

# 05

---

---

## SHOW ME WHAT YOU POST, AND I'LL TELL YOU WHO YOU ARE: A REFLECTION ON GENZ'S PERCEPTION ON BODY IMAGE AND MANIPULATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

---

Joana Teixeira  
University of Beira Interior  
joanateixeira.design@gmail.com

Clara E. Fernandes  
LASALLE College of the Arts;  
UNIDCOM  
clara.fernandes@lasalle.edu.sg

Ricardo Morais  
IADE-UE  
University of Beira Interior,  
LabCom - Communication & Arts  
ricardo.morais@labcom.ubi.pt

#### JOANA TEIXEIRA

She studied Fashion Design at the University of Beira Interior, with her master's dissertation titled "GenZ in the image era: The role of fashion and photography in body depictions". She participated in many competitions and shows, such as the Bloom space of Portugal Fashion 2014 and focuses on design and how fashion influences our society.

#### CLARA FERNANDES

She is a Lecturer at the School of Design Communication at LASALLE, Singapore. She is an integrated member at UNID-COM-IADE and holds a Ph.D. in Fashion Design. Her research tackles entrepreneurship in the creative industries, social and sustainable matters in design, as well as innovation and new technologies in fashion design.

#### RICARDO MORAIS

He is currently Invited Assistant Professor at the University of Beira Interior and Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Design, Technology and Communication - IADE-UE. He is a member of the research unit LabCom - Communication and Arts. He has focused his research in the field of new media, journalism and political communication.

### **Abstract**

In a society increasingly dominated by the image cult, reports on the growth of prejudice and discrimination based solely on physical appearance have increased. GenZ is the first generation born entirely in a fully developed internet and has known social media early. Therefore, it is crucial to understand their perception of body image and image manipulation perception as they are targeted daily on social media by retouched images of celebrities and branded content. In this study, we opted to develop a survey applied to 785 GenZers residing in Portugal to collect their perceptions about this topic. Results aim to show their perceptions of body image on social media by reflecting on their own posting habits and their views on celebrity retouched images. At the end of this study, the main results are presented in the hopes that new generations will gradually begin to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices that mark a society still dominated by the image and by the aesthetic and beauty standards.

**Key words:** Image manipulation, communication, GenZ, social media, body image.



# Introduction

The construction of the youth's self-confidence has never been so attained and scrutinized since GenZ is the first generation who are almost from birth, confronted with screens, social media, and images of celebrity and influencer's bodies daily. Teens and adults in the making who compose this generation face significant behavioural issues related to their social media usage (Kircaburun et al., 2018; Hasan et. al., 2020; Lee et al., 2014). As they have not known a world without the internet, these young people will indubitably have a different perspective on body image and are therefore a fascinating subject.

As images on social media are shared without consent and privacy issues are the constant concern in the digital era (Hasan et al., 2020), we aim at understanding which motivations/reasons are behind GenZers use of social media, and what kind of visual content they post on their accounts. Moreover, we wanted to understand how GenZers perceive body image and image manipulation on social media, as they are the main target for brands, and many of them suffer with body-image issues due to the constant exposition of so called perfect-bodies, non-disclosed surgeries by celebrities and influencers (Lee et al., 2014; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020), and highly unattainable beauty standards (Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019).

## **GenZ: Online behaviour of the Digital Natives**

GenZers are often considered the digital natives of our society, as they did not know the world without the internet and are very familiar with its related technologies (Connor, 2020). However, these digital natives are also showing dangerous behavior. When the first iPhone was launched in 2007, the oldest members of Generation Z were around ten years old. New social media platforms like Facebook were spreading rapidly worldwide, meaning these now teens and young adults grew up often alone with their devices, as many parents have no idea of their children's online behaviour. Following Nietzsche's famous phrase "What nourishes me destroys me", the internet can provide innumerable possibili-

ties to these users and can also cause harm (Ponte & Batista, 2019; Smahel et al., 2020). Thus, social media has been linked to many studies on depression and body-image issues from GenZers (Chen et al., 2019; Davies et al., 2020; Keles et al., 2020).

Having financial power and independence also means gaining power against brands, and therefore, GenZ are believed to be a generation of change, that will make a difference in fighting for its rights and improving our society (Pandit, 2015).

Generation Z is often divided into two groups with young people of different personalities. However, they were all created within the same standards of society and with the same global problems. All young GenZers have seen the world going through a financial and ecological crisis and want to actively participate in changing this paradigm (Owen, 2018; Connor, 2020). These young people are sure of what they want and even more sure of what they do not want. At the moment, young people who are considered GenZers are approximately between 10 and 25 years (Giarla, 2019; Connor, 2020); there are about 2 billion in the world (Owen, 2018).

This generation presents itself as a consumerist and revolutionary group, challenging stereotypes and dictating its own rules. These young people are growing up within the same social standards, not forgetting that this concept mainly applies to developed countries. Their personalities were created in a technological, contradictory world and marked by the union of different cultures (Twenge, 2018, p. 12). They are generally deemed to be disinterested and unfocused other than to share their lives online (Chen et al., 2019), however, if something proves relevant to their lives, these young people can be truly focused and committed (Milenaar, 2021, p. 13; Diaz, 2019).

A large part of generation Z supports individualism. From creating new social concepts to reformulating previous ones, these young people are very ambitious and autonomous, bringing new hope for world development and creating their own brands and businesses is at the top of their lists (Owen, 2018; Milenaar, 2021, p. 23). Most of these young people no longer believe in having "standard" professional life. They seek to work from home and create a career online (Meyer, 2019). Although this generation is tech-savvy, GenZer's are maturing very slowly and may take longer to grasp the responsibilities of adult life (Owen, 2018),

especially when compared to other generations (Connor, 2020).

