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Search behavior of Gen Z on YouTube and TikTok

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Abstract

This study examines the search behavior of Gen Zs on YouTube and TikTok. It uses Purposive sampling to choose 10 participants who are Gen Zs, individuals ranging from 11-26 years old, residing at Barangay Bagumbayan of Santa Cruz, Laguna. It is only limited to Gen Zs who are young achievers and young professionals, and are using both YouTube and TikTok. It utilizes Uses and Gratification Theory to explore the search experiences of Gen Zs. The researchers conduct face-to-face semi-structured interviews to gather data, followed by thematic approach with themes derived from the transcripts of the interviews. It aims to understand the search purposes, predetermined intentions, and shifts in preference among Gen Z users. The findings revealed that informational, navigational, and transactional are the search purposes in utilizing YouTube and TikTok. Gen Zs have different predetermined intentions when maximizing those platforms. These predetermined intentions encompass completeness of information, convenience, engagement, legitimacy, and viewer preference. It was also found that the reasons Gen Zs in shifting their preference in utilizing content from YouTube and TikTok are retention, validity of information, exposure, and valuable, and usefulness.

Keywords: Search behavior; YouTube; TikTok; Gen Z

1. Introduction

The internet has expanded the reach of news Social Media in general became a hub of interactivity between a variety of different groups of people for a myriad of different reasons. From the defunct Friendster to the popular Facebook that helps connect loved ones with each other, there is no shortage of platforms or applications that can be used by the public for their needs or interests. Two social media platforms have risen to the top when it comes to popularity, YouTube and TikTok.

YouTube was founded on the 14th of February, 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steven Chen, and Jawed Karim. The social media platform has amassed over 2 billion users worldwide. From the first video being uploaded by founder Jawed Karim and titled "Me at the Zoo" to now sharing and posting content made by millions of people, the journey of YouTube's rise is textbook definition of innovation and diligence. Becoming the largest video platform took years of dedication, consistent improvement, and continued interest by the audience for them to keep on using the platform for their own reasons. Over time, improvements have allowed it to further enhance its user experience by introducing YouTube Kids, YouTube Premium, YouTube Music, and more for specific topics or interests in mind

TikTok, known as Douyin in China, was launched in 2016 under the Chinese company called "ByteDance". In 2017, ByteDance acquired Musical.ly, which led to the company transferring much of Musical.ly's features unto Douyin, including its short video format that helped launch Douyin's global name "TikTok" to the stratosphere in terms of popularity when it was released in 2018. During the pandemic years and into the present day, TikTok is currently still on the rise as a marketing report by data.ai stated that the application will break 3 billion downloads at the end of the year.

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Both are video sharing platforms with no sign of stagnation in terms of usage or popularity, but both are different when it comes to not only its presentation, but also by its audience and their search behavior. While in recent times, TikTok has allowed for videos to be posted that are 10 minutes in length, its main attraction is its short video format that is usually from 15 to 60 seconds. YouTube on the other hand, consistently posts videos longer than 1 minute and it is known for its lengthy videos that can range from 30 minutes to multiple hours, with movies and well-made documentaries being posted within the application that are two to four hours in length.

Anthony Schultes described search intent as, "The purpose of a person's search. The intent or reason behind typing for specific terms into a search engine." Different types or variations of search purpose were given, categorized as Informational, Navigational, Transactional. Briar Dean (2022) stated that 99% of all search terms fall under these categories or purposes.

Each type of search purpose is inherently different from one another and may be done in different social media platforms. Informational search purpose is deliberately looking for information on certain subjects. Navigational search purpose involves searching for routes, landmarks, or anything that involves a location. Transactional search purpose is finding the specific product or service itself.

The differing lengths in videos, different content and presentation of said content, the individual capabilities of each platform, different audiences and search behavior when using the platforms have made them similar in the surface level, but once the barriers of similarities have been broken, the study may show how different each video sharing platform truly is.

The focus of the research is about the contents of videos being posted and shared in YouTube and TikTok only, the process was conducted to reveal how both social media platforms and their capabilities and presentations affect the users of both applications. The question of whether content subconsciously affects a user's behavior was answered in the study.

