Filling the Void

Investigating the Impact of The Digital Society on Generation Z's Relationships

by

Melanie Hopkins and Joana Gama Filho

June, 2018

Master's Programme in International Marketing and Brand Management

Supervisor: Peter Svensson
Examiner: Annette Cerne

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to contribute to the knowledge about Generation Z in the consumer society context, through a critical investigation of the possible negative impacts of the internalization of the consumerist mentality within the digital capitalist society. This is relevant since such internalization could interfere with the capacity of individuals to maintain long-term relations and influences their overall wellbeing through the stimulation of anxiety, loneliness, sense of inadequacy, and fleeting actions, among others. As the first group to arise in a completely digital society, Generation Z has the potential to have different attitudes and experiences when it comes to relationships.

Theoretical Perspective: The study departs from critical studies and consumer culture theory. The most relevant theories include a Foucauldian take on self-governance and surveillance of society, and Eva Illouz's concepts of love and relationships in a consumer society. These are important because of the effects of technology and social media on people's attitudes and general well-being as they take part in today's digital society. We also draw on Russell Belk's theories of "The Self" in consumer society, and Zygmunt Bauman's liquid modernity and love in the consumer society.

Methodology: This research departs from a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemological standpoint as the outcome of research that explores a socially constructed phenomenon such as romantic relationships greatly depends on the interpretation of the researchers. The empirical material was collected by interviewing Generation Z participants (ages 16-23 years old) and analyzed using a reflexive, grounded theory approach.

Empirical data: From the 16 interviews, with members of Generation Z, we identified four main ideas that were then analyzed and interpreted into three main themes that we believe encompass the impacts of a digital society on the participant's attitudes and experiences with relationships.

Conclusion: The developed themes of False Sense of Fulfillment, Individualism, and Authentic Self Presentation encompasses the attitudes and experiences of this generation with love, dating, and romantic relationships. These themes provide a new nuance to the critical marketing literature by highlighting possible negative impacts of digital capitalism mentality, which, in accordance with the literature, creates a false sense of individual empowerment on individuals. For the individuals we interviewed, who were born into and developed entirely within this culture, we found that these negative internal processes affected their attitudes and experiences toward building and maintaining romantic interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: Critical Studies, Consumer Culture Studies, Postmodernism, Internet, Love, Interpersonal Relationships, Social Media, Dating Apps, Tinder, Digital Society

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Table of Figures

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Love and romantic relationships have been part of the popular imagination for centuries. Through literature, music, visual arts, theater, and more recently cinema and television, the idea of what it means to be in love and how to develop and cultivate such strong feelings have been passed down through generations. From the Victorian era – which related this strong feeling to religion, (de Jong & Collins, 2017) to the beginning of the 20th Century-when the Western religions lost strength and were replaced by love as a new sort of doctrine -the idea of romantic love has awakened in the popular imagination the belief that to love intensely and in a pure way means to renounce other important bonds (de Jong & Collins, 2017). Due to its popularity but still complex nature, love has been a prominent concern of social theorists and scientists since the mid-20th century when the literature saw the emergence of studies about the nature of love in the field of social science. Sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and communicologists have been studying and theorizing ever since about love and romantic relationships in a cultural and psychological context offering particular attention to the idea of romantic love (Bauman, 2003; Chapman, 2011, Fromm, 1956; Giddens, 1992, Illouz, 1997, 2015, 2016, Sternberg, 1986; Sternberg & Weis, 2006). In fact, since the first appearance of the idea of the romantic love in novels during the twelfth century to it is portrait in films, at the beginning of the 20th Century, love has been seen as a type of emancipating feeling that liberates the lovers of the bonds created by capitalist labor relations and requires a set of norms and consumption rituals in order to reach validation (Illouz, 1997).

While a capitalist society is characterized by a social structure in which the available and accumulated assets are a unit of measure for life, and a transaction is defined by the consumption of goods in a way that is focused on self-interest, (Sassatelli, 2009) on the other hand, to be in love, requires from the individual spontaneity and empathy and it appears as an irrational, organic and private movement that does not seek for profit, but to emancipate the man from capitalist and work obligations (Illouz, 1997). However, the idea of what love is meant to be today and its ambivalence between being free and consuming to be free is also a product of consumer society. In the postmodern Western society, the media plays a particularly important role for the development and reinforcement of the ideal way of love, not only by characterizing the feeling as being fundamental for the development of self-affirmation, but also by defining the characteristics that love and being in love should encompass. As an example, when discussing consumer society in a postmodern frame, Roberta Sassatelli (2009) points up to Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality where people lose the ability to make the distinction between nature and artifice, therefore creating a dimension based on images that represent reality. The media leads the individuals to believe that this hyperreality of the consumer society, as it is organized, can attend all their needs, as it is a perfect organization in itself (Sassatelli, 2009). In the context of romantic love and dating, the values spread by the media determine what romantic love is and

create a representation of reality that aims to meet the needs of the consumer society through an imposed standardization. This repetitive exposure to ideal practices that portray the real world in an almost perfect way, such as the act of love, can be seen as a form of control exercised over the individual which becomes standardized and used to conform. Therefore, through media, and the conditions of consumer society, love, and romantic relationships have become more commodified encircling common social feelings and practices (Kessler, 2014). The commodification of romantic love and relationships has transformed the free and pure act of loving into a ritualistic process permeated by consumption where the intention is to demonstrate and reaffirm amorous emotions (Illouz, 1997).

Although, in the existing literature, several authors have tried over the years to contextualize romantic love into the logic of capitalism and consumer society (Bauman, 2003, Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 1997, 2015, 2016), perhaps when trying to make sense of how the romantic love is established contemporaneously, Illouz's book "Consuming the Romantic Utopia" (1997), is one of the most cited by researchers. She argues that in today's society the quest for love appears also a journey of individual fulfillment which not only resembles the action of shopping - where features and cost vs. benefit of a certain prospect are carefully weighed - but also requires the consumption of goods in order to be legitimate (Illouz, 1997). When analyzing the transformations of romantic love throughout the 20th century in the United States, the author found three major points of congruence between the production and circulation of goods and the evolution of romantic love in today's world. The first discusses the idea of falling in love. During this process, individuals assimilate their feelings with cultural meanings that are associated with the concept of romantic love. This means that the emotions they experience are understood through a series of material elements such as products, movies, books, advertising, television and songs that help them interpret their feelings and plan actions accordingly (Illouz, 1997). Being in love then means to engage in a series of gestures and activities, defined by the consumer society and diffused by the media, which reassures what the individual is feeling. This leads to Illouz's second point: the advent of dating. Developed during the course of the 20th Century, this practice emerged as a way of freedom, allowing lovers to meet away from the domination sphere of family, and normally requires commercial transactions (Illouz, 1997). Travelling, dinner dates, going to the cinema or a bar, all these leisure activities that one is expected to engage in once in love, are only possible through consumption. Therefore, romantic relationships adopt the capitalist dynamics where consumption is inherent to achieve satisfaction. In an endeavor to prove true love by breaking free from the boring work imperatives that encapsulate them, individuals engage in dating rituals where the consumption of goods and services are an imperative. The incongruence is, by doing so, they end up remaining in the same consumerist mentality generated by the capitalist system. We are now in Illouz's (1997) third point of connection; encompassing the love-related-choices. In this context, romantic relationships and all other social interactions appear the same to the individual since the dreams and fantasies that characterize a complete romantic love experience are offered by the market and therefore can be consumed as any other commodity. Thus, if in the present Western

consumer society, 'dating' means undertaking a number of actions and engaging in attitudes that involve consumption, then, suddenly, to be in love is not just a feeling anymore, but a cultural practice permeated by consumption (Illouz, 1997; de Jong & Collins, 2017).

This becomes even more evident in the context of the internet. Before, individuals were exposed to the ideal way of practicing love through television and advertising vehicles that aimed to profit from mass dissatisfaction and stimulate consumption. Then today, in a more digital capitalist environment, consumers produce and share content that represents their perfect lifestyle and its practices, including the idea of love, dating and relationships. Social media differs from the traditional mass media vehicles like television and cinema because consumers are actively involved in the construction of the hyperreality. From the moment the internet gave time and voice to consumers, they have taken the lead and developed a sense of control over this consumption relationship (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Romele et al., 2017). In the past, the "producer versus consumer" dynamic of capitalism brands and corporations exercise control over the production of goods and stimulate consumption through different means, then in the context of digital capitalism, the consumer has a much more active role, not limited to consumption, but also producing information (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). The individuals feel a sense of freedom from being the master of their own lives and choices. Despite the fact that brands and mobile applications benefit from this sense of freedom and consumer empowerment by tracking and collecting users' data tracking that then will be used to stimulate consumption, (Charitsis, 2018) individuals still conform with the surveillance because they are accustomed with the leading role provided by technology that allows them to connect and share content and information instantly based on their preferences. This intense relation between production, consumption and instantaneity is known to be changing individuals' behavior and psychological patterns as every life action is produced in a calculated, customized, and rationalized way according to specific ideals of the leading consumer. Indeed, the emergence and advances of technology and the internet is known to have a big impact on individuals' personal and social lives including the way they communicate, behave and experience their daily activities (Charitsis, 2018), in both a social and an intimate way. If before, as described in Bauman's concept of liquid modernity (2000), society was controlled by the rules of the market permeated by capitalist economic objectives which incentivized the consumption as way of constructing an identity and pleasure, then today in the context of digital capitalism, one can argue that the consumers are responsible for the creation and establishment of such rules, and their identity is defined by what they share spontaneously. Long lasting goals and personal ties are not the priority anymore, and instant satisfaction prevails (Bauman, 2000). This becomes even more clear within the online dating phenomenon. Although online dating has been around since the 1990s, the introduction of dating applications accessible through smartphones has changed the entire dynamic of forming relationships, since it allows easy and fast contact to anyone in the world. To be close to someone becomes irrelevant since it is possible to remain constantly connected virtually, and rejection is something insignificant in the face of the infinite possibilities of contacts allowed by the apps (Bauman, 2003). Therefore, virtual proximity is

tenuous, as it can be easily established as well as broken, simply by pressing delete (Bauman, 2003). Consequently, people unlearned how to maintain long-term ties because they feel free to play around knowing that is always possible to return to the marketplace looking for more option (Bauman, 2003).

This is consistent with the sovereign consumer mentality of Western consumer society. Here the difference between momentary satisfaction—resulting from the consumption of goods and generating fleeting pleasure, and the long-term satisfaction, (which represents real happiness)— becomes blurry (Bittencourt, 2014). When experiencing a world that is digitalized twenty-four-seven with endless options and media stimuli about what the ideal life should be, the individual compares what they have with what they could possess, causing an eternal cycle of dissatisfaction (Bittencourt, 2014). The mentality of maximizing possibilities as described by Schwartz et al. (2002) is stimulated by the proliferation of options, turning anxiety and regret into an ever-present feeling that individuals are now accustomed to. Since it is impossible to examine all the alternatives, once the individual makes a choice "there will be a lingering doubt that he or she could have done better by searching a bit more" (Schwartz et al. 2002, p.1185). With a smartphone in hands, the individual is a 'maximizer', with non-stop access to look for the best possible outcome while navigating through a virtual domain where people display their best features in the attempt to catch someone's attention (Wotipka & High, 2016). The appearance parade, where users commodify themselves in order to stand out (Hobbs, Owen & Gerber, 2016), thereby enticing a competition to find perfection. Individuals, imprisoned in the neoliberal mentality that, if they work hard enough they can have everything they desire, compete against themselves and others in order to find the best suitable option to match their expectations (Anderson, 2016). This evaluation process is based on the main characteristics they intend to highlight and the opportunities awaiting in a large pool of options.