As previously stated, this generation comprises two groups, the ME and the WE categories. The WE group has a different lifestyle and way of thinking than the ME generation. According to Owen (2018), as shown in table 1, it is possible to confirm the contrast between them. For brands, ME is the most manageable group to grasp and is, therefore, more targeted by these brands. On the other hand, the WE generation, due to its power to change and agitate the usual, has hindered the work of brands, pressing them to review their online strategies (Rodgers et al., 2019; Davies, 2020).

Generation Z	
ME Generation	WE generation
Live in constant competition with society.	Believe in collaboration between all.
Are afraid of being excluded from the present and feeds on followers.	Do not give importance to the number of followers, rather give relevance to the strength that their feelings have for the public.
Prefer to communicate through images, in order to gain likes and fans through their physical appearance.	Prefer to communicate through the power of words, giving more importance to writing / speaking
Use hashtags like #ootd (outfit of the day)	Use social movement inspired hashtags
Work for personal success.	Work for the progress of society.
Driven by what is in the moment.	Driven by social, cultural and political beliefs.
Try to escape the unpleasant realities that the world provides.	Look at the unpleasant realities of the world with optimism
Are very similar to each other	Although similar, have several differences between them
Strengthen your own self-esteem.	They aim at helping society to strengthen its self-esteem.
React often to unpleasant things	Act to unpleasant things.
Don't mind dupes and copies of originals.	Prefer what is original
Live on filters to show themselves to be physically and psychologically perfect, in front of everyone.	Show reality and present themselves without filters.

**Table 1. Main differences between ME and WE groups, according to Owen (2018).**

Generation Z accompanied the growth of social networks and the appearance of photos manipulated to gain followers and public recognition (Chen et al., 2020, Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to know which apps they use most, improve their photographs' appearance, and what types of manipulation accompany their social networks profiles.

As already approached in table 1, this generation is generally categorized into two opposite groups. Many of these young people regain social awareness and end the obsession with consumption, selfishness, narcissistic selfies and cosmetic surgeries (Chen et al., 2019; Verdú, 2015). The youngest member of this generation were born and raised in the face of a chaotic

world and witnessed a worldwide decline and, therefore, are specifically trying to avoid the same mistakes as their predecessors. These young people can be as unstable as they are revolutionary, supportive of sustainability and aware of everything that surrounds them, they are a strong generation, but they quickly become sensitive to issues such as social and economic inequality (Connor, 2020; Owen, 2018; Giarla, 2019).

The majority of generation Z no longer show interest in university degrees, which have been seen in previous generations, have not particularly favoured Millennials (Verdú, 2015; Giarla, 2019). On the other hand, much of the free time they have left direct them towards their professional vocations. They believe that they can support themselves with what gives them pleasure, such as writing on blogs, drawing fashion sketches, photography, content creation, among others, through these hobbies they seek to help the world (Verdú, 2015). The world heritage that was left to the Z's, does not seem like a pleasant place to live. They want more justice and harmony between all.

For these young people, globalization is part of their early vocabulary (Silva Rodrigues, 2017). They are mostly in favour of social equality and use social networks to demonstrate their concerns about the reality of our world. With regard to image manipulation, studies have shown the disparity between the cult of image at a very young age (Lee & Lee, 2021; Davies et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2019; Quittkat et al., 2019), and a rejection of beauty standards through new body inclusion and positivity movements (Teixeira, 2020).

Many young GenZers believe that the “ugly” concept comes from the eyes of individuals and that each human being has their preferences; these damaging concepts result from the prejudice and beauty standards that are publicized (Lee & Lee, 2020). Many influencers of this generation begin to present real and unfiltered content, with the intention of including and encouraging their followers to adopt the same behaviours without fear, this generation feels very pressured and with high levels of anxiety (Germano, 2019) due to the judgments of society and for that reason, GenZ is also changing the role of influencers by portraying and pursuing genuine behaviours and profiles (Milenaar, 2021, p. 36; Davies et al., 2020).

On the merit of these influencers, taboos such as body hair and birthmarks are no longer a topic of concern within contemporary society (Weinstock, 2015). With the help of young Z's, mentalities are evolving, and social networks show more and more real photographs, resulting in a more significant number of individuals against photographic manipulations.

---

## Methods

---

In order to understand the importance that Generation Z attaches to social networks and beauty stereotypes that currently exist, an online survey was developed on “Google Forms” and was active from 25 June 2020 until 10 August 2020 (see table 2), in order to prove the influence that social networks have on the Z's and what stance these young people take in relation to image manipulation.

Universe	Young people born with technology and who have access to the world of social networks: approximately 1.6 million (PORDATA, 2020)
Sample	The sample is characterized by young people between 10 and 25 years old, residing in Portugal, who will be divided by gender due to the diversity of opinions that may be collected.
Sample size calculation	Universe: 1.6 million (PORDATA, 2020) Confidence interval: 5 Confidence level = 99% Ideal sample size: 666 respondents. This result was calculated with the support of the “Systems Survey Software” platform, which has been exceeded.
Valid responses obtained	785
Sample composition (by gender)	Female: 628 responses (80%) Male: 157 responses (20%)
Sample composition (by age group)	11 - 15 years   8 answers (1.1%) 16 - 19 years old   291 answers (37%) 20 - 25 years old   486 answers (61.9%)
Sample composition (by nationality)	Portuguese   773 answers (98.5%) Portuguese and French   4 answers (0.5%) Portuguese and German   1 answer (0.1%) Portuguese and Australian   1 answer (0.1%) Brazilian   4 answers (0.5%) Romanian   2 answers (0.3%)
Data collection tool	Questionnaire prepared on the online platform “Google Forms”.
Questionnaire application interval	June 25, 2020 to August 10, 2020
Analysis type	Bivariate statistical analysis

**Table 2. Sample characterization**

To obtain more possible answers and for the margin of error presented to be below 5, the survey was disseminated by several social platforms and different groups, specifically targeting genZers. Social media platforms proved to be the best means for chain-referral sampling, since this generation is very present

on these platforms, we therefore used Facebook and Instagram to pass on the questionnaire, that had an age limit of 25 years old. The form was built of five main parts: the first one of demographic characterization; the second related to social media habits; the third tackled image sharing; the fourth about stereotypes and body image; and the final one being a selection of stereotypical images that respondents were invited to choose from, with each group proposing multi-choice questions.