2. Material and method

The research utilized a phenomenological qualitative approach, employing in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to delve into the search behavior of Gen Z on YouTube and TikTok among residents of Barangay Bagumbayan, Santa Cruz, Laguna.

This study was conducted at Barangay Bagumbayan of Santa Cruz, Laguna. Barangay Bagumbayan is the most populated barangay in the municipality of Santa Cruz. According to the data given by the office of the Sangguniang Kabataan of Barangay Bagumbayan, the barangay has a population of 3,333 Gen Zs. Purposive sampling technique was used for this study wherein the researchers selected 10 participants that fit the criteria of who can be a part of the study. The participants of the study must be of the ages 11 to 26 years old. The researchers asked for permission from the parents or legal guardians for those younger than 18 years old. The participants or their legal guardians must have also signed the consent form to provide legal proof of their willingness to be a part of the study. The participants should also be a young achiever or a young professional.

In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants in a face-to-face setting. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interview transcripts were then coded and categorized into patterns and themes using thematic analysis. The analysis of the interviews was used to determine the search behavior of Gen Z in using YouTube and TikTok.

3. Results and discussion

This study used Thematic Analysis to analyze the set of data and looked for patterns in the meaning of the data to find themes.

3.1. Thematic Analysis

This analysis focuses on the responses of 10 participants who are Gen Z that are using YouTube and TikTok to classify the search purposes of Gen Z in using YouTube and TikTok, to explore the predetermined intentions of Gen Z towards the aforementioned platforms, and to determine the shift in preference of Gen Z when utilizing YouTube and TikTok.

3.2. Search purpose of Gen Z in using YouTube and TikTok

3.2.1. Types of videos that Gen Z primarily search on TikTok

Two themes have emerged which are informational and transactional. It was revealed that Gen Z primarily search for academic-related videos and tutorial dance videos on TikTok. Zaitun (2021) concluded that TikTok is a promising platform for use as an interactive learning medium that can improve students' learning performance, particularly their speaking and writing skills. TikTok's internal feature is enabled, and the application will be used as a learning tool in a variety of courses.

Meanwhile, TikTok can also be utilized for transactional as this platform can already be used to buy different things. According to Pinaroc (2022), TikTok Shop opened up a whole new market for sellers, ranging from well-known brands to small and medium-sized businesses. TikTok Shop aims to provide users with a unique shopping experience as well as opportunities for local content creators. Jianyu and Swei (2021) added that TikTok offers a more casual and relaxed marketing environment for entertainers, allowing them to create content that inspires their fans.

On the other hands, two participants mentioned that they are searching on TikTok to do online shopping. The social media platform is now an e-commerce platform where they can buy different things. Two participants also stated that educational contents are the type of videos that they are searching on TikTok. Meanwhile, two participants revealed that they are searching for trending videos on TikTok.

According to Pinaroc (2022), TikTok Shop opened up a whole new market for sellers, ranging from well-known brands to small and medium-sized businesses. TikTok Shop aims to provide users with a unique shopping experience as well as opportunities for local content creators.

3.2.2. Types of videos that Gen Z primarily search on YouTube

It was revealed that two themes have emerged on what types of videos that Gen Z primarily used on YouTube. The two themes are informational and navigational. As Gen Z are mostly students, they are maximizing the use of YouTube by watching videos that is related to their lesson. During their leisure time, they tend to watch lifestyle videos or vlogs. Based on Seven Boats Academy (2023), YouTube's massive collection of user-generated content has evolved into a source of entertainment in its own right. People watch a variety of videos, including vlogs, challenges, and parodies, as well as reaction videos and pranks, which are changing how audiences interact with entertainment.

On the other note, YouTube can also be used to search directions of the places that people are not familiar with. According to Chang (2020), navigation tasks come in a variety of forms on YouTube, but they can be broadly divided into two categories based on whether or not they require exploration. Finding paths in known environments, or traveling to a known relative balanced in a previously unknown environment, do not require extensive exploration. On the other hand, tasks like finding an object in a new environment or exhaustively mapping one necessitate exploration and are therefore more difficult.