Here, the members of the Millennial generation appear as leading actors that can provide our study with some background information on the issue, since they were the first group to have technology and internet access as a big part of their lives. The ability to access everything in the palm of their hand triggers impulsiveness prioritizing short-term gain and narrowing self-interest to long-term consequences (Roberts, 2014). These practices become clear in a research about Millennials in Adulthood conducted by the Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project (2014). When surveying American Millennial adults, the institute found that they showed tendencies of commitment-phobia, meaning the lack of inclination to develop long-term relationships. One reason for this may be the fragmentation of emotions and relationships explained in the previous paragraphs, and the increased attitudes of self-absorbedness and individualism. In an article discussing Millennials and relationships from Scientific of America, (Landau, 2016) psychologist Jean Twenge explained this phenomenon, connecting it with a growing cultural ideal that having a partner is not anymore, a requirement to find happiness, precisely due to the choice overload paradox boosted by endless internet accessibility we have already discussed (Landau, 2016). Also in the article, Helen Fisher, a biological anthropologist and chief scientific advisor to online dating applications and websites, Match.com, Tinder and

OkCupid, (defined in Table 2 in Appendix A) argued that "the vast majority [of Millennials], when you ask them what they are looking for, say they are looking for some sort of partner and some sort of commitment" (Landau, 2016). However, "some sort of commitment" is not necessarily expressed as long-term commitment.

Although our study does not aim to advance on the studies about the Millennial generation, understanding their attitudes can offer a starting point since their technology exposure is similar with the one experienced by the members of Generation Z. The difference lies in the fact that the latter group was born with access to the internet what makes them a product of digital capitalism and producers and consumers by nature, whereas Millennials grew into it later in their lives. Since Generation Z has never known a life without technology and information in the palm of their hands, and living under constant surveillance is part of themselves, they appear as an interest group of consumers that may suffer undiscovered negative impacts—when it comes to dating and relationships—of constantly exposure to devices and social media.

1.2 Problematization

As researchers recognize the pattern of the fragmented mentality of interpersonal relationships that keeps getting amplified by technology and social media, the question is often raised; where will relationship, affection and emotions will be in the future? It is common to see a dystopian idea of dating and relationships in movies and literature that make an attempt to portray the future of the world in an apocalyptic way. The movie *Her* (2013) narrates the story of a lonely single man that falls in love with a computer operating system. More recently, one of the episodes of the British TV series Black Mirror, *Hang the DJ,* (2017) illustrates a possibility of dating in the future where society lives inside a dating system 24/7, and a program matches people with their perfect partner with 99.8% accuracy, further promoting the 'ideal' relationship expectation. Although it is impossible to determine if love and traditional dating practices as we know will survive the future technological advances, general quantitative research on Generation Z shows indications that they may diverge more dramatically from the typical pattern of evolution that prior generations have followed.

Born in mid to late 1990's, Generation Z is what we believe to be the first truly digital native generation to historically reach adulthood, (JWT Intelligence, 2016). One stand out characteristic of this generation is an open mindset which can be seen for example in research conducted on Generation Z by JWT Intelligence (USA) and Consumoteca (BR) that found that less than half of the young participants consider themselves to be completely homosexual or completely heterosexual. For them, freedom means having the possibility to experiment before making a decision about sexual orientation, they do not believe in "labels" and consider sexual preferences as something that is fluid and can change throughout life (Consumoteca, 2018; JWT Intelligence, 2016). Despite this tolerant and open-mindedness attitude, when asked what they consider as the main indicator of success, 43% of the participants answered to be married or have

a stable relationship. Consistently, having children was a stated desire by 80% of them (Consumoteca, 2018). In addition, more curious data stands out: The differences in the definition of success for each gender. Men of this generation prioritize marriage and stable relationships more than women. For women, success means starting their own business and being financially independent (Consumoteca, 2018). Other recent quantitative market research on Generation Z has shown that they are skeptical of everything they see online, and more cautious about what they post about themselves, however at the same time remain more liberal and open-minded about societal issues (FutureCast, 2017). They also have high expectations about what they see online- wanting to see relatable, real-life stories, but at the same time only tolerating advertisements that last a maximum of 10 seconds (FutureCast, 2017). Here we already see some contradictions that make this generation different from the rest, as their mentality has been completely molded by the opportunities and information available to them their whole lives. This change in perspectives on priorities, and the dichotomy between fluidity and freedom and the valorization of old values, led us to view this generation as a hybrid group and not a continuation of the previous one, the Millennials and their commitment-phobia attitudes.

Whereas the existent literature had already discussed the changes surrounding the idea of love and its practices in a digitalized world, especially in the context of online dating and commoditization of the self (Dalessandro, 2018; Fox & Makstaller, 2013; Heino, Ellison & Gibbs, 2010; Manning, 2013; Meenagh, 2015; Sumter, Vandenbosch & Ligtenberg, 2017; Wotipka & High, 2016)—most commonly from a psychological and sociological point of view—we would like to depart from a critical marketing approach that place the members of Generation Z as the central focus because they are the first group of digital native consumers to reach adulthood. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the impacts of the technology in the digital capitalism context and the exercised surveillance power on the members of Generation Z in a qualitative approach to better understand their underlying motivations. These individuals are consumers as well as products of the digital consumer society, which could impact their life experiences and emotional capabilities, more specifically the phenomenon of dating, love, and relationships. Therefore, an encompassing question emerged:

What are the attitudes and experiences of Generation Z when it comes to dating and relationships?

1.3 Aims of the Research

Kotler and Keller (2012), define marketing as a discipline involving the identification and satisfaction of human and social needs. By looking at it from a social perspective, the authors expand the definition as being a social process through which individuals and groups obtain what they need and desire through creation, supply and free exchange of products of value to each other (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Such rationale, as described by Skålén, Fougère and Fellesson, lies on the realm of marketing as a "managerial discourse" which focus on establishing a

management orientation for organizations that is "marketing oriented" (2008, p.1). In the literature, critics of this perspective have discussed the fact that "marketing has devoted too much attention to refining itself as an instrumental science, with the corollary emphasis on the production of knowledge for the 'marketing organization'" without giving much attention to the side effects caused in individuals' lives (Tadajewski, 2010, p.776). Therefore, critical studies aim to withdraw the marketing discipline focus from merely organizational issues and denounce the control and domination exercised by corporate actions and its impacts on society. These studies are important due to the discipline's reconceptualization in post-modern society, where the managerial mentality extrapolates the general managerial discourse from corporations and exercise power over individuals through the dissemination of "truth claims that are legitimated by its position as an academic discipline and expertise" (Skålén, Fougère & Fellesson, 2008, p.3), including the way in which individuals should love and express love for others. Such legitimizing power not only drives consumerism but also works in the characterization of contemporary society having a big impact on the administration not only of companies but equally important, on individuals' lives and well-being (Charitsis, 2018; Skålén, Fougère & Fellesson, 2008; Tadajewski, 2010). Whereas in order to understand the impacts of the marketing discourse and the managerial mentally that emerges from it, the marketing discipline should be studied from a political discourse perspective, which examines the impacts of such exercised power, instead of only as a positive science (Skålén, Fougère & Fellesson, 2008). From this argument Skålén, Fougère and Fellesson (2008), explains that the idea of power here can be observed from the perspective of Foucault's governmentality theory, where "government" is seemed as any form of "calculated direction of human" through the use of some sort of rationale (in our case, the marketing discourse) that leads to a certain way of thinking (here the managerial and consumerism mentality which leaves the corporation realm and enters individual's private lives) (Skålén, Fougère & Fellesson, 2008, p.4). Thus, we understand there is a need to critically evaluate the impacts of the market and consumerist thinking over society as a whole.

Emerging from a critical point of view, this study aims to enhance the knowledge about how the consumer society mentality, especially in the context of digital capitalism, interferes with the emotional sphere of consumers' and citizens' lives. Since the members of Generation Z are a product of digital capitalism, the first generation to be born with limitless access to technology and leading actors in the context of the internet, it is important to examine and explore the underlying consequences of a full immersion into technology and empowerment mentality in individuals' lives. When the internet emerged, it was thought that people's lives would be freed through access to so much information, however it has been argued consistently that the opposite has occurred, the digitalization causing the world to deconstruct and the divide of personal lives and work to disintegrate, with surveillance of all aspects of our lives from work to social interactions to identity formation (Schiller, 1999). As stated by Schiller, digital capitalism has been created by the unlimited networks that now generalize "the social and cultural range of the capitalist economy" which therefore creates profound social changes and cultural practices that are becoming inherently driven by the market (Schiller, 1999, p.14).

Research has recognized this shift and has explored the way the constant access to technology creates anxiety and affect individuals' well-being, and how the dating dynamics are increasingly resembling the shopping practices through the launch of new applications. Yet, the negative impacts have not been discussed when it comes to studying a specific group of people who are the product of digital capitalism and does not know the world without it. Therefore, we aim to explore the members of Generation Z to exam if they are suffering from greater effects on their affective life that can have big consequences within their future emotional and interpersonal sphere.

1.4 Thesis Outline

The study departs from a brief discussion of previous studies on the topic of love and relationships in the consumer society and the digitalization of dating and relationship practices. We then explore the relevant theoretical context in which our study is set, and lastly, we present key themes about Generation Z's attitudes and experiences with relationships and dating, as interpreted through our empirical findings. Finally, we discuss how these findings relate to previous conceptualizations of the ideal relationship and dating rituals in the consumer society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Love and Relationships in The Consumer Society

Throughout history, many studies have tried to map the features of romantic love, relationships and dating, however a review of a more recent sociology and psychology literature reveals that today, the internet context has changed the way individuals construct interpersonal relationships. This appears as a result of two aspects of today's society: 1) the internalization of the market and its consumption dynamic in the personal sphere of individuals' lives; 2) the change in individuals' behavior caused by the endless access to technological devices that stimulate instant gratification. Since the latter plays a big role on the former, we find both views to be interdependent and interchangeable in the context of this study. Hence, they need to be evaluated and discussed encompassing each one's characteristics when it comes to the dating and relationship attitudes and practices of today

First, in the game of dating in a consumer society, as described by Kessler (2014), love is seen as a transaction between suppliers and consumers from different regions and cultures. Each social agent according to his or her needs can assume the role of consumer or supplier, but, in order to make a successful transaction, both parts have to present the characteristics that are adequate to the expectations of the other part. The quality of the "product" may be less than desired, deadlines may not be fast enough or even the price charged for services and "products" may have a very low cost-benefit ratio (Kessler, 2014). Especially in the context of the internet and advances in communication technology, with so many options in hand, the individual finds it harder to stick to a single and definitive choice (Schwartz et al. 2002). We can compare this abundance of potential partners to the endless options the consumers face when engaging in shopping activities. The relationships that are exercised through a market dynamic, where people present a set of characteristics and value certain attributes that makes them more or less desirable for a certain segmented category, turn some features into more desirable and demanded than others, and as result, show that not all consumers and producers in the marketplace are successful in their venture. The product (the available partner) can suffer several adaptations according to the needs of the market, gaining reputation, inspiring competition and conquering new territories (Kessler, 2014). This argument is consistent to the connection between the search for a love partner and the shopping activities that is discussed by Heino, Ellison and Gibbs (2010) in their studies entitled 'Relationshopping'. As an example, the authors explored the case of Match.com, an online dating site that markets itself as a tool to help people connect with millions of potential partners, perfectly specified to your ideal criteria. The article discusses the ways individuals determine each other's 'value' from viewing online profiles, and the best way to showcase their qualities in order to get the best matches (Heino, Ellison & Gibbs, 2010). In this scenario, relationships have expiration date because nothing less than perfection will be accepted. If a "product" is not capable of fulfilling various objectives—like status, personal satisfaction, enjoyment— it is seen as defective, and is therefore rejected by the consumer. Here there is a

dichotomy between the idea of romantic love, which presupposes the logic of a sublime love and love for life, and the impacts of the neoliberal mentality, where everyone deserves and can have the best, pressuring the individual to attain this and creating anxiety if they fail (Zolfagharian & Yazdanparast, 2017). It is understood that when individuals view relationships as commodities, they assume that acting rationally will give them exactly what they want, then failure equals frustration since love doesn't come so easily (Heino, Ellison & Gibbs, 2010).