The questions of this survey were elaborated, considering the objectives of this research and so that the final statistical results were as clear as possible. The survey was also carried out in more friendly approach, questioning respondents by the 2nd person of the singular and with the integration of images for a more interactive approach.

---

## Findings

---

The sample is unequally divided in terms of gender with 80% female respondents and 20% male respondents, more specifically 628 female and 157 male individuals. We therefore chose to expose our results separating the male respondents from the female respondents, as the answers would be undoubtedly and unequivocally different in each gender, however, other studies made in the Portuguese context show that young women spend more time than their male counterparts on Instagram (Pinto Alegria, 2019, p. 19), and spend significant time on the app over the weekend, once again, when compared to the male users (Pinto Alegria, 2019, p. 22).

Starting with the sample's social media consumption, we wanted to understand what are the first and second most used social media platforms used by our sample. As we can observe on both charts 1 and 2, Instagram comes first for both male and female respondents, followed by Facebook and Twitter as second most used platform. Of course, this is particular to this specific sample of Portugal-resident young people, as other platforms such as TikTok have exponentially grown over the last year, and are much used by this generation (Mäkitalo, 2020). This is especially important as GenZers are one of the most vulnerable

targets for brands online (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021), as well as their millennial predecessors (Burnasheva & Suh, 2020).

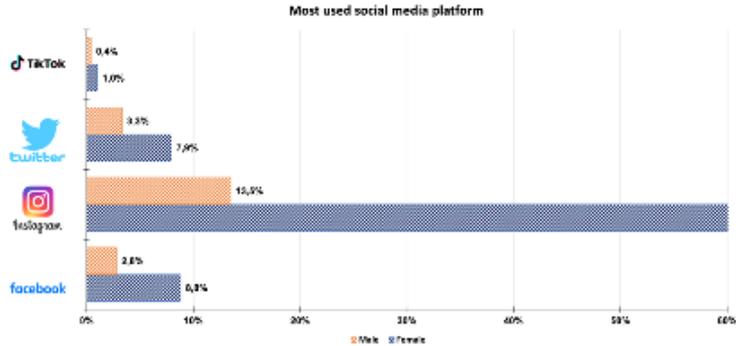


Chart 1. Most used social media platform by the GenZ sample.

In the case of Instagram, the use of images is predominant, which could explain why GenZers are so driven to it (Owen, 2018; Li & Xie, 2020). Considering that Instagram has been under scrutiny for being linked to body-image issues among young people (Kleemans et al., 2018; Tiggermann & Zinoniev, 2019), it is even more interesting to see that this platform is, nonetheless, still preferred by most of them.

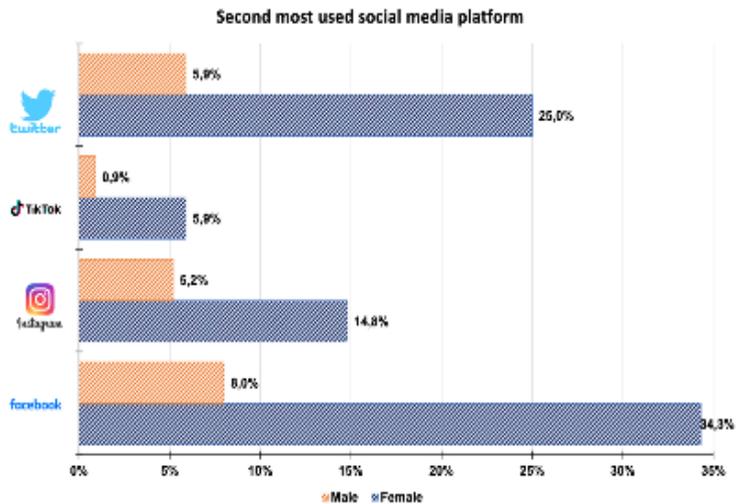


Chart 2. Second most used social media platform by the GenZ sample.

Going deeper into our research, we also wanted to observe the main motivations and reasons behind these young people’s social media consumption. Chart 3 shows that both genders declared that their primary reason was to communicate with other people, followed by “to share/post pictures”, which corresponds to their primary use of Instagram.

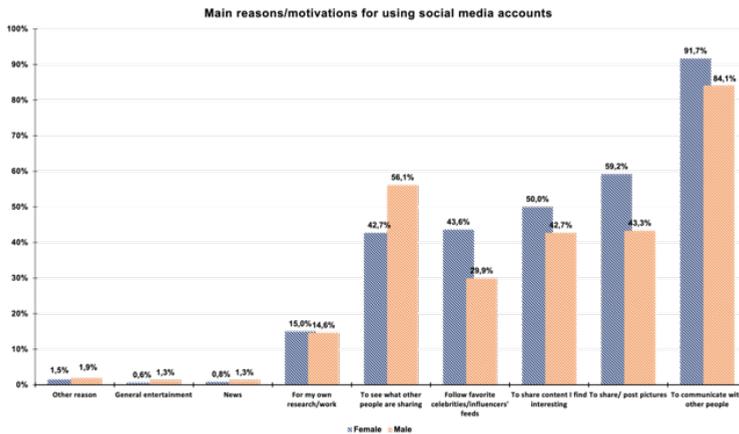


Chart 3. Main reasons/motivations for using their social media apps.

For male respondents, if the primary reason presented was the same as female respondents, their second reason was a passive take on their female counterparts, as their second motivation was to “see what other people are sharing”. This is an interesting finding, as it follows other research on this matter (Tiggermann & Anderberg, 2020), and shows that female respondents are more active in sharing, than their male counterparts, and are therefore, more likely to suffer from social media-related body image issues (Lee et al., 2014). Nonetheless, male respondent’s third reason was “to share/post pictures”. Since respondents could choose more than one answer to this question, percentages are not cumulative. Other most given answers for both genders were “to share content I find interesting” and “follow favourite celebrities/influencers’ feeds” which is consistent with that age group’s actual consumption (Loureiro et al., 2019; Mäkitalo, 2020).