Three participants mentioned that they are searching for daily vlog content on YouTube. It is content wherein content creators or influencers are simply recording their lives. Meanwhile, three participants also stated that they are searching for educational content on YouTube. Two participants are utilizing YouTube mainly because of navigational use.

Based on Jan (2021) lifestyle vlogs showcase vloggers' daily lives to a global audience. They create video diaries and share them with the world. Video blogging frequency can range from daily to monthly. One of the benefits of lifestyle video blogging is the lack of scripting and authenticity of the content. Young people are highly interested in other people's lifestyles, which can influence their future decisions and careers. Shufan (2023), claimed that YouTube is allowing easier access to educational content than before. Additionally, this platform is being enhanced by a diverse group of professional creators of high-quality edutainment content. The well-explained material and presentation of real-life examples that are rare in educational settings characterize this enjoyable educational format elements through storytelling. Educational video motivation aims to engage and motivate learners to take ownership of their learning and identify with the course's stories.

3.2.3. Topic or question that makes Gen Z prefer to use TikTok

This part highlighted that the reason why Gen Zs prefer to use TikTok is because for informational use. It is confirmed by Mazlan and Adnan (2023) that TikTok is a platform for entertainment that has amassed an incredible 14 billion hashtags in total. This serves to highlight the platform's significant viewpoint, with a diverse range of themes spanning

from music to humorous content. As a result, it draws young people together as a means of forming parasocial bonds and avoiding social isolation as well as an addiction to TikTok's entertaining material.

Four participants shared that they are utilizing TikTok mainly for entertainment purposes. Gen Zs are maximizing the use of TikTok by watching dance challenges, watching online games such as Call of Duty and Mobile Legend, watching funny videos, and listening to KPOP songs. On the other hand, two participants shared that they are watching tutorial videos on TikTok.

TikTok stands out among recent social platforms due to its nature as a "creative medium" with messages geared toward entertainment. The journalistic narratives shared on TikTok appear to represent "entertainment journalism," which aligns well with the philosophy of fast content consumption, or so-called fast content (Anderson, 2020).

3.2.4. Topic or question that makes Gen Z prefer to use YouTube

In this part, it was revealed that for information use is the primary reason why Gen Z prefer use YouTube. Based on Seven Boats Academy (2023), YouTube's massive collection of user-generated content has evolved into a source of entertainment in its own right. People watch a variety of videos, including vlogs, challenges, and parodies, as well as reaction videos and pranks, which are changing how audiences interact with entertainment. In addition, Moghavvemi (2018) confirmed that a significant number of learners rely on "YouTube" to solve their problems and questions related to studying.

5 out of 10 of the participants revealed that they are utilizing YouTube mainly for watching educational contents for a reason that these contents have complete information and credible. Meanwhile, two participants shared that they prefer to watch tutorial videos on YouTube.

YouTube has grown in popularity for educational videos and has established itself among students as a complementary learning platform that promotes on-demand learning. Furthermore, many people turn to YouTube for information on science, technology, and medicine. The benefit of online videos is their versatility: "Science online video has adopted many different styles, formats, and genres, creating a variety of categories that are difficult to classify and have virtually no creative limits" (Allgaier, 2019).

3.2.5. Predetermined intentions of Gen Z towards YouTube and TikTok

Features of YouTube or TikTok that influence the decision of Gen Z to search and engage with content on the platform

Six of the research participants answered that they are after in the completeness of information as their predetermined intention in using YouTube and TikTok. Those Gen Zs emphasized that as YouTube does not have a time limit on its content, it enables it to cater to much longer videos. With that, Gen Zs can understand more the content as it has a detailed explanation. On the other hand, the participants also commended TikTok for delivering informative content despite only having 15-30 seconds long videos.

Two participants assert that TikTok provides a user-friendly experience due to its swift interaction and succinct video format. They commend the platform's brevity, with videos lasting between 15 to 30 seconds, which they perceive as both informative and entertaining. In contrast to YouTube's lengthier video content, TikTok's concise format facilitates rapid consumption without significant time commitment.