Secondly, this common feeling of frustration and anxiety that pervades individual's lives in today's consumer society is made even worse by the overexposure to technology and increase in expectation for instant gratification. This phenomenon—the search for immediate satisfaction and the quick accomplishment of happiness—is more distinguished when it comes to the members of Generation Z. It has been recognized that these young individuals show a different pattern of interpersonal relationship due its constant exposure to the media through technology usage (Bradbury, 2017). The sheer amount of information accessible to this generation is a double-edged sword. Despite the need of contemporary society to advance technologically in order to simplify tasks and solve everyday problems, studies show that the amount of information and twenty four-seven accessibility has created a set of new and unforeseen issues, including the expectation of getting instant gratification through the unlimited access to media and mobile devices (Roberts, 2014). In his article on instant gratification, Paul Roberts describes how the instant gratification epidemic has come upon us. As the production and consumption market migrated "closer to the self" by means of conspicuous consumption from simple and pragmatic to fulfilling our endless, ephemeral demands, (Roberts, 2014, p.22) the individuals started to struggle to behave in a socially present way and make lasting commitments as they are so accustomed to and spoiled by a consumer culture that can provide them with everything they need and desire. In this context, the growth of access to technology has heightened the individuals' exposure to everything that propels them. Instant gratification has been more recently labeled as a problem among Millennials and Generation Z, as the older generations lived part of their lives without the internet. Since the members of Generation Z grew up with constant access to digital devices and are exposed to an even higher influx of technology than their millennial peers, they show high levels of eagerness and very low attention spans (Kardaras, 2016). However, it is important to notice that there are conflicting opinions on the pros and cons of technology among the youth today, many originating within the psychology, education, and behavioral studies.

On the negative side, a common denominator is that technology is so intensely integrated into young people's everyday lives that the more devices the individuals depend on the less control they have over themselves (Leslie, 2016). In the research article "The dark side of consumer life in the age of virtual and mobile technology", several key themes are identified as problems for society that may produce complications for the new generations (Zolfagharian & Yazdanparast, 2017). Some of these important themes are relevant to our research including the following: The diminishing quality of presence as a result of divided presence into multiple tasks and environments (Zolfagharian & Yazdanparast, 2017). This recognizes the issue that a large

amount of young people are never 'present in the moment', because individuals are too busy checking their phones every five minutes, checking social media, email, constantly trying to be efficient, their attention is too divided to be seriously committed to anything. Another theme is the "heightened immediacy expectations", described in the article as somewhat of a pandemic (Zolfagharian & Yazdanparast, 2017). This theme is directly related to the normalization of instant gratification which young people seem to be developing toward many aspects of life, including the way they relate to each other; moving on quickly, throwing the relationship away if not supplying them with immediate gratification. Lastly, the authors approach the matter of the lack of authenticity in life due to the overuse of technology resulting in "overcalculated and hypercompetitive" lifestyles, (Zolfagharian & Yazdanparast, 2017, p.1327) which are becoming more apparent through young people's use of social media today. The cited study shows that, although individuals greatly enjoy the perks of technology and find it hard to imagine and live life without its benefits, they also realize that spontaneous life moments are less common as everything becomes a calculation, empty of meaning (Zolfagharian & Yazdanparast, 2017). Since people are aware of it, they agonize about the issue, realizing that their lives are becoming increasingly controlled by dependency on technology. This constant questioning of the authenticity and realness of life has a great effect on their behaviors, creating a constant anxiety and making them analyze the decisions they make, both online and offline. It seems as though they are still searching for deep interpersonal connections with to combat the worries of living a life void of any personal relationships. The problem is the need for instant gratification promotes the creation of superficial connections, so when technology is being used as the main method of social interaction and expectations are high for instant gratification, people tend to form anxieties in a cyclical manner. This anxiety increases even more due to a phenomenon denominated "FOMO", meaning the "fear of missing out" and even 'nomophobia' an official psychological fear of being without your cell phone (Gezgin, Cakir & Yildirim, 2018). Quite common for the Generation Zers, it is a reflection of the intensified amount of self-monitoring that individuals practice enabled by technology and internet, making individuals aware of every instance and opportunity they should take, or what they are possibly missing out on.

Yet, on the positive side, some scholars believe that there is a silver lining. As proposed by Anderson and Rainie (2012), the traditional "Kuznets curve" model can be used as a metaphor for the evolution of technology; stating that the third generation that uses technology will start to produce 'net-positive' effects, because it is becoming so seamlessly integrated into lives, that when Generation Z reaches adulthood, these individuals will be experiencing more positive than negative effects (Anderson & Rainie, 2012).

Although the current sociological and psychological approaches offer a good foundation for the understanding the changes in the what is valuable about love and interpersonal relationships in today's consumer society, and the consequences it brings to current romantic relationship bonds reliability and durability, from a consumer culture point of view, little has been studied so far. By reviewing the literature in other fields, we consider two things. Firstly that the easy disposability of romantic relationship today is consistent with the hedonic mentality

of consumer society that seems the acquisition of goods as a way of providing pleasure rather than fulfilling one's needs in a functional way. In this context, love is not just considered a commodity, but also individuals commodify themselves in order to fit in the desirable features required by the dating market and, in search for decommodification, try to stand out by escaping certain practices that may or may not end up being the same. This easy disposability is made worse by the access to technological devices and the advent of the internet but could be seen as natural to members of Generation Z since they are a product of digital capitalism immersion

The fact that the idea of romantic love and relationships is hugely influenced by the rise of modern marketing and consumer society is important here. In fact, most of the studies about love and its romantic implications have had to do with the rise of mass media. Mass media showed the world the ideal way of a world mediated by consumption that seems so real that could be easily replicated in real life. The changes seemed in love and its related practices in the context of social media and overall technological mediation tools, follow the same path. The use of mediation tools as mass media vehicle offer to market and brand practitioners the means to insert into consumers' minds brands and its appeals. To a large degree, consumers make use of such tools and assimilations to apply the same rationale to other spheres of their lives, including the way they build interpersonal relationships. If before, to enter the dating market, individuals had to engage in a series of efforts and rituals like developing the courage to ask someone out on a date to the whole face-to-face experiences which led to maximum exposure of the individual's persona, then in current days, a set of attractive pictures is all it takes for someone to "swipe right" or give "likes" to catch the attention of others behind a screen. This sense of instantaneously getting what one wants is also translated to interpersonal relationships: if someone doesn't directly relate to the individual's perfectly customized lives, they are immediately distressed (Roberts, 2014, p.20). Therefore, one may ask, in this context, what is left of love attitudes and experiences, and long-term commitment for those consumers who grew up accustomed to this scenario?

2.2 The Digitalization of Dating and Relationship Practices

As technology and social media are fundamental aspects of Generation Z lives, (Bradbury, 2017) from a critical point of view, when it comes to the constant use of technology, it is important to assess how the information and media exposure has impacted negatively young individuals when it comes to interpersonal relationships. As discussed before, today's interpersonal and romantic relationships are guided by a dynamic similar to the exchange of goods in the consumer society. This is even more amplified now in the age of online dating and dating apps such as Tinder (See Table 2), which offers a simplified alternative for meeting people, flirting and dating, however individuals feel as they have ultimate control because over the situation since they can decide what appeals to them with a simple binary choice, yes or no (Gaby & Carolina, 2016), resulting from control with minimal effort, and "heightened sense of

one's own desirability" (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010). Indeed, when exploring potential implications that social media has caused at relationship development, different studies in the field of psychology and sociology (Bradbury, 2017; ; Dalessandro, 2018; Fox & Anderegg, 2014; Hardey, 2008, Heino, Ellison & Gibbs, 2010; Hobbs, Owen & Gerber, 2016; Marganski & Fauth, 2013; Meenagh, 2015; Turkle, 2011; Turner, 2015; Sumter, Vandenbosch & Ligtenberg, 2017) aim to define the negative impacts of the use of such mediation tools in the individual's interpersonal relationships and well-being. And although not everyone engages in online dating practices, social media and technological devices appear to be a relevant part of individual's lives today, with mobile applications interfering with the experiences and attitudes of individuals when it comes to dating and relationships. In this sense, when looking at previous studies the following themes were also identified below.

Anxiety: Two problems arise from this scenario: 1) Dating apps may not be the beacon of freedom that one may think as anxiety becomes more prevalent among the younger generation due to endless options complicating decision-making processes. Since there is so much out there to be discovered and experimented with, the pressure of society and personal preferences for settling down for something serious and long-term, contrast with the constant feeling of "what if?" and "is this the best I can get?" so common in the consumer society; 2) Since the selection of suitable candidates is based on looks and the level of attractiveness individuals feel pressured to show the set of features that are considered desirable, leading the ones who do not fit such standards to a) pretend having such characteristics; b) avoiding such online dating practices which can result in exclusion from the dating experiences. Berman and Wilson (2010) found that stress and anxiety surrounding self-identity has increased among teenagers due to digital capitalism and the need to communicate and reaffirm themselves in an environment where people can be presented and share information in an unlimited variation of ways. Although this study is not investigating identity development, it is important to note that the younger generation has so many choices and pressures from social media when determining how to present one's self online, which then enables the opportunity for this confusion to seep into aspects of their lives such as relationship experiences. Cyr, Berman and Smith (2015) expand further on the studies that investigated how the growth of technology and online communication affects identity formation among young adults and found that it was increasing existential anxiety in a variety of aspects including a decrease in peer relationship quality and anxiety. The study investigated the use of various digital communication methods including social media sites, and found that a preference to use communication technology for interpersonal relationship communication was positively correlated with more relationship anxiety (Cyr, Berman & Smith, 2015). Our research takes this into account, however, delves deeper into dating and romantic relationships specifically as we asked about the role of technology and communication specifically in the participant's attitudes and experiences with dating and relationships.

Fleeting commitment: The majority of young people who are already using dating apps like Tinder agreed that the sheer quantity of options available encouraged them to be more fastidious, their behavior leaning more toward throwing out than letting in people by means of judging others quickly then discarding immediately if criteria were not met (Heino, Ellison & Gibbs, 2010). Despite the superficiality of communication and interactions in the digital capitalist scenario, another study points to the fact that social media is now used in all parts of a relationship, from the meeting, flirting, surveillance and even breaking up (Meenagh, 2015). Since the increased usage of new media technology like dating apps, relationships can now "develop at a much faster rate than previously possible" (Meenagh, 2015). So in contrast to people acting very hesitant and cautious when it comes to dating, there is an alternative behavior where the relationship may progress quickly due to unlimited online communication, then fizzle out when the in-person meetings don't meet the high expectations. These expectations stemming from the norms of instant gratification in a consumer society where individuals search for the best the market has to offer and are not willing to settle for less. How and why does someone stick to one option when it is so easy to shop around and bonds are so weak that will probably eventually break anyway?

Vulnerability: Online communication decreases vulnerability, and "the ambiguous nature of text-based communication" takes the pressure off (Meenagh, 2015, p.463), therefore people are more likely to flirt and be open-minded when they are not face-to-face with someone. The ability to meet someone without approaching them in real life context is another huge benefit, as most people agree that it takes a lot of courage and is more difficult than expressing interest through online communication (Hardey, 2008). This theme can be evaluated from both a positive and negative way. On one hand, online communication offers to individuals with some sort of social phobia the opportunity to easily meet and interact with new people. On the other hand, it can reinforce the anti-social behavior by providing the means to establish social contact without the necessity of any of face-to-face interaction. "Shopping" online for the most suitable option offers the possibility of choosing the desired options from the comfort of one's room without judgments or high expectations.

New dating rituals: Fox, Warber, and Makstaller (2013) found that social media tools were the primary mean of communication at the beginning of a relationship, allowing individuals to 'research' each other before deciding to give a phone number. Their study demonstrated that there are more stages to developing a relationship than what was seen back in the days before smartphones and social media, with lots of confirmation by 'stalking' each other's account profiles, hanging out in groups, and texting or Snapchatting, (defined in Table 2 in Appendix A) all before even going on an 'official date'. This behavior demonstrates the anxiety of risk aversion and reflects that the idea that young individuals are not inclined to spend time or energy on something that may not be a perfect fit for their life. As consumers, individuals were taught that, as long as you work hard, it is possible to obtain the best options available in order to fulfill

your instant one's current needs. However, as other spheres in today's society, to achieve "the best" requires a plan. The main issue is then, relationships are becoming "too strategic", (Hobbs, Owen, & Gerber, 2016) and the commoditization of individuals is at an all-time high along with individualism (Turkle, 2011). Even, when it comes to social interaction norms, Fox and Anderegg (2014) argue that people have developed a set of strategies to play depending on the stage of the relationship. For example, "interactive strategies" such as messaging or posting on someone's Facebook timeline are seen as unacceptable if one wants to avoid the impression that they are more invested in the relationship than the other person (Fox & Anderegg, 2014, p.688). The study also notes that social networks have a substantial role in encouraging adherence to these behavioral norms, with men to remain "stoic and inexpressive" while women must nurture the relationship but refrain from any exhibit of 'neediness' (Fox & Anderegg, 2014, p.689). Besides male and female categorization of values, there are also "the players" and "the wooers" as described in a communications study by Mariann Hardey (2008). "The players" value quantity, freedom, disposability, and see dating as a game, while on the opposite end of the spectrum, "the wooers" value exposure of the 'true self', security, and real connections with quality people (Hardey, 2008, p. 1115). In this sense, traditional courtship rituals are downplayed or even cast aside, and a calculated, strategic approach has monopolized the development of relationships. This may point to the younger generation adopting a new set of values, like control and efficiency, that may overtake the old values like patience and appreciation.