Now on to the types of content shared by generation Z members on their social media accounts (chart 4), we can observe that although their curves are similar, there are a few differences in terms of images shared.

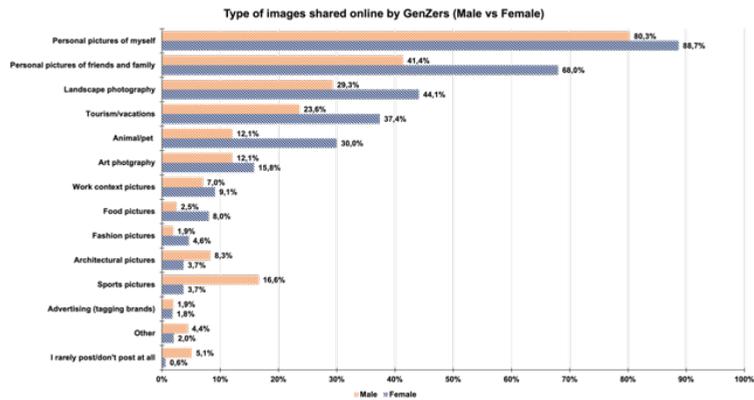


Chart 4. Types of pictures shared on social media by the GenZ sample.

Occupying the first position for both male and female respondents was “personal pictures of myself”, an idea that is line with what was previously approached in our literature review, as GenZ are very active on social media, and self-promotion is a big part of the youth’s online activity (Vitelar, 2013; Boursier et al., 2020). “Personal pictures of friends and family” is the second type chosen by both genders, once again, showing similar behaviours, as it is the case for the following categories. The main differences here are mostly related the remaining categories where we found more disparities between the groups. For example, the fifth category chosen by male respondents is “Sports pictures”, whereas the same category only comes in 10th position for female respondents. Also, important to note, more than 5% of male respondents declared they “rarely post/don’t post at all”, whereas only 0,6% of their female counterparts assumed this position. Although many reasons were given, both genders show a high tendency to post personal pictures, whether of themselves, or with family and friends, which is consistent with descriptions provided in the literature review (Owen, 2018; Vitelar, 2013).

Moreover, we wanted to comprehend the range of motivation and reasons these young people assume for posting such content on their social media accounts (Chart 5).

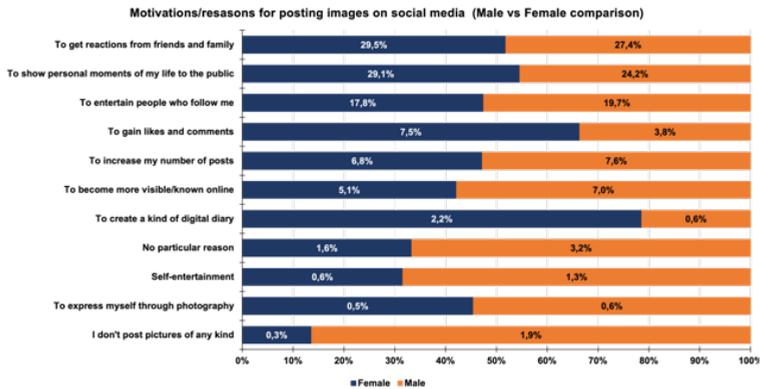


Chart 5. Main reasons/motivations for using their social media apps.

As we can understand with chart 5, once again, both genders present similar motivations, as the main answer given by both groups was “to get reactions from friends and family”, closely followed by “to show personal moments of my life to the public”. The third and most voted reason being “to entertain people who follow me”, we can therefore grasp young people personal images and share them to obtain some kind of reaction from other people with whom they are somehow connected. The following option chosen by our respondents (ranked differently in each gender), also keep on that logic, as reasons such as “to gain likes and comments”, “to increase my number of posts” or “to become more visible/known online “were also given.

Now we have a better understanding of these young people’s behaviour and motivations on social media, we also wanted to understand their relationship with image edition and manipulation (Figures 1 and 2).

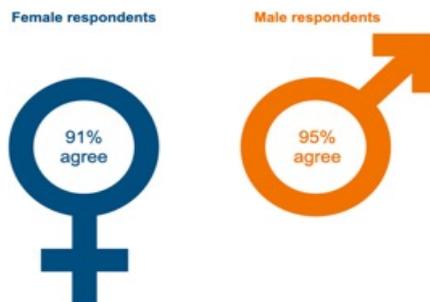


Figure 1. Percentage of the sample who are satisfied with the option of changing/editing their pictures before posting them.

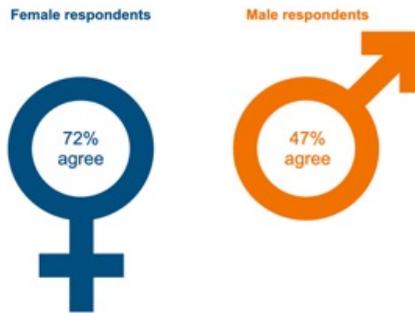


Figure 2. Percentage of the sample who admit to retouching/manipulating their pictures before posting them.

The sample was asked about their thoughts on editing options available on social media platforms such as Instagram, and both groups of respondents are in agreement with the option of editing their pictures before posting (Figure 1). However, both groups had more mixed-up feelings on the second question regarding whether or not they retouch/edit their images before posting them on social media. Only 47% of male respondents admitted to such a practice, whereas 72% of female respondents admitted to retouching their images before posting. This is especially important as body positivity among young people is directly related to the images portrayed on social media by brands and content creators (Kleemans et al., 2018). Therefore, respondents were also asked if they felt comfortable with posting pictures without retouching them first, having 90% female respondents showing confidence in such a practice, as well 96% of male respondents. Although interesting, these numbers are contradictory with the 2021 study made by Dove in Portugal with Edelman Data & Intelligence (Activa, 2021). The study reveals that on the 510 girls between the ages of 10 and 17 years old (the younger group belonging to GenZ), 76% use filters or editing apps before posting a picture of themselves on social media. Moreover, 52% of that sample declares not posting if they don't feel like their image is "perfect" on the picture.