Conversely, two participants highlight TikTok's engaging nature, particularly emphasizing its role in facilitating trending dance challenges. One participant articulates their engagement with the platform, citing TikTok as their preferred avenue for participating in viral dance trends. Another participant underscores the platform's content diversity, noting the abundance of varied content on TikTok compared to YouTube, attributing this to TikTok's user-friendly posting interface.

According to Al-Marouf et al. (2021), both YouTube and TikTok social media networks provide up-to-date sources described as useful, enjoyable, engaging, and relevant. In contrast, YouTube is used for educational and non-educational purposes due to the type of uploaded content and time management. Therefore, TikTok developers and influencers should initiate highly specialized videos and create content that raises awareness of medical field issues.

3.2.6. Factors influencing Gen Z to engage with content on YouTube or TikTok

The legitimacy of content sources emerges as a crucial factor influencing participant engagement, particularly on YouTube. Participants emphasize the platform's credibility, attributing it to the presence of diverse content creators who provide varying perspectives on topics. They value the authenticity of content creators and prioritize engaging with individuals they perceive as reliable sources of information. One participant underscores the importance of discerning legitimate sources and being influenced by credible individuals, highlighting a preference for content creators who convey truthful information.

Convenience emerges as a significant determinant in platform engagement, with participants favoring TikTok for its accessibility and engagement features. The platform's "For You Page" (FYP) functionality is highlighted as a key facilitator of user engagement, providing instant access to a variety of engaging content. Participants appreciate TikTok's ability to fit into their busy schedules, contrasting it with YouTube's longer video formats, which require more time commitment. They value the ability to entertain themselves and consume content effortlessly during breaks or downtime, underscoring the platform's convenience in accommodating their lifestyle.

3.2.7. Criteria that Gen Z employs when utilizing YouTube and TikTok

Five participants emphasize the importance of ensuring the credibility and authenticity of content creators and the information they provide. Employing criteria such as legitimacy and relevance to the topic when utilizing content from YouTube and TikTok. P08 stresses the need to verify the legitimacy of the content creators they watch, indicating a conscious effort to avoid unreliable sources.

Moreover, one of the participants underscores the significance of engagement metrics such as likes, views, shares, and comments in assessing the credibility of content on TikTok and YouTube. This aligns with one of the participant perspectives, which emphasizes the importance of considering views, likes, and comments as indicators of legitimacy. These participants prioritize engaging with content that garners significant interaction and attention from other users.

Regarding viewer preference, three participants express their inclination toward certain features or qualities of platforms. Participant 02 highlights the interactive nature of TikTok's "For You Page" (FYP), which fosters increased engagement between users and the platform. This suggests a preference for platforms that facilitate user interaction and engagement. The themes of Legitimacy and Viewer Preference emerge from the data, highlighting participants' considerations regarding the credibility of content creators and platforms, as well as their preferences for engaging and interactive content experiences.

In addition to these themes, Participant Three mentions using YouTube for entertainment, particularly enjoying Barbie videos and TikTok for dance covers. This highlights the Entertainment aspect of platform usage. Participant Four expresses their preference for specific content types on both platforms, finding Disney Princess videos and lessons easier to find on YouTube while enjoying funny and viral videos on TikTok. This speaks to the Convenience aspect, as well as the variety of content available on each platform to suit different preferences.

According to Chen et al., (2022), Audiences on YouTube and TikTok are drawn to visually engaging content, with research suggesting a strong preference for digital media. Music videos on both platforms are particularly valued for their emotive visuals. Additionally, TikTok serves educational purposes, offering informative content through short, animated videos. On YouTube, viewer motivation is influenced by factors like social anxiety and the appeal of content creators, especially evident in the popularity of YouTube live streams. Overall, preferences on these platforms are shaped by a mix of content type, educational value, and social factors.