Despite all the cited points about the impact of technology on human interactions and the development of romantic relationship, the article "Liquid love, dating apps, sex, relationships and the transformation of intimacy", brings to light a more positive view on the effects of dating apps on the individuals' socially constructed ideals and values toward relationships and levels of commitment. The findings suggest that the traditional values are still held in many regards, including the desire for a meaningful relationship and monogamy. In fact, only 25% of dating app users are solely looking for sex, and 72% are still looking for a monogamous relationship (Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber, 2016). Still, the interesting point is that the participants accept dating apps like Tinder for allowing more possibilities for romantic relationships while disregarding the anxieties that come along with it, like knowing that the plethora of options will most likely lead to less satisfaction (Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber, 2016).

These discrepancies in the literature, from the critical positioning to the positive aspects of it, show a need for further research that should examine the new generation's attitudes and experiences toward these practices. Since most of the existing literature is related to Millennials, it is still not known if the negative impact of risk aversion, avoiding commitment and loss of satisfaction will follow the new generation, or if their positive attitudes toward the value of commitment (Consumoteca, 2018) may be able to shield them from such problems. In either sense, the challenge is that relationship attitudes and experiences can vary depending on the perspective of those participating in combination with who they are interacting with. These social rules stem from the set of internalized norms individuals have developed over years of living in a Western culture and consumer society, absorbing the messages displayed by social

institutions and media. Still, as Hardey (2008) points out the unspoken rules of today's dating practices are not as simple obvious as what one can imagine. It is like technology has added opaqueness to an already confusing social practice. Many of these norms draw upon the theme of power and control in a relationship, one of the great anxieties plaguing those who desire a meaningful relationship in today's world, entrapping them in a cycle of caution, questioning if their values are acceptable, and over calculation of the 'right way' to be in a relationship. A minuscule population of Millennials has recognized this strained way of living; balancing their real-life connections with what they do online, and some even quit social media in efforts to escape these pressures, (Turkle, 2011) however the question is how will Generation Z deal with this dilemma?

2.3 Intended Contribution

There is an overall argument in the current literature of a constant feeling of dissatisfaction experienced by people nowadays. To compensate for this, people engage in fleeting relationships and liquid interpersonal connections (Giddens, 1992; Bauman, 2003), which are rooted in the consumer society mentality and searching for pleasure and instant gratification seems to be more amplified by the constant exposure to digital devices. Additionally, the constant surveillance that is inherent due to social media also appears as a nuclear point of concern when it comes to the government of power by and over individuals (Romele et al., 2017) as it has caused pressure to constantly perform, therefore propelling the cycle of anxiety and an endless search for fulfillment. Here, a contradiction emerges: although the internet has facilitated the means of interpersonal communication for some people, it also seems to have created a void between individuals when it comes to deeper interpersonal relationships. This logic requires a closer look at why these manifestations are occurring in a consumer society, specifically within the group of young members of Generation Z, which are particularly important due to their ingrained digital nature.

Despite Eva Illouz's work (1997, 2015, 2016), a critical perspective remains largely absent in the body of literature when understanding the impacts of consumer society and the internet on the emotional sphere of individuals' lives. Still, we believe this topic is relevant since romantic relationships have a strong impact within the sociology of consumption due to the centrality of relationships in social processes and creating meaning within our culture (Wotipka & High, 2016). Additionally, as a socially constructed concept, since the day of birth, the individual is taught that through love and interpersonal relationships that one can build its world and make sense of life, as well as reach the ultimate sense of happiness. However, in this highly digitalized market dynamic of today's world where endless options are provided and satisfaction is hard to reach, the ideal image of relationships may be undergoing changes when it comes to love as personal life goal and aspiration.

Using Generation Z as the object of study, we aim to contribute to the critical scope of the critical marketing literature by exploring how the constant and endless access to information

through technology, especially mobile, articulate individuals' personal interpretations of dating and romantic relationship attitudes and experiences and related concepts, ideas, actions, and emotions. Such contribution will be made through the definition of themes that represent Generation Z's internalized processes that have negative effects on their dating and relationship experiences. These themes are consistent with the idea of love as consumer culture phenomenon and express the underlying consumer logic of dating and relationships in their attitudes and experiences in the contemporary world. Such themes include, (but are not limited to the ones reviewed in the literature) are drawn from the values and attitudes that constitute the actions of overall individuals on today's digitalized consumer mentality. These ideas state that the consumer society mindset has the potential to influence individual's wellbeing through the interference in the emotional sphere of the individual, and the development of self-commoditization practices that increases competition, generates anxiety and weakens bonds. Hence, this research intends to contribute to the literature in three major ways: (1) Do the members of Generation Z internalize the consumption mentality and norms promoted by the neoliberal consumer market when it comes to their attitudes toward dating and relationships and long-lasting bonds through exploration of their experiences?; (2) If so, how has this internalization has been amplified by this generation's constant use of technology as displayed in these attitudes and experiences? (3) To search for specific negative characteristics of Generation Z's attitudes and experiences when it comes to dating and relationships and their priorities surrounding the idea of love.

3. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of this study greatly draws upon a framework of what we determined to be the most relevant theories from both consumer culture theory and critical studies in marketing, with the objective to explore the negative impacts of the digital capitalism and consumer society on Generation Z, as well as examine their attitudes and experiences with dating and maintaining relationships. Firstly, we depart from a critical approach represented by theories from a Foucauldian perspective that address the issues of self-governance, the gaze, and surveillance placed upon society through the internet and social media. Secondly, we drawn on consumer culture theories that explain the effects of internet exposure to the definition of the self and its attitudes in a postmodern society. Here, Eva Illouz, appears a central point, as her theories explain the development of love and relationships in a consumer society. In order to formulate her framework, Illouz responds to and expand on different sociological theories. Therefore, following her rationale, we also found it important to examine the studies about the self and liquid society and the interdisciplinary theory of rituals as a sociological and consumeristic construct.

3.1 Internet, Surveillance and Servitude

To better understand theories about the power relations in a neoliberal society, one needs first to account for the concept of Panopticon, developed by Jeremy Bentham in 1785. The idea is simple: A prison where one security guard would be able to watch all inmates at once without them knowing if they are indeed been observed. The fact that someone was actually watching them was irrelevant since the prisoners, by thinking of the possibility of being watched, would anyway behave in accordance with the norms. Not merely an architectural form, the panopticon can be seen as an example of political technology (Cook, 2014). There are no chains or bars. Individuals just obey in accordance because of the fear of being punished. Departing from this model, Foucault proposes that the panopticon represents a system that is used by the government as a way to train individuals to behave according to certain norms, a disciplinary power that can be exercised by anyone that is placed in the position of the observer (Cook, 2014). When discussing the power dynamics in neoliberal society, Foucault (2013) draws a parallel between the individual's obedience and a form of guidance, which is exercised toward them. In her dissertation about the Foucauldian Superego, Deborah Cook (2014) explains that for the author, "the soul is the prison of the body" (Cook, 2014, p.160) in the sense that it is composed by the internalized norms dictated by society, in special governmentality practices. The disciplined soul then imprisons the body affecting the way individuals behave and make sense of themselves and the world (Charitsis, 2018; Cook 2014). In the context of the internet and, especially in the realm of social media, Romele et al. (2017) point to the fact that the panopticon appears as a reversed system where the user is placed under the spotlights, being observed, while the other users are

around him or her doing the observation. However, in such situation, the idea of exercised power should not be reduced to a simple matter of subordination under the surveillance of a tyrannical power rather; the concept of voluntary servitude should also be brought up to the table (Romele et al., 2017). On the internet, through social media, individuals "create the conditions of their own surveillance" (Romele et al., 2017, p.215). In this sense, the place of the watcher/the sovereign is untaken and the individuals exercise the power relations and the surveillance. "Social media exploit individuals' digital identities, and at the same time creates the conditions that make (digital) identities exploitable" (Romele et al., 2017, p.215). If the individuals are willing to take such subordinate place, it could be, as explained by Bauman and Lyon, (2013, p.145) "a desperate attempt to escape abandonment to loneliness".

Charitsis describes how the digitalization of society has gone another step further with neoliberal governance as people now track their actions with apps; datafying their lives in even more aspects (Charitisis, 2018). Thus, consumers are not governed directly by producers; they are expected to govern themselves in accordance with the identities that they identify with. In this sense, data collection from consumer' social media profiles and other online accounts by companies, plays an important role in the definition of consumer identities because companies can then have a database supplying them with information needed to personalize the customer experience. Such practice can be seemed as an intervening point between governmentality and marketing. Thus, while the neoliberal mentality tells individuals that they should embrace their freedom, that they should be obligated to be free, they are still entrapped in the options that are offered and personalized toward them in such consumption rituals that underline their freedom and are used in a way to construct themselves.

For Dennis Rook, dating is a ritual that has been socially constructed, and can be filled with different kinds of meaning depending on cultural values, his definition is "a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time" (1985, p.252). Rituals create a sense of rationality in a world that so often feels unstable, they are used as a means of becoming accepted by society, which is why individuals are drawn to create them (Rook, 1985). Rook's theory proposes several key components to a ritual: "artifacts, scripts, performance, and audience" (1985, p.253). Dating and relationships are socially constructed rituals in this sense, however, with digitalization, these components of artifacts and scripts may be in a less structured, simple state than previously discussed by theorists. When conducting the research, our study aimed to utilize this theory, but also question the varying degree of involvement and importance of these four themes in terms of Generation Z's specific attitudes and experiences. Another aspect of social rituals is that they can become void of meaning and hollow over time, but people do them anyway just for the sake of the ritual, (Erikson, 1951) and the vitality of a ritual depends on the previously mentioned four dimensions of a ritual, with dating for example; it will be stronger with a "well defined" script (Rook, 1985, p.256). Today, with the different methods of communication, from Facebook Messenger to Snapchat (Defined in Table 2 in Appendix A),

there could be separate scripts for each method, various methods, or even amounts of communication may be valued more by the new generation.

Erikson's model of ritual significance links different stages of development with the psychosocial crisis, ritual elements, and the marketplace arena in which they take place. This theory emphasizes the negative impact of external social force on human psyche (Erikson, 1951). The two stages most relevant to our study are "Identity and Role Confusion" which occurs in the teenage years when the emphasis is on determining a sense of 'self', and the "Intimacy vs Isolation" stage, which begins at age 20 (Erikson, 1951). In the former stage, people are concerned with fitting in with society and achieving a sense of personal identity. The change to the more digitalized world has shown potential to influence the latter stage of Erikson's model, which deals with the question of "can I love", in which the young adult is capable of forming intimate relations through compromise and sacrifices, however struggles with isolation due to searching for intimacy and fear of rejection (Erikson, 1951). This theory recognizes that ritual behavior is heavily integrated between the developmental stage in life, the marketplace arena in which they occur, and the negative feelings that occur from heavy social pressure to succeed during each stage (Rook, 1985).

Although these concepts can be experienced by any individual present in a social media platform, because of their digital nature, the members of Generation Z have their self-identity enrooted in the power game played in the field of the internet and social media, and voluntary servitude behavior might shape their attitudes and experiences.