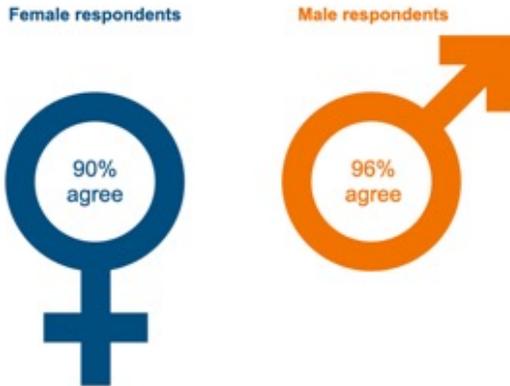


Figure 3. Percentage of the sample who declare feeling comfortable with posting pictures without retouching/editing them.

It is important to understand here that these questions did not specify what kind of edition people were referring to, since some people do not consider filters as editing. For that reason, the questionnaire comprised a few questions targeting specifically editing apps, the first one being related with the number of apps used in the editing process (chart 6).

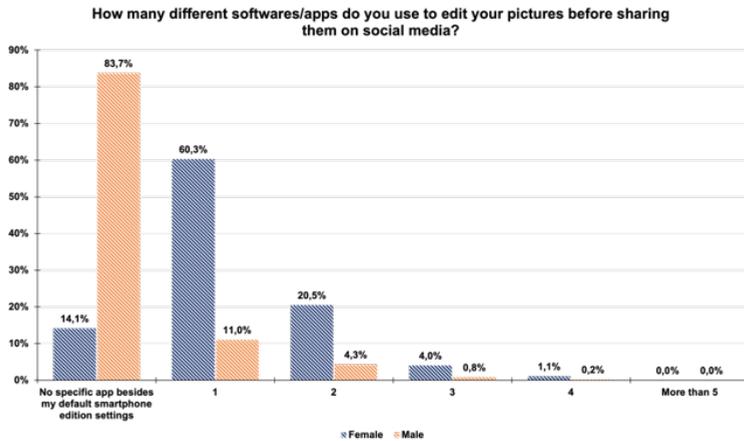


Chart 6. Number of apps used by GenZers to edit their pictures before posting on social media.

As we can observe on chart 6, a majority of male respondents denies using any specific app to edit their pictures before posting them on social media. On the contrary, the same answer only comes in third place for their female counterparts, as a ma-

majority use their default settings, which are nowadays plenty of different options present in the social media platforms themselves to allow all kinds of modifications, and therefore, no specific app is needed according to these answers. Furthermore, by asking what kind of specific apps these respondents use (when they use them), we wanted to understand what specific apps are mostly used by the respondents who admitted using such apps (figure 4).

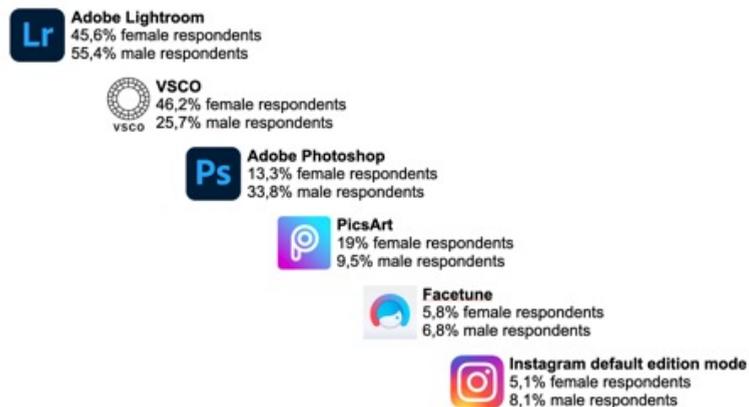


Figure 4. Most used editing/retouching apps by the GenZ sample.

Adobe Lightroom comes in first place when adding percentages of both gender groups, closely followed by VSCO, app that comes as a first choice for female respondents and third choice for male respondents, an app that has grown exponentially in the last two years (Germano, 2019). Adobe Photoshop comes third (4th position for female and second position for male respondents), followed by PicsArt, Facetune, and finally, in opposition to what was hinted in chart 6, Instagram's default edition mode comes in last.

As previously proposed in this study, we are aware that the term "editing" can be interpreted in many ways, we therefore asked our sample to give their primary editing motivations/reasons, that are summed up in figure 5.

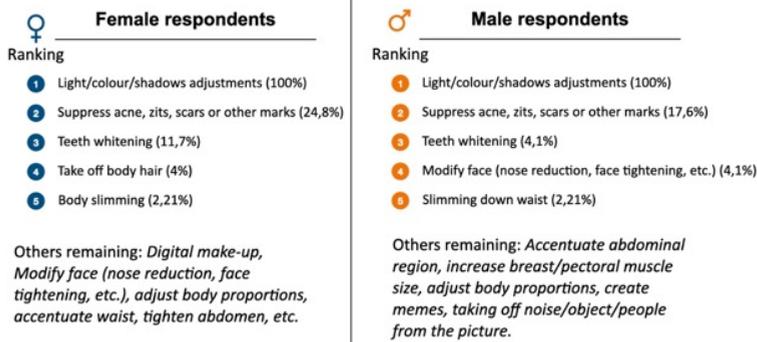


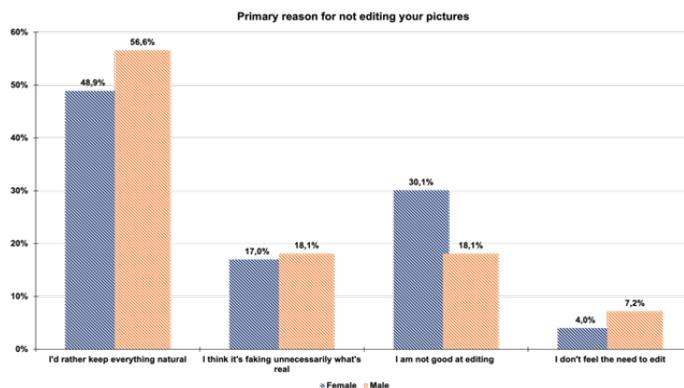
Figure 5. Top 5 reasons/motivations for editing the pictures according to our GenZ sample (Female/male comparison).