Shift in Preference of Gen Z when utilizing YouTube or TikTok

3.2.8. Factors influencing the views, perspectives, and beliefs of Gen Z on TikTok

The most common theme that emerged was the validity of information as four respondents stated that the relevance of the platform TikTok as a source of information and the presence of said platform as an avenue of interaction makes TikTok an influential hub of online social interaction for content creators and their audiences. A theme that supports this statement is Exposure, wherein 3 respondents stated they were exposed to information that changed or added to their pre-existing beliefs and improved their skills in certain languages. Being exposed to said information also leads to the theme of Retention as some of the respondents mentioned their beliefs or views were influenced by the videos, they watched on TikTok. Each theme is a result or influence of each other, as without exposure, there can be no retention.

No retention means viewers are less likely to validate the information they are receiving, a theme that seems to be the most prominent based on the analyzed data.

A journal made by Daryus, P.W.A., Ahmad, B.R., and Dada M. (2022), made a proposed model of their research that helped explain the popularity of TikTok among its respondents which also helps with a better understanding of why TikTok influences the researcher's respondents as well. 4 factors were listed and these are; Uniqueness, Informativeness, Co-Creation, and Entertainment. TikTok itself is popular already and its short video format makes it unique to its competitors. The platform holds much information and is sometimes done entertainingly and co-creation is a user-designed approach that allows products and services to be exposed to its users.

3.2.9. Factors influencing the views, perspectives, and beliefs of Gen Z on YouTube

"Valuable" and "validity of information" are the two emerging themes gathered from the data. From the theme of "Valuable", all of the respondents learned lessons or searched for answers from videos on either platform. For them, it's shown that they are aware of what influences their views, perspectives, or beliefs and the validity of information makes the videos they watch worthwhile and valuable. One can connect both themes as a symbiotic partnership, P07 mentioned how they look for the quality of the video, including the content itself and how they deliver it. P08 echoes this sentiment in the theme of validity of information as they mentioned the person in a video must be smart and honest whenever sharing information.

A study by Sharma, T. and Sharma, S (2021), states that YouTube made learning easy, accessible, and innovative. It concludes with the notion that YouTube made a positive and great impact on the world by having experts in different fields available to the masses by posting videos detailing what lessons they ought to be teaching. This coincides with the 2 themes of Value and Validity of Information as the value of a video will always be connected to the validity of information. Valid information should always come from a trusted source, and a trusted source makes the information valid and valuable with the video they made.

The themes of validity of information and value emerged not just from a connection between the two, but the genuine desire to search deeper from the surface-level information presented to the respondents. They want the videos to be valuable, and in turn, the videos must hold valid information to be considered valuable to their time and efforts.

3.2.10. Factors that can change the mind of Gen Z when watching a video

"Validity of information" and "retention" have emerged based on the data that was gathered and analyzed. Validity of Information is the more prominent theme that was stated by the respondents to be their main priority when it comes to specific things that they are looking for whilst Retention is another theme that came to light. Validity of Information shoulders most of the respondents as they look for factual and truthful information rather than purely relying on word of mouth by any content creator. P06 and P07 both resonated with this theme as they mentioned legitimacy and factual information as aspects of what they are looking for when watching a video. With that said, the validity of information also leads to retention as some respondents are more inclined to believe or learn from videos if they see an actual person with relevant knowledge of the topic being discussed in the video itself. Again, this theme supports the validity of information due to the presence of a real person who will act as their teacher.

An article by LibGuides (2022), presents a guide on how to properly evaluate videos found on the internet and its various websites. Some details pertain to the source of information (who published it), what reason behind making the video (why was it published), and asking questions and searching deeper behind the video itself is a necessity to determine if the video itself is valuable and the information within is valid.

4. Conclusion

The conclusion in this study highlights how user engagement and convenience influence platform choice, focusing on YouTube and TikTok. Participants stressed the importance of trustworthy information and valued platforms and creators who provide it. For young users, YouTube and TikTok are essential for learning, entertainment, and shopping. YouTube's longer videos are great for learning, while TikTok's shorter ones are preferred for quick, entertaining content. Both platforms have their perks: YouTube offers all-in-one videos, while TikTok breaks content into smaller parts for easy consumption.

In essence, this research emphasizes how user preferences shape digital platforms. YouTube and TikTok are crucial for young people, so it's important to keep them user-friendly and enjoyable. Understanding what users want can help improve these platforms to better meet the needs of their audience.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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