3.2 The Self and its Values in Postmodern Society

Since dating is a social construct, there are certain norms that have been developed around it, and these norms have changed with the age of the internet and social media. For example, it is now considered normal to "direct message" a stranger on Instagram (Defined in Table 2 in Appendix A) if one considers them attractive, and start a conversation that way; however, when the internet first began, flirting and starting relationships through online communication and zero face-to-face contact was a very new concept and not the norm. Since our study is dealing with possible generational differences attitudes and experiences that are a result of individuals' values, it is important to recognize that such values can change over time. Although not all researchers agree on a specific set of exact values, there is a consensus of basic human ones and how they relate to attitudes. Values not only determine attitudes and behaviors, but also relate to individual's acceptance of norms and their motivations behind experiences, as they shape and characterize societies, cultures, and individuals (Schwartz, S. 2012). Schwartz's (2012) theory of basic values describes six main features of values, the most important to this study being: values are beliefs that are linked to affect, values in regards to desirable goals, values serving as standards by which we make life decisions. Values as goals refers to values motivating people to do certain actions that will help them achieve their goals, like for example acting a certain way in order to start a relationship, and values serving as standards can help

guide individuals when evaluating things like people or events, to decide what is worth doing or avoiding or good or bad (Schwartz, S. 2012). Important to consider for our study is how the values have changed in a generation that has internalized the consumer society and the digital instant gratification mentality, and how it is impacting their life priorities.

Freedom is one of the values of the capitalistic system as well as self-interest and fair competition. Yet, for Illouz (2015), although freedom appears as the ultimate end of individuals' consumption practices, it increases the feeling of insecurity and meaninglessness. The author explains that while in the sphere of consumption, freedom lies in the right to choose, in the realm of interpersonal relations it related to individualism. For Illouz, the internet forces individuals to be more introspective and less fragmented in their self-construction in order to develop their opinions and tastes and find what they really want in the competitive market (2016). The use of online dating has reduced the ritual down to a marketized environment, in which people are judged based on their economic value, which people are aware of, therefore making them anxious about increasing their value on the dating market.

In the postmodern context, the cultural logic of consumer society creates a self that is characterized by excess and superficiality in what is called by Bauman (2000), liquid state of modernity. Such state is defined by the sense of individualism that boost individuals to live in the moment, expecting happiness from the accumulation of goods. This scenario stimulates dissatisfaction, since ephemeral pleasure is more important than long-term acquisitions, creating an eternal search for new feelings and identities, which are made possible and constructed by the sense of freedom that the individual internalizes (Bauman, 2003). Because the market offers endless options to be consumed, individuals find it hard to develop and maintain a self that requires a coherent identity narrative, and instead, appears as fragmented.

Indeed, the construction of the self is an important concept when discussing the impacts of internet and social media on individuals lives, Belk has broadened his original "Extended Self" theory (1988) with the "Extended Self in a Digital World", which explains how the new digital world has expanded the ways in which we present ourselves (Belk, 2016). Belk expands on Charles Cooley's "Looking Glass" theory that individuals' selves are built on other's reactions to them (1964). Cooley's theory emphasizes that the self-construction is greatly affected by what individuals imagine others are thinking about them. First, they must imagine how they look to others, then they imagine and react to other's judgment of that appearance, and lastly, they use that feedback to develop their self (Cooley, 1964). To expand on this, Belk points out that in the digitalized world individuals are now "co-constructed" even more now, through the self-reflective technology they have such as Instagram or Tinder in which they receive online feedback of 'likes' or 'swipes' and comments, therefore the construction of themselves is not always in their control and can be quite negative (Belk, 2016, p.51). This is a concept that has emerged with the rise of digital capitalism and social media, and is much more prevalent today and that shows relevance for our studies since the members of Generation Z are the first individuals to ever be born with constant access to internet, therefore, being placed in the "co-constructed" environment stimulated by social media. The use of self-reflective technology is

creating new methods of self-presentation and "visual performance" as well as forms of consumption that influence identity formation, conditioning people to present themselves and consume in what society prescribes as the best ways (Kozinets, Ashman, & Patterson, 2015).

Furthermore, Belk shows a new aspect regarding the original theory, stating that today with the internet, the idea of the "core self" is not singular anymore and must be abandoned since individuals now "re-embody" themselves in online worlds, giving them the opportunity to create multiple selves (Belk, 2016, p.51). Belk's point is consistent twith Goffman's (1959) theory on self-presentation. He describes it as somewhat of a theatrical performance in which individuals attempt to control their presentation to others in an ideal way. In the consumer society, individuals (especially with lower self-esteem) will change their appearance, the setting, and mannerisms in order to control their self-presentation within social interactions (Goffman, 1959). This theory can give our study a useful perspective as we explore the issue of fakeness within online dating, as the anonymity that comes with a computer screen has amplified and even encouraged individuals to present their 'best self' in more extreme ways, and exclude other information that may tarnish this ideal image (Wotipka & High, 2016). Another aspect of the self that is relevant in the digitalized era comes from Hodder's (2012) theory, stating that individuals do not actually see their 'self' in an object, but instead become obsessed with and over-reliant on how it can extend their abilities, in this case, people feel the need for smartphones to extend their capabilities in communication or, more specifically, even dating practices as individuals become more entangled in the digital society. Then, as people become more reliant on their devices, the constructing on the self seems to be reserved and more difficult. However, some theorists have noticed that people are starting to overcome the obstacles for the 'self' definition, as society seems to be circling back to resisting the urge to rely on smartphones and computers for extension of 'selves', which involves every aspect of their lives and ideas (Kelly, 2014). This means, that by separating themselves from their smartphones and computers, individuals can more easily define and gain back their sense of 'self'.

3.3 Existential Anxiety

In addition to the constant feeling of exposure that the internet and social entail and the endless possibilities it offers, the anxiety of choice is another issue that arises in the era of a digitalized consumer society, whether it be the choice to commit to someone, something, the choice to change an attitude, or to perform a specific action.

Søren Kierkegaard's theory of existential anxiety is crucial to this theoretical framework in that it provides a perspective into the cycle of anxiety created by "the dizziness of freedom" surrounding choice. Although the theory arose during the 20th century when social media did not exist, Kierkegaard explains that the anxiety of making a decision does not come from debating the outcome of the actual decision, but the thought of leaving behind one's freedom by eliminating the other available choices. Today, this anxiety is even more amplified because of the sheer amount of choices presented to us in the western consumer society, and the increase in awareness of these choices due to marketing and social media. Many researchers and theorists have continued to study the phenomenon of anxiety in choices as consumer culture exploded due to the age of the internet. In a more recent perspective, Barry Schwartz argues in "The Paradox of Choice" that choices leave society unsatisfied as individuals evaluate their preferences by

looking at the missed opportunity rather than the potential of what is being gained, and every choice individuals make is connected to their efforts to assert self-autonomy and exhibit character (Schwartz, 2004). Schwartz (2004) also points out that in a rational sense, more choice should make society feel liberated; individuals can psychologically benefit from the options to get exactly what they want, and it should allow them to express the 'self' more; however, the paradox arises in that the feeling of helplessness seems to be increasing over time. In this sense, when evaluating possible relationship options and the possibility of long term commitment individuals are always hunted by the idea of "what if" and tend to move quickly from one prospect to the other in a constant search for perfection.

3.4 Fluid Relationships

If in a pre-modern marriage market encompassed by romantic love, the self was close to the family and work environment, the postmodern marriage market is based on the freedom of the individual where they are always demanded to choose (Illouz, 1997). These changes require a constant evaluation of partners and of the self to consult one's emotions toward them. Which means that intimacy does not function only on the basis of desire but appear as a result of a choice made in accordance with a set of evaluations. In this context, the social relations, based on a mutual responsibility between the parties, is changed by another type of relation which Bauman (2003) in his reflection on the liquid love calls connections, a term drawn from dating websites. For the author, the great pleasure of using dating websites does not lie in the action of dating per se, but in the easy possibility of leaving the other when it is not convenient anymore. Through connections, there is no mutual responsibility, no pressure and imprisonment among the participants. Both can still, without the slightest remorse, exchange their partners for better ones. For the author, when the quality of the relations diminishes vertiginously, the tendency is that one tries to compensate the lack of this quality with an absurd amount of partners. Nevertheless, when knowing that the partner can decide to leave the relationships agreement at any moment, individuals tend to see the investment of feelings as a risk move. If the other is always a potential aggressor and someone who takes away the possibility of enjoying life fully, then there is no sense in loving someone, trusting in their presence, in making sure he or she is worth of the love (Bauman, 2003).

Whereas, we recognize that both, the hedonic and overflow of options have its impact on the weakening of long-lasting ties in romantic relationships, we believe that the framework developed by Illouz (2015) when discussing commitment in postmodern society, also offers a relevant perspective when analyzing our empirical material. According to Illouz, individuals leave today in a state of commitment phobia, which can be described in two different ways: as hedonic, where the act of committing has to constantly negotiate with the desire of pleasurable accumulation; and as aboulic, meaning, the scope of wanting a relationship. While some individuals engage in a series of relationships in a constant search for pleasure that never ends,

others are unable to even desire such deeper connection. Here, as Illouz says, we see the emerge of two kinds of individuals:

> "The first could be characterized as overflowing with desire, the second as deficient in desire. The first is characterized by the difficulty to settle on one object from an abundance of choice, the second by the problem of not wanting anyone" (2015, p.78).

Although the hedonic figured has been discussed in the literature in the context of Liquid Love, as proposed by Bauman (2003) and Confluent Love, as discussed by Giddens (1992), in the context of the internet, Illouz identify the "aboulic self" as more advanced response the abundance of options available in the market. In the context of abolia the individual finds it hard to value an object in a situation where there is a decline in the sense of self. This happens because in the scenario of the internet, to present one's 'self', in order to meet other people, the individual is obligated to focus intensely on himself and his self-perception and what he aims to be (Illouz, 2016).

Therefore, in a consumer society scenario, the idea of choice has become an introspective process where the individual dialogue with their 'self'. The individual does not need to know the number of options that are out there to imagine them and through this process of envisioning they then assess their own emotions and preferences, which lead to a constant need for renewing of sentiments (Illouz, 2015) which can stimulate fleeting attitudes. This necessity of self-assessment relates to the characteristics of consumer choice which are "exercised through a combination of rational deliberation, refinement of taste, and the desire to maximize utilities and wellbeing" (Illouz, 2015, p.91). Here, Illouz highlights the concept of introspection to the choosing of a partner, which requires that men and women get to know their feeling and emotions prior imagining a future with someone else. The problem is, according to the author, there is evidence in cognitive psychology that suggests that when trying to predict their feelings, individuals are unable to evaluate their wants. Individuals are incapable of knowing how they will feel in the future due to present stimulus caused by the available options that leave them bias. The individual then makes decisions based on intuition, which requires the evaluation of separate characteristics and not the other as a whole. By doing so, the individual is incapable of conducting a holistic judgment breaking down the other in separate and discrete components/attributes that once rationalized lose their emotional appeal (Illouz, 2015).

In this sense, what individuals value when prospecting others is shifting with the introduction of internet dating and dating apps to a contemporary dating ritual. We can see the shift as such tools and applications focus on the value of physical attractiveness and emotional compatibility. It is not a high priority to just find someone "who [merely] pleases you", but instead, looking for a partner capable of "highly elaborate and intense emotional aspirations, supposed to be the outcome of a fine dynamic of sharing of tastes" (Illouz, 2015, p.180). These

aspirations are translated into a set of characteristics that Illouz describes in her book Cold Intimacies (2016). The most relevant for our study are highlighted below.

1. Intellectualization: the main way individuals we rationalize, by recollecting experiences and using them for reflexive reasoning.

2. Visualization: the internet allows possible choices of partners to be continually visually presented as if on display, as opposed to the real world, where individuals you can only see people who are present in the moment. This allows for comparison before encounters even occur, encouraging a rational process of reasoning stemming from an economic realm in order to plan actions and achieve their goals methodically.

3. Commensuration: The combination of influences from the internet, capitalist market and psychology lead to a society that has made romantic relationships a measurable, commensurable, and comparable construct. Individuals now have tools that help them evaluate relationships.

4. Competitiveness: The comparative mindset has been developed due to the internet and tools we have developed to evaluate each potential partner's qualities. When everything is rationally measured, the mindset changes into always wanting to improve, and 'settling' on someone leads to discontent.