Once again, our respondents could give more than one answer, and therefore, we can see that in both cases all respondents chose “light/colour/shadows adjustments”, followed in both cases by “suppress acne, zits, scars or other marks”, although at different percentages, with 24,8% of female respondents adding this reason to the prior, and 17,6% of male respondents doing the same. Teeth whitening was given as the third reason by female respondents, as their male counterparts chose the ladder and “modify face” ex aequo (4,1%). Body insecurities are therefore the main culprits for image edition in both cases, and we also can assume that filters, exposure and other effects are chosen as an easy way to enhance or improve certain aspects (Tiggemann & Zinoviev, 2019; Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019). On the other hand, and as approached in the literature review, body hair and slim figures are not the main concerns of these young people (Weinstock, 2015).

The Dove report approached earlier in our study also tackles this matter, with 64% of the sample declaring to edit at least one specific part of their body before sharing the image on social media.

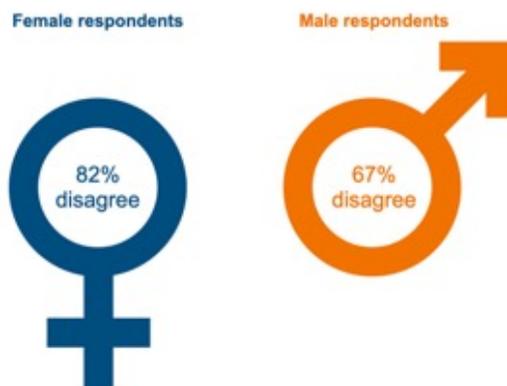
On the other hand, as we obtained a considerable number of answers stating that respondents did not edit their pictures (28% female respondents and 53% male respondents), as showed on figure 2, we asked these respondents about their reasons for not editing their pictures prior to posting them on social media. The reason “I’d rather keep everything natural” came in first place with 48,9% for female respondents and 56,6% for male respon-

dents, followed by “I am not good at editing”, for 30,1% of female respondents and 18,1% of male respondents. Finally, the last reasons given were “I think it’s unnecessarily faking what is real” and “I don’t feel the need to edit” came respectively in fourth and fifth place.



**Chart 7.** Primary reason/motivation given for not editing pictures on social media (only respondents who had declared to not use any editing before posting).

In the final questions, participants were asked about body image and beauty standards portrayed online and their own perception on this matter. In figure 5, we can see that 82% of female and 67% of male respondents disagreed that the “perfect body” exists, and both groups agreed majorly with the idea that beauty standards are a common construction in our society, with 94% of female and 91% of male respondents agreeing (Figure 7).



**Figure 6.** Percentage of the sample agreeing with the idea of the existence of the “perfect body”.

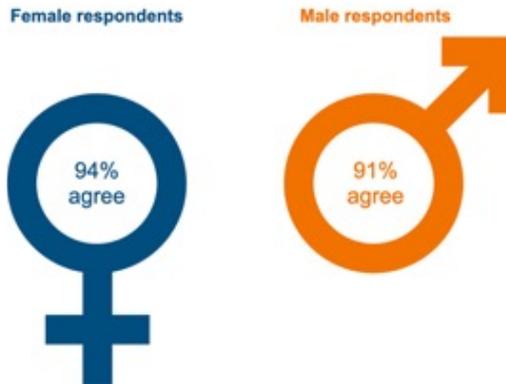


Figure 7. Percentage of the sample who agree with the existence of beauty standards in our society.

As previously tackled, Dove’s report of Portuguese young GenZers girls also reveals that young users (62%) wish for more “real looks” and “normal lives” online, as well as more diverse beauty in the “influencer” scene, with 59% declaring they wish to see more diversity represented on social media (Activa, 2021).

This is especially interesting considering that matters of body positivity and body shaming are both antagonistically present in the cyber space (Kircaburun et Alhabash., 2020), and many studies link social media usage and poor body image among young people. We therefore asked two final questions to understand if these young respondents have personally suffered from such images portrayed on social media (Figure 8), as well as their own thoughts on image edition if only “real bodies” were shown on social media (Figure 9).

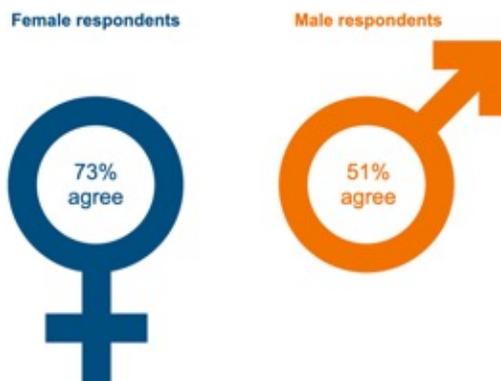
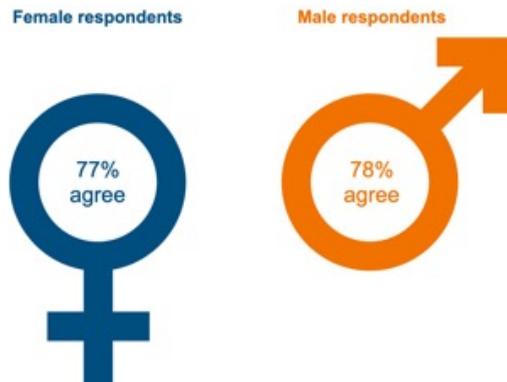


Figure 8. Percentage of the sample who declared having personally suffered from beauty standards exposed on social media.



**Figure 9.** Percentage of the sample who admitted to being more comfortable with posting pictures with no edition/retouching whatsoever if only “real bodies” were displayed on social media.

As we can see in figure 8, although only 51% male respondents declared they had previously suffered from body standards portrayed on social media, we can attest that a majority of the sample felt victimized by these images at least once in their life, with an even higher percentage of female respondents (73%) agreeing with that statement. This is important, as females are more prone to suffer from body objectification from users on social media (Boursier et al., 2020). On figure 9, we can observe that 77% of female and a close 78% of male respondents agreed that they would feel more comfortable with posting natural pictures if only real unretouched pictures were posted by other on social media, as young people are so exposed to retouched images, they are more vulnerable to self-dissatisfaction (Lee & Lee, 2020).

These answers are in line with the literature review and complete what we could observe on this sample of GenZers residing in Portugal. Many answers were complementary on both gender groups, with very few exceptions between them.

---

## Final thoughts

---

This study aimed at understanding what GenZers are posting on social media, as well as their own thoughts on body-related issues. Through this sample of 785 GenZers residing in Portugal, we were able to find that Instagram is still a preference among this generation. However, video-based social media like TikTok are gaining popularity among the very youngest. It is highly important for them to post personal content and get reactions from it in the form of likes, comments, and new followers.

This research focused on the analysis of the obsession around body image for GenZers, trying to understand their perceptions about the valorisation of aesthetic dimensions, and considering specifically that the young people of this generation were born and grew up exposed to discriminatory patterns and prejudiced. Through the work carried out, we realize that when we talk about generation Z, we refer to two groups, the ME and WE generation, which although distinct, present themselves as one concerning ideals and behaviours they defend, namely at the level of the changes that they consider necessary to implement in society.

The data collected allowed us to conclude that GenZers victims and perpetrators on social media, as they admit to posting personal pictures in exchange for approval, gained through likes and following, although their main reason for posting is to communicate and get reactions from others. A majority of female GenZers admit to changing their appearance before posting pictures, and almost half of our male respondents also admitted to this practice. Both deem themselves satisfied with the possibility to edit images but acknowledge high feasibility to post without any modification. However, both groups admitted that it would be easier for them to do so if they did not feel so much online pressure on their body image. VSCO is the primary app used by female GenZers in our sample, closely followed by Lightrroom. These apps are generally perceived by young people as aesthetically pleasing and are, therefore, preferred by them, as appearance is an essential topic for this generation. As we previously approached, social media is often pointed out as a

culprit in young people's self-esteem. Media are builders of our social reality and are responsible for forming a large part of the public's opinion.

In the context of this research, we can determine that many GenZers seem open to the possibility of fighting against prejudice and exclusion. As in our sample, this generation has come to terms with the unreal images they are supposed to take as a model. There is definitely a sense of hope for social change and consciousness from this generation, as many have started new movements to provide more genuine models, real ideals, and inclusive discourses. Although these young people are very aware of beauty standards and have gained consciousness of the dangers of such images, they not only continue to post massively but also to follow accounts that make them feel conscious about their own bodies, as both genders declared having felt discomfort in their own skin because of this.

The results obtained in this study also manifested that there are still several aspects to explore in the scope of the cult of body image, prejudice, and discrimination based on physical appearance. In this sense, it would be necessary to continue collecting data on this topic, namely through interviews with GenZ influencers from both groups, ME and WE, and comparing our sample with data gathered in other countries. Moreover, we consider that this study shed some light on a particular part of our population, a generation that is not only the future of this country but can also create a real change against the exclusion exacerbated with the rise of social media.

## **BIBLIOGRAFIA**



Boursier, V., Gioia, F., & Griffiths, M. D. (2020). Selfie-engagement on social media: Pathological narcissism, positive expectation, and body objectification – Which is more influential? *Addictive Behaviors Reports*, 11, 100263. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.abrep.2020.100263>

Burnasheva, R., & Suh, Y. G. (2020). The influence of social media usage , self-image congruity and self-esteem on conspicuous online consumption among millennials. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistic*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AP-JML-03-2020-0180>

Connor, P. (2020). News in the numbers. *Pew Research Center*, 1–8. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/19/5-charts-on-global-views-of-china/>

Davies, A. (2020). *Decoding Gen Z Identity Construction In Social Networks Trough Te Paradigm Of Branding A Toolkit For Parents & Carers*.

Davies, B., Turner, M., & Udell, J. (2020). Add a comment . . . how fitpiration and body positive captions attached to social media images influence the mood and body esteem of young female Instagram users. *Body Image*, 33, 101–105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.02.009>

Diaz, T. (2019). *Retail Insights for Connecting with Generation Z*. *FlexEngage*. <https://www.flexengage.com/all-posts/generation-z>

Djafarova, E., & Bowes, T. (2021). ‘Instagram made Me buy it’: Generation Z impulse purchases in fashion industry. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102345>

Duas em cada três raparigas tentam editar o corpo antes de publicarem uma fotografia. (2021, April). *Activa*. <https://activa.sapo.pt/comportamento/2021-04-20-duas-em-cada-tres-raparigas-tentam-editar-o-corpo-antes-de-publicarem-uma-fotografia/>

Germano, C. (2019). *Is VSCO sneaking up on Instagram as Gen Z's fave image app?* GEN Z INSIGHTS. <https://www.gen-zinsights.com/is-vsco-sneaking-up-on-instagram-as-gen-zs-new-fave-image-app>

Giarla, V. (2019). *Generational Social Media : How Social Media Influences The Online And In-Person Relationships Of Gen X , Gen Y And Gen Z Media Influences the Online and In-Person.* Salem University.

Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A. (2020). A systematic review: the influence of social media on depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 25(1), 79–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1590851>

Kircaburun, K., & Alhabash, S. (2020). *Uses and Gratifications of Problematic Social Media Use Among University Students : a Simultaneous Examination of the Big Five of Personality Traits , Social Media Platforms , and Social Media Use Motives.* 525–547.

Kircaburun, K., Kokkinoos, C., Demetrovics, Z., Kiraly, O., Griffiths, M., & Colak, T. (2018). Problematic Online Behaviors among Adolescents and Emerging Adults: Associations between Cyberbullying Perpetration, Problematic Social Media Use, and Psychosocial Factors. *International Journal of Mental Health Addiction*, 17, 891–908. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-018-9894-8>

Kleemans, M., Daalmans, S., Carbaat, I., & Anschütz, D. (2018). Picture Perfect: The Direct Effect of Manipulated Instagram Photos on Body Image in Adolescent Girls. *Media Psychology*, 21(1), 93–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2016.1257392>

Lee, H.-R., Lee, H. E., Choi, J., Kim, J. H., & Han, H. L. (2014). Social Media Use, Body Image, and Psychological Well-Being: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Korea and the United States. *Journal of Health Communication*, 19(12), 1343–1358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2014.904022>

Lee, M., & Lee, H. H. (2021). Social media photo activity, internalization, appearance comparison, and body satisfaction: The moderating role of photo-editing behavior. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 114(January 2020), 106579. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106579>

Li, Y., & Xie, Y. (2020). Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words? An Empirical Study of Image Content and Social Media Engagement. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 57(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243719881113>

Loureiro, S. M. C., Serra, J., & Guerreiro, J. (2019). How Fashion Brands Engage on Social Media: A Netnography Approach. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 25(3), 367–378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2019.1557815>

Mäkitalo, A. (2020). *Engaging with generation Z - From face-to-face interactions to online communities*. Universidade de Jyväskylä.

Meyer, M. (2019). *Quais as diferenças entre as gerações x, y e z e como administrar os conflitos?* Oficina da net. <https://www.oficinadanet.com.br/post/13498-quais-as-diferencas-entre-as-geracoes-x-y-e-z-e-como-administrar-os-conflitos>

Milenar (2021). Geração Z. Estudo de Tendências 2021. <https://www.milenarmedia.pt/geracao-z-e-o-mercado/>

Owen, S. (2018). A equação da geração Z. WGSN. [https://www.wgsn.com/assets/marketing/emails/2018/GenZ\\_equation/public/Gen\\_Z\\_Equation\\_public\\_pt.pdf](https://www.wgsn.com/assets/marketing/emails/2018/GenZ_equation/public/Gen_Z_Equation_public_pt.pdf)

Pandit, V. (2015). *We Are Generation Z: How Identity, Attitudes, and Perspectives Are Shaping Our Future*.

Pinto Alegria, A. S. (2019). *Relação entre a utilização de redes sociais e a literacia em saúde mental positiva de jovens: um estudo exploratório sobre o Instagram*. Universidade Católica Portuguesa.

Ponte, C. & Batista, S. (2019). EU Kids Online Portugal. Usos, competências, riscos e mediações da internet reportados por crianças e jovens (9-17 anos). *EU Kids Online and NOVA FCSH*. <https://www.fcsch.unl.pt/eukidsonline/documentos/>

Quittkat, H. L., Hartmann, A. S., Düsing, R., Buhlmann, U., & Vocks, S. (2019). Body Dissatisfaction, Importance of Appearance, and Body Appreciation in Men and Women Over the Lifespan. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 10, 864. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2019.00864>

Rodgers, R. F., Kruger, L., Lowy, A. S., Long, S., & Richard, C. (2019). Getting Real about body image: A qualitative investigation of the usefulness of the Aerie Real campaign. *Body Image*, 30, 127–134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2019.06.002>

Saiphoo, A. N., & Vahedi, Z. (2019). A meta-analytic review of the relationship between social media use and body image disturbance. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 101(December 2018), 259–275. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.07.028>

Silva Rodrigues, T. (2017). *Os Jovens da Geração Z e o Consumo: os Outros e o Eu na Formação das Percepções Sobre a Marca* [Masters Dissertation in Marketing & Strategy, University of Minho]. [https://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/bitstream/1822/49494/1/Tânia Rodrigues da Silva.pdf](https://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/bitstream/1822/49494/1/Tânia%20Rodrigues%20da%20Silva.pdf)

Smahel, D., Machackova, H., Mascheroni, G., Dedkova, L., Staksrud, E., Ólafsson, K., Livingstone, S., & Hasebrink, U. (2020). *EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries*. EU Kids Online. <https://doi.org/10.21953/lse.47fdeqj010fo>

Teixeira, J. M. de S. (2020). *A geração Z na era da imagem O papel da moda e da fotografia nas representações corporais*. University of Beira Interior.

Tiggemann, M., & Anderberg, I. (2020). Social media is not real: The effect of ‘Instagram vs reality’ images on women’s social comparison and body image. *New Media and Society*, 22(12), 2183–2199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819888720>

Verdú, D. (2015). *Geração Z mudará o mundo*. EL PAÍS. [https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2015/05/02/sociedad/1430576024\\_684493.html](https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2015/05/02/sociedad/1430576024_684493.html)

Vitelar, A. (2013). Like Me: Generation Z and the Use of Social Media for Personal Branding. *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, 7(2), 257–268. <https://doi.org/10.25019/mdke/7.2.07>

Weinstock, T. (2015, June 16). A modelo Barbara Ferreira quer que sejas quem realmente és. *VICE*.

### **Acknowledgements**

This study was supported by UNIDCOM under a Grant by the Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT) No. UIDB/DES/00711/2020\* attributed to UNIDCOM/IADE – Unidade de Investigação em Design e Comunicação, Lisbon, Portugal.