. Secondly, its size ($n = 20$), although justified by the criterion of information power rather than by an arbitrary threshold (Malterud, Siersma & Guassora, 2016), remains suitable for an exploratory approach and does not allow a statistical generalization to the behaviors of the entire Tunisian Generation Z. Finally, since the data were collected at a given point in time, the study does not make it possible to observe whether the same individual really goes through the six stages of the identified decision-making process, or whether this path is an a posteriori analytical reconstruction based on retrospective accounts, a limitation inherent in any cross-sectional qualitative study and which calls for longitudinal follow-up to be fully tested.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative study sheds light on how Instagram content influences Gen Z's engagement with e-learning platforms. Three main findings emerge: advertising effectiveness follows a two-step mechanism

(awareness and conversion) rather than a uniform effect, the authenticity of content acts as a signal to reduce perceived risk rather than a simple aesthetic preference, and the diversity of behaviors within Generation Z depends more on individual circumstances than on generational affiliation itself.

These results open up several avenues of research. A comparison between several countries would test the cultural robustness of the awareness/conversion mechanism identified here. A longitudinal follow-up of the same participants would make it possible to verify whether the six-step decision-making process proposed in this study is confirmed over time rather than reflecting a retrospective reconstruction. Finally, a mixed approach combining qualitative interviews and real Instagram audience data would make it possible to quantify the extent of the priming effect mentioned by the participants, and to test whether the mechanism for reducing the perceived risk of authenticity is generalized to other categories of online services.

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