4. Methodology

This study departs from a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemological approach. This chapter explains the reasoning and foundation that supports our research design, empirical material collection and analysis, and ethical considerations.

4.1 Ontology

The ontology and epistemology are important guiding factors to consider when deciding the most appropriate research design. Ontology is the study of nature of being and existence, which works as a base around which a knowledge base can be built (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Because there are several different ontological positions within social studies, it is important to clarify our standpoint to determine how we will articulate the structure of the social world we are examining. Our study departs from a relativist ontology which states that there is not only an absolute truth to be discovered, but rather this reality and truth depends on the researcher's perspective and context of the situation (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This study is concerned with the 'how and why' truths within a very abstract, feeling involved topic, however, the end goal is that we uncovered Generation Z's certain experiences, and attitudes toward love and relationships, which are not 'single truths' as a realist perspective would suggest (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Instead, we accept that within this abstract topic there are many possibilities for truths for the individuals that we interviewed and that our interpretations as the researchers have influenced the discoveries of this study as well.

4.2 Epistemology

The relativist ontology is typically paired with social constructivism epistemology, our research will be more on the weak constructivist side of the spectrum as the research outcome depends on our interpretation of the empirical material and the analysis is subjective. A constructivist epistemology is characterized by the realization that aspects of social reality cannot simply be measured and quantified as facts, and specific fundamental 'laws,' but rather accept that people place different meanings in their experiences (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In the case of this abstractly defined social research, the participant's feelings and mindsets regarding relationships are socially constructed and can change according to different contexts, as well as depend on the interpretation of the researchers, which makes the nature of reality entirely relative (Easterby, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). A constructivist perspective starts from questioning a phenomenon instead of a hypothesizing, and also focuses more on the 'whole' of a complex situation, (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015) which we do through analyzing the experiences and discourse of a specific phenomenon and specific generation. The constructivist perspective allowed us to explore and understand a wide array of complex material

regarding Generation Z's views, ideals, and attitudes in love and relationships. Furthermore, this is the best epistemological fit because it allows reflection about these ever-dynamic social constructs (love, self-presentation, commoditization) and relies on the individuals shaping it to generate new insights and understanding (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

4.3 Research Design

The best way to answer our research question was through a qualitative research design with interpretive positioning. A qualitative research project is ideal for this research in order to "understand and explain beliefs and behaviors within the context they occur" and its "interpretive and naturalistic" characteristics (Draper, 2004, p.642). According to Kozinets, (2002) qualitative methods are most useful for gaining insights about symbolic concepts, including desires, values, meanings, and motivations behind choices. Therefore a qualitative research approach was best in order to assess these underlying, attitudes, feelings, and experiences in regards to love and relationships for Generation Z. So in this sense, the main interest of the study lies in developing an understanding about "the quality or nature of human experiences and what these phenomena mean to individuals" (Draper, 2004, p.642). Since the concepts of love and neoliberal mentality surrounding relationships vary depending on individuals background culture, convictions, and knowledge, this makes them extremely subjective and difficult to evaluate. Therefore, a qualitative method of research with an abductive approach to analysis helped us explore and understand more clearly the reasoning behind this specific generation's attitudes associated with dating and experiences surrounding this phenomenon within the neoliberal capitalist society.

In alignment with the qualitative approach, this research followed a grounded theory method. Grounded theory is a comparative method, that allows for both structure and flexibility in the research design (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This makes it a great tool for analyzing social practices that have not yet been greatly researched such as the topic of this study. This approach coincides with the aim to understand the negative impacts on Generation Z of their upbringing in the digital capitalist society and its effects on their romantic and personal experiences. Grounded theory allowed us to observe this as a phenomenon, then question it critically while at the same time maintaining an open perspective to discover new ideas. There are several styles of grounded theory, however, our research fits best within the Straussian concept which recommends that the researchers familiarize with prior research and use structured processes to make sense of the data (Strauss, 1987; Corbin and Strauss, 2015). We had limited prior knowledge of the topics at hand, love, self-presentation, and relationships in the postmodern society, so therefore we had to collect and process this information prior to starting the research, but also refer back to it to aid the analysis of the material. Since this area of social research is continually changing and transforming, and also depends on the interpretations of the observer and participants, grounded theory allowed us more freedom when choosing and performing the research design and analysis. Since we did not formulate a hypothesis prior to collecting the empirical material, the

Straussian method is more appropriate than the grounded theory approach described by Glaser (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). We recognized that this approach is used as a means of methodology and that an actual concrete theory is not produced, instead, we approached theory by creating specific themes which are discussed further in our discussion and conclusion.

4.4 Method of Data Collection

4.4.1 Overview of the research method

To best explore Generation Z's attitudes and experiences about dating, love, and relationships, we chose in-depth interviews to obtain multiple perspectives and rich material. We conducted 16 non-standardized, semi-structured personal interviews. Although not all researchers agree on one standard approach to the number of interviews, when conducting them within a relatively homogenous group of the population, 16 or less interviews is proven to be sufficient enough to identify common themes and reach saturation (Francis et al, 2010). Interviews allowed us to collect information in specific contexts and learn about experiences, and phenomena from the participants and provided us with insights for a preliminary study that were sufficient given the time constraint of the study and the difficulty of studying attitudes and other abstract matter by observing actions through ethnographic research methods (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

4.4.2 Sampling Strategy and Criteria Selection for Participants

Before beginning the data collection process, a sampling strategy was chosen. A purposive sampling strategy was used in order to select participants with the required characteristics, (explained later in the following paragraphs) this was the most appropriate way to select a specific group of people related to our particular research question and fits well with the grounded theory approach (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The selection of interviewees was important to consider in order to allow freedom to discover new concepts and insights regarding Generation Z in the dating world. We used a purposive strategy to acquire the 16 participants needed for the interviews, and this was combined with snowball sampling to ensure an adequate number of these hard-to-find participants (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The snowball sampling started with our acquaintances and colleagues with whom we had already pre-established a trusting relationship. We then asked participating friends to recruit other participants that fit within our designated criteria and were willing to participate, then we offered incentives such as coffee gift cards to increase participation. The acquaintance between us as the researchers and some of the participants was beneficial in creating a more open and friendly atmosphere which aided in encouraging the most authentic and truthful responses from the interviewees (Sreejesh, Mohapatra & Anusree, 2014). The number of interviews was

originally 20, however, we started to see the variation within the interview responses after about 12 interviews, indicating that we were starting to reach a sufficient amount of data, so we conducted a few more to get just enough variety (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

The sample selection of a study is crucial when conducting interviews, given that we were examining a specific group of people from only a small portion of the population (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, it was imperative to clearly define a set of characteristics shared by this population that must be present in each participant. The requirements for participants included the following: that they must be 16-23 years old, have some knowledge about dating, include an equal proportion of males and females, own a smartphone, and be raised in a Western society. The participants also had to be English speaking due to our language capabilities as the research team.

We determined that participants within the age range of 16-23 years old were most appropriate given that the most common definition of Generation Z includes those born from 1995 onwards to the year 2010. Therefore turning 23 years old in 2018 is the maximum age of participants as the cutoff to remain within Generation Z and not the Millennial generation. We also considered the life stage pertaining to value development that these individuals are in. There are 3 common life stages proposed by sociologist Morris Massey, and our participants are in the last stage: the "socialization period" when social and relationship values are developed and "locked in" by age 21 (Massey, 1979). The participants in our study were 16-23 which is at this last stage of developing values, so according to Massey, (1979) their values are fairly concrete at this point of their life, therefore it is a relevant timeframe to explore their attitudes, views, and experiences in the rest of their lives as they take part in dating and relationships rituals in a consumer society context. We also needed participants who were old enough to have relevant experiences and opinions about romantic relationships since that is the focal point of the study. According to a quantitative study by Pew Research Institute, a common age to start having romantic relationships in Western society averages 16-17 years old, (Lenhart, Anderson, & Smith, 2015) so we chose this as our youngest range for the age limit as they are still within the Generation Z limit. Since the study focuses in the context of dating and relationships, ideal participants needed to have at least some knowledge and experience with dating, and ideally be aware of some dating apps such as Bumble (defined in Table 2 in Appendix A) and Tinder. The legalities regarding age limit for the use of these apps (18 years) was not an issue for our research design since many of the participants started using dating apps at a young age by lying about their age. The participants were old enough to have some substantial experiences with online dating and relationships, but young enough that they grew up as a product of the digital capitalist society with the internet and unlimited access to technology. The Pew Research survey also determined that there are few demographic differences in Western societies when it comes to romantic relationships, including gender, and different racial or economic backgrounds (Lenhart, Anderson, & Smith, 2015). This information allowed us to place less concern on nationality differences when selecting participants, and focus on other key characteristics of Generation Z. However, we still chose to select participants from Western cultural backgrounds

to maintain some consistency in each participant's cultural upbringing, perspective, and values in the Western consumer society. Other important criteria were that the participants must have had access to technology while growing up, since part of the background research of this study is involved with the epidemics of an overload of information and "instant gratification", common among Generation Z and caused by continual exposure to the media through technology like smartphones. For this reason, it was ideal for the participants to own a smartphone, and preferably have experience with dating applications, which 90% of them did.

We wanted the sample to have both males and females because each gender may have differing experiences and attitudes about dating and relationships. There were 9 female participants and 7 male participants. We acknowledge that this study does not delve into other types of gender orientation other than participants that identify as either male and female, which is discussed in the limitations section. This is because of the time constraint for finding available participants, however, it is a positive because it narrows the focus of the study by eliminating some variables. We also did not select participants based off any sexual orientation criteria, the purpose being that Generation Z tends to be very open about their sexual orientations, and more than half of them even prefer not to choose a specific one (JWT Intelligence, 2016).

Table 1: Overview of Interviewees
 (*Names and occupations have been changed for confidentiality).*

Name	Age	Nationality	Occupation
Amanda	21	Austrian	Finance Graduate Student
Tessa	20	Dutch	Economics Undergraduate Student
Elsa	17	Swedish	High School Student
Maria	22	Belgian	Accounting Graduate Student
Agnes	18	Swedish	High School Student
Jasmine	20	French	Biotechnology Undergraduate Student
Rachel	22	American	Literature Graduate Student
Martina	20	Hungarian/Taiwanese	Marketing Undergraduate Student
Camila	20	Ecuadorian/American	Engineering Undergraduate Student
William	18	Swedish	High School Student
Jan	22	Dutch	Computer Science Graduate Student
David	19	Swedish/ Australian	High School Student

Pablo	21	Columbian/ Swedish	Psychology Undergraduate Student
Theodore	22	English/ Swedish	Criminology Undergraduate Student
Gustav	16	Swedish	High School Student and Social Media Influencer
Simon	20	Swedish	High School Student

4.4.3 Interviewing strategy

Interviews were the best method to use for this study for a few of the following reasons. Firstly, to understand the respondents constructs that underlie their attitudes, beliefs and experiences toward a specific matter which is relationships in this case; secondly, to gain understanding of this generation's 'world'; and thirdly, because the concept of relationships and dating is a sensitive issue, respondents may be more likely to be truthful within a confidential, comfortable situation (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). During the interviews, techniques such as "Critical Incident Technique" and "laddering" were used (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015 p.505). Critical Incident Technique was useful for gaining insights by asking the participants to recall certain examples of their dating experiences and reflect upon their feelings and behaviors, which we then interpreted to find out the true attitudes that the participant had during that moment. Laddering up was used by asking 'why' questions about when the participant acted or felt a certain way about their example, in order to elicit their true attitudes regarding the situation. We also chose to use a "dual-moderator" method, so both researchers were present during the interviews, with one as the main conversation facilitator to keep the flow going and ensure that the participant stayed on topic while the other researcher focused more on the note-taking and ensuring all topics were discussed (Sreejesh, Mohapatra & Anusree, 2014). This method was successful in creating a very conversational interview where questions were adapted along the way while we both listened carefully and responded to the answers of the participant.

Because the aim is to understand the attitudes that underlie Generation Z's dating and relationship experiences, we used a "non-standardized, semi-structured" interview approach. This method was ideal for allowing the interviewees free discourse, was non-constraining and allowed for a broad approach when answering our research question (Hultman, 2018). We allowed participants to "elaborate or take the interview in new but related directions", however, we still created predetermined themes and a set of baseline, open-ended questions to guide the interviews (see baseline questionnaire in Appendix A) (Given, 2008, p.422). We avoided leading questions, by not revealing the research objectives, since it is common that participants may internalize this information to try and give the 'right' answers (Alvesson, 2003). Some advantages of interviews compared to focus groups or questionnaires are that the individual may feel less pressure to answer in a way that "conforms to the group responses" and it is easier to identify motivations and resistance to certain ideas or actions, which could be for example choosing to use or not use Tinder (Sreejesh, Mohapatra & Anusree, 2014, p.50). We also implemented the strategy of "warm-up questions" like "what type of relationship advice would you give to friends or your children?" to get the respondents to recall past experiences and

decrease resistance when answering more sensitive questions later on (Sreejesh, Mohapatra & Anusree, 2014, p.157).

The interview questions were based off exploring the attitudes and experiences of relationships and dating for Generation Z. Firstly in the interviews, we asked personality questions to build a personality profile of the respondent, as their background life, interests and personality are important to keep in mind when analyzing connections between their values, emotions, and actions described in the interviews. Specific questions were designed around the theme of developing relationships in today's consumer society in order to pinpoint the respondent's feelings toward this phenomenon. Another area of focus for the questions was the concept of dating rituals and dating apps, to uncover what their attitudes are toward the current dating practices and what they value when it comes to specific dating rituals. The central focus here was about how technology (specifically their phones) affects the way they view and build relationships. Since dating is a socially constructed ritual, we took inspiration from Rook's theory of rituals in consumer behavior which states that artifacts, scripts, performance, and audience are the key components, (1985, p.253) and used these as dimensions for constructing our questions and analyzing the responses. One example of a question related to the audience would be "how do you feel telling others that your relationship started on Tinder?", which allows us to understand the respondent's attitude toward their social circle's judgment of their dating methods. We also drew on Sternberg's (1986) definitions of love, passion and commitment, to gather basic insights from the interviewees, since they are commonly accepted definitions in the sociology field, however our questions aimed to expand on these concepts and extract deeper definitions from Generation Z to determine how they understand these terms and what they mean on a more personal level.

The goal of the interviews was to gather rich, in-depth answers to collect information such as meaningful experiences. To accomplish this we used an interpretive and reflexive approach during the interviews which gave us the ability to provide a "rich account of the interviewee's experiences, knowledge, ideas, and impressions" (Alvesson, 2003 p.13). For this research, reflexivity was essential. It allowed us to be skeptical but at the same time "stimulates an interplay between producing interpretations and challenging them" (Alvesson, 2003, p.14). However, although the approach was reflexive, it also involved a slight "romanticism" positioning described by Alvesson as advocating a more **"**genuine human interaction", and emphasizes the establishment of "rapport, trust, and commitment between interviewer and interviewee" (2003, p.16). This was necessary because the interviews involved questions about love and relationships which can be seen as personal and delicate topics, and it was essential that we developed trust in order to get the most authentic responses possible.

4.4.4 Ethical Considerations

When dealing with a sensitive topic such as personal feelings about love and relationships, we took careful consideration to avoid the potential ethical issues that could arise. We chose to follow Bryman and Bell's four significant categories: "deception, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and harm to participants" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.128). In order to achieve the most ethically sound results, we first focused on communicating to potential participants what the study was about in the very first step of asking if they would like to participate in the interview process. If they agreed to meet, we then described the study again, in-person, where we were extremely honest with the participants about the aims of our study,

without divulging too much information to influence their interview answers, then we asked if they would still like to participate so they could choose to give their consent to participate for a second time. We also took into consideration the matter of privacy by getting consent to record the interviews, by sitting in a private room where no one else could hear, and by protecting their identity within the report. The names and occupations of the participants were changed, but ages and nationalities remain original. For the two participants who were under 18 years of age, we obtained consent from their high school supervisors.

4.5 Method of Analysis

Grounded Analysis was used to analyze the data from the Interviews. This is the most suitable method because we do not start by "imposing external structure on the data" and we are not testing any pre-existing theories (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015 p. 509). Although we utilized background theory to gain knowledge about the concepts of love, and internalized values society developed in regards to relationship ideals, we derived the structure from the fragments of material collected during the interview process. With this more holistic method, we were free to make new discoveries as well as engage with the cultural aspects of the empirical material (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The insights were developed using an abductive approach, but leaning slightly more toward inductive, simultaneously oscillating between theory and the empirical data (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This method was organized practically in the way of cognitive mapping and concept mapping which is explained further in the analysis portion.

To conceptualize the collected material, grounded theory suggests coding it through an "analytic procedure of constant comparison" to then create meaningful categories (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Considering that the goal was to analyze the discourse of the interviewed subjects and highlight the main findings in regards to values and attitudes, we had to reduce and categorize the material by constantly comparing the interview data and background theory. While analyzing the empirical material, it was important to recognize Charmaz's point, to align with our constructivist ontology, we recognized that as the researchers, our interpretation of the data was entirely subjective and interpretive (Glaser & Strauss 1967). As described by Hultman, in accordance with our relativist epistemology, our "worldview is dependent on the observed, and knowledge depends on the knowledge creator" (2018). By being reflexive we were able to be creative and generate interesting and strongest interpretations during the analysis aiming for rich and varied results, and accept that there may be more than one type of result, in the end, depending on how we interpreted the data and structured the discussion (Alvesson, 2003).

The point of departure of this analysis is the mapping strategy through which we organized the interview responses into different categories. Organizing the interview transcriptions in a transparent and systematic way greatly aided in the analysis when comparing all the interviews. Cognitive mapping and concept mapping techniques were the practical methods of conducting the grounded method analysis. Based on the mapping technique described by Northcott, (1996) the coding process was divided into two levels of analysis. For the first level, a cognitive map was used in order to define inter-connections between information found during the interview transcribing process. After the main concepts were identified, a second level analysis was conducted (Northcott, 1996). Cognitive mapping was especially useful when trying to represent the interviewee's understanding and interpretations of a particular situation (Brightman, 2003). It is intended to draw evidence from the conversation—in form of

ideas, beliefs, values, experiences, and attitudes—and represent the relationships between complex and dynamic schemes and ideas, identifying deeper meanings behind it (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). Both maps produced a visual interpretation of the knowledge generated from the individuals, representing the relationships between complex and dynamic schemes and ideas, and their deeper meanings (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). As an exploratory study, cognitive and conceptual mapping were beneficial techniques for triggering new ideas, associations, and spark critical thinking, all in the most flexible way of thinking (Brightman, 2003).

Before analyzing the evidence of the interviews through the mapping process, the first step was to define a few core themes through which we could organized the data. According to Ryan and Bernard, (2003) without some initial categories, there is nothing to compare, describe or explain, and these basic themes can lead to the classification of the more subtle concepts. Themes can be identified by repetitions, metaphors, analogies, similarities, and differences, linguistic connectors (explain cause and relations), asking what is missing, and theory related material (social conflicts, cultural contradictions) (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The themes incorporated a few central ideas which were: personality, love, relationships, values, dating rituals, peer and generational judgments, technology, and dating apps. After transcribing the interviews, the process of organization of the responses consisted of brainstorming around the key evidences mapped, and drawing connections between them through questions based on a casual relation approach (Northcott, 1996). This mapping technique was accomplished through the use of the online program "Stormboard", which allowed us to utilize color coordinated whiteboards to the first list, link, then analyze the ideas and quotes. This program was an important tool that allowed us to keep track of the data and collaborate simultaneously online as well. From the cognitive maps, we picked out certain values, keywords, repeated concepts, and discussed quotes where the participants said interesting things or contradicted themselves, then used these insights for the center of each individual concept map which were similar to the cognitive maps, however they helped with construction and interpretation of deeper meanings surrounding the central concepts. In addition, the concept maps included patterns regarding values among the interviewees which were discovered by comparing similarities and differences between the responses. This way we arrived at a clear visualization of the conceptual associations.

The category of "love" stemmed from our questions targeting the interviewee's personal definitions of love, commitment, and intimacy; The values category was about general values in life and ideal characteristics they seek in others; The category of relationships was about challenges and rewards of being in relationships, what is their ideal relationship and how to they achieve it; The dating apps category was about specific experiences involving dating apps like Tinder or Bumble, pros and cons of the apps, and purpose of use; The dating ritual category differed in that it was about the ideals of dating versus how they really date, as well as opinions on old courtship and newer dating rituals; The Technology category was about the role of technology in their lives and attitudes toward the ability to access so much information; The Generation Z category consisted of judgements of their peers; Lastly there was a category for contradictions, questions, and general insights that we found to be peculiar and the most interesting findings that arose after comparing the rest of the categories. These insights were the starting points to the main part of the analysis and led us to the experiences and attitudes.

Once the interviews were coded through the use of these basic themes, we began the concept mapping process. This process started with sorting and placing the key themes that emerged from the first level of mapping, (Northcott, 1996) then establishing connections

between each idea. Here, the aim was to understand the true attitudes and experiences toward dating and relationships from analyzing life examples, emotions, stories, and judgments extracted from the interviews. We focused on how the interviewees conceptualized specific situations and emotions. Our concept mapping strategy departs from Strauss's view to no longer reduce or compress the data, but instead to ask questions in order to expand and create deeper understanding of each topic (1987).

4.6 Credibility and Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research

Since the research is based off a constructivist epistemology, the concern is more about providing a rich picture of the specific phenomenon, and less concerned about validity. However, there are other accepted approaches to validity in qualitative research, such as Lincoln and Guba's alternative framework for qualitative research validity which focuses on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, (1985) which we used as the framework for validity for this study.

Credibility can be established by "ensuring rigor in the research process" and more importantly, communicating it to the readers (Gasson, 2004, p. 95). In this study, credibility was established through multiple layers of analysis as well as by having two researchers conduct and analyze the empirical material. This helps to illuminate blind spots and accept that there could be many interpretations of the information. According to Kvale, the greater concern should be having *too few* interpretations of data, and applying "subjectivity in this sense of multiple perspectival interpretations is one of the specific strengths of interview research" (1994, p.157). To further increase credibility, to achieve the best possible responses out of the participants, as the interviewers, we aimed to embody Kvale's interviewer requirements; being knowledgeable, critical, sensitive and structured (1994). This was accomplished by utilizing prior background information on Generation Z and their tendencies, making them feel as comfortable as possible in the interviews, keeping the environment relaxed, however also keeping in mind that their responses might not always be truthful. In order to increase the sensitivity level, before the interviews began we created a bit of small talk with the participant, brought them food, and explained that they did not have to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with and that it was a judgment free zone. We do acknowledge that there are limitations to using in-depth interviews, which are discussed in the limitations section.

Transferability is another alternative for measurement of quality for the constructivist-based study, instead of requiring the research to be generalizable—which fits with a more positivist perspective. The constructionist view is concerned with how the concepts of this study can be relevant to other fields and contexts since qualitative studies usually do not focus on generating insights that are directly 'generalizable' in the traditional sense (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015, p.103). Since the study was interpretive and the sample size was only 16 people, this opens the door to criticism of our findings. To defend ourselves we had to ensure to use constant comparison in the method to determine how the new information is similar or different from contexts of previous studies (Gasson, 2004). To do this, "thick description" is imperative, and can be achieved by describing in detail the experiences within the culture and contexts of the participants (Geertz, 1973 p. 6). We accomplished this by recording and transcribing the interviews, and listening to them more than once in order to extract as much detail as possible, as well as being fully present in the interviews, picking up on subtle cues such

as tone of voice and body language of the participants. In this sense, the concepts derived from our study can be applied within many contexts of social studies, including consumer culture, behavioral studies, and psychology, because we focus on the experiences, values, and attitudes of a specific generation. Including a sufficient number of perspectives is important when conducting interpretive research, (Gasson, 2004) which is part of the reason we decided to do 16 interviews and get a wide variety of Generation Z participants. However, when dealing with perspectives of all the participants, we must also take each account of "reality" in a sensitive manner (Gasson, 2004).

Dependability is less about being able to recreate this study in the exact same way, achieving the same results, but instead, according to Gasson, is concerned with "making explicit the process through which they were derived" (2004, p. 94). This is accomplished by the use of grounded theory, which forced us to "constantly reflect on, and record where our ideas and influences came from" as well as provide enough details, creating an "audit trail" in the analysis so that readers make the connection between the analysis and findings (Gasson, 2004, p. 94). This can be seen in our analysis where we describe the process we used to deconstruct and organize the interview responses as well as where we provide rich quotes from the interviews to support each theme and concept described when we interpreted the empirical material. By utilizing multiple quotes from the variety of participants and grouping them around specific themes, the reader can understand the origins of our interpretations.

Confirmability can be difficult to prove with grounded analysis because there is no hypothesis that we are trying to "prove" right or wrong. So instead we focused on being transparent about two important elements of reflexivity: first, "self-awareness as part of a social context, affecting the phenomena under observation", and "self-awareness as someone who applies biases, prejudices, cognitive filtering and bounded rationality to the collection, analysis and interpretation of data" (Gasson, 2004, p. 93). It is important to make the reader understand that as the final insights from our study were not simply derived from "the data", but lie partly in our subjectivity, and "what sensitized us to examine certain patterns" (Gasson, 2004, p. 93). In the analysis section, we describe in detail how we chose certain criteria to examine and code the empirical material, and why we felt these were the most important. It is also crucial to keep in mind that the interview responses must be taken in the context they are given, as described by Alvesson, (2003) the localism perspective emphasizes that statements must be seen in their social context. In this case, the interviews were conducted in private, calm locations, however, the time, place, day, comfort level, or other factors unknown to us may have created a situational context that may have influenced the construction of their answers and reactions.

5. Findings and Empirical Material

Data analysis revealed an overall consistency regarding dating and relationship attitudes and experiences among the interviewed group of Generation Zers. Although the use of technology and internet was recognized as being an essential part of the interviewee's lives, all of them demonstrated reluctance when it comes meeting prospects they only know from online and they would rather the first encounter be in-person. Many participants also expressed hesitation and fear of meeting someone they only knew online, as the chance of a fake profile is very high. However, online communication methods appear as extremely relevant when it comes to getting to know a person and maintaining relationships. Although a few participants stated to have met partners online, it was rarely through use of online dating apps like Tinder, but instead through other platforms such as Snapchat or Instagram which are more preferable due to the higher level of trustworthiness.

Despite showing an overall understanding of what commitment means, when it comes to engaging on activities to meet and continue dating potential partners, the interviewees were more inclined to act in a fleeting way, where immediate satisfaction was highly valued and "having fun" seemed more important than working to make a relationship last. In relation to their use of apps for dating, the participants recognized negative sides of having unlimited access to technology, such as feeling overwhelmed by the ability to see all the available options displayed on their phone and feeling insecure about how they compare to all the options. While some of the participants shown a strong inclination to pursue a long-term relationship, most stated career and financial independence as their top priority. Furthermore, the traditional idea of marriage was not a fundamental value for many of the interviewees. This idea of partnership faces some inconsistencies when it comes to their dating practices. Efficiency was shown as another value when it comes to dating practices, as most of the participants expressed concern with wasting time with people they meet online, and prefer to "hang out" or "chill" in a more relaxed way than go on more traditional dates.

After conducting the analysis, four main ideas emerged when it comes to the dating and relationship attitudes and experiences of the members of Generation Z, these are: The Void, Existential Anxiety, Efficiency, and Performance. In this section, we will present and explore the different dynamics of each one. Each idea has a set of specific characteristics that helped us define and explain it through use of the participant's dialogue. Such ideas were interpreted and translated into three main themes related to internalized processes, which will be presented further in our discussion.

5.1 The Void

The Void is characterized by the participant's desire to fill up their lives with something that brings joy and happiness, and the actions they take to create interpersonal connections. Although 'connection' and 'void' can be seen as opposite points, our data analysis lies exactly in this contradiction. This observation is in line with Schwartz's "Paradox of Choice" (2004), in which the informants act like "maximizer" (Schwartz et al. 2002, p.1185) and show an urge to seek for a deep and true relationship, but due to the overload of options find it hard to maintain

romantic relationships for a long time. This main idea was expressed by our interviewees in a set of attitudes and experiences and here appear divided into three subcategories: 1) fleeting actions; 2) hollow communication; 3) meaningless encounters.

5.1.1 Fleeting Actions

Departing from Bauman's (2003) perspective of ephemeral romantic bonds in postmodern society, our data reveals that all our informants either engaged in short and temporary dating and relationship experiences or expressed some concern about their friends and peers undertaking such actions. Overall the participants pointed to the fact that today, their generation moves from one relationship to another easily and/or tended to engage in casual and superficial relations. "Having fun" is one characteristic that appeared in many interviews when the topic love and relationships were brought up, in both positive and negative aspects of the word. Being in an enjoyable relationship it is something highly valued, however, they also described uneasiness when the relationship stops being pleasurable in the sense of requiring some sort of effort to make things work, or when the first feeling of intense passion diminishes, they would rather just move on and search for someone else.

Camila is a 20-year-old student that is about to start her bachelor's degree. She had been dating a guy for a few months already and did not feel inclined to commit with her partner because she felt like she should be enjoying her life instead of being roped into a serious romantic situation. She claimed that her friends from the same age, in general, were looking for casual and short-term dates, rather than seeking stability like previous generations such as her parents.

> Camila: "I see that now is even harder to settle down, especially student life, no one wants to have something serious. It's not as important as much as before, where people were looking for more stability. You want to have someone you like and enjoy spending time with, but not serious stuff. Right now I'm not actually looking for something serious, but I met someone that I really like but at the same time I'm just about to start my studies and I'm afraid of missing stuff, and if I'm committed then I will not be able to go as crazy as I should, it cut my freedom a bit, like less drinking, travelling, you have to chill (...) All these apps, Tinder, make it even more informal. Meet someone for a night and then by, whatever, I got what I wanted it. You don't need to put the effort. You miss chances of actually getting to know people for real. It is weird to meet people by swiping, judging them by looks, you never actually get to know someone for real only by their looks".

Indeed, freedom appears to be an important aspect here. The informants displayed a need to have their freedom respected, especially when in a situation of serious commitment and when as a reason to not commit. In both scenarios, our analysis shows that such aspect can be interviewed with the "fear of missing out" that will further have explored under the idea of "Existential Anxiety".

On the other side, Amanda, a 21-year-old master's student, recently moved from a 4-year relationship to a new one. She preferred to invest in long relationships, then engaging in casual dating rituals for a long period of time. When enquired about her thoughts on her own generation, she confessed:

Amanda: "My friends are younger than me. They're all not serious, fucking around. They have a relationship for one month, two weeks. They are so serious, so happy, 'this is a relationship!' then instantly it's over. They're always changing. Like 'oh I'm so in love with him', then the next day 'so I am in love with another one'. "This is the guy, he's great", then two hours later they are done with it".
Interviewer: "Are they actually in love"?
Amanda: "With some for sure, but they cannot decide what they want. It is always very intense then goes away fast".
Interviewer: "Do they get bored"?
Amanda: "I think they do. They are already interested in new guys, they cannot concentrate on one for too long".

Likewise, Rachel, 22-year-old, felt like that her fellow peers were more prone to fleeting. Despite the points made by Camila and Amanda, she stated that a lot of her friends engaged in such ephemeral practices because they were not actually looking for someone else, but rather saw a date or a relationship as a way of not being lonely. She explained that learning to be single and alone was a process that required her effort and she did not see the same investment from her friends. Internet united, but also separated people, giving a sense of loneliness, an empty space that needs to be fulfilled somehow, in this case, by casual encounters.

"Rachel: I feel a lot of people just jump from one relationship to other, they don't actually figure out how to be single and who you are and what you like… This is important, knowing who you are despite another person. They don't take time to it. My friend back home jumps from one serious like the 3-year relationship to another, and then, after breaking up she stays single for 2 months and then needs another one. That started at middle school I think. She doesn't know how to be alone, by herself, and she like craves a companion and being in the relationship is the easiest way to get that.
Interviewer: "Do you think that is common, to not want to be alone?"
Rachel: "It's definitely something a lot of people struggle with for sure. When I was in college a lot of my close girls were very independent, but I have seen it in the extended friends. With guys, I see that a lot. They are always trying to hook up".

The knowledge that relationships nowadays have a high percentage of failure and that divorces and separations are more common than ever before leads to incredibility about investing in a more permanent bond. Amanda's parents were still married, but seeing how her friend's parents are divorced give her a negative attitude about long-term relationships.

Amanda: "We are slow because we can see how marriage can fall out, a lot of friends saw their parents getting divorced, so people are more open to the possibility of divorce. Of course, some people want to get engage super fast, and some will never get married (…) Right now I am in a relationship that might work or maybe not. If it does not work I will just be single and enjoy my life for a while, and if I find something serious again I will go for it. And if not it, does not really matter that much to me".

Similaly is David, a 19-year-old Swedish high school student with entrepreneurship aspirations that saw having solid goals in life as the main attribute in a partner. During his interview, he stressed several times the urge to have a woman in his life which share the same ambitions. He described a desire for a "power couple" type of dynamic. However, like Amanda, he stated that devoting time to a relationship would not be very wise since a divorce is almost inevitable.

> *David: "What I'm trying to say is you can be together and more in love than someone that is married but not be my wife. I think that marriage is like too much of a thing and you know you are getting divorced and stuff. Like I said, for me, it is not as attractive, it can cause a bigger problem. But I don't know if there are some benefits like stuff you can do with your taxes when you're married, probably".*

For David, the fleeting attitude, as for other interviewees, seemed to extrapolate the realm of dating and romantic relationships and interfered in other fields of his life, like hobbies and activities they are interested in. He struggled to keep the focus on one thing and moved quickly from one love interest to another.

> *David: "So I like to do many things I want to change a lot because I don't really like doing the same thing too much. Six months ago I was traveling the world and playing this card game called Magic Gathering like it's like a nerdy card game. And I was like traveling the world trying to win tournament money and prize money and stuff like that but I got bored. Right now I am trying to figure out. I am very invested in high cryptocurrencies work and stuff like that, so I am trying to figure out where I want to start my journey there (...) Yeah, like [people are] really easily giving up. I mean, there is one thing to be motivated, but (...) motivation only gets you started, but then you gotta then like showing up is like staying with it. Like sure there are loads of people my age, [that] probably have the motivation, but I think they stick with stuff not very long".*

He continued by enforcing the point that people from his age do not make any effort to solve problems and overcome obstacles that may emerge in relationships. Through this, a contradiction point comes up on David's interview: although he stated that marriages are always doom to fail anyway, he criticized his peers for not investing time and work to make a relationship last, and not having the right motivation.

> *David: "I know that like after you know anytime you are facing like difficulties, they do not really try to solve it, because like it is so easy, just, you know, hop on Tinder and swipe right couple of times and then you're then you are good to go. And yeah like I feel like a lot of people do not try to fix their issues anymore. You know, and I feel that is like a big part you know if you want to like you have to fix your issues then sure if you can not fix them that's when you move on. But I feel like a lot of people do not even try to fix it because there's just so accessible right you got like five different apps that will bring the great joy".*

5.1.2 Hollow Communication

If, as Rachel mentioned, the fleeting process is directly related to the incapability of being alone, our data shows that internet and social media communication can offer a sort of fulfillment to the informants, but there is an overall consensus that such attitudes represent a satisfaction that is empty in meaning. When using online dating apps, some informants demonstrated a preference for only talking to strange and random people rather than meeting them in-person. Others criticized social media user for showing exactly this kind of behavior.

This is the case of Maria, 22-year-olds. She censured the shallow nature of online dating and communication arguing that it is not a continuous process: *"on Tinder, you can talk a bit and then you never know if you will meet the person or not"*. Maria's point is reinforced by her boyfriend Gustav. He is a 16-year-old student and digital influencer who makes money by posting sponsored content on his Instagram account. Gustav explained that since he is in a stable relationship, he does not use social media or dating apps to find partners. Still, he kept his profile in order to have a conversation with random people. In this context, he presented the app Yellow, (defined in Table 2 in Appendix A) which allows the user to video chat with people that are located close by.

> Gustav: *"I used Tinder, but never for the purpose of the relationship. It was more about meeting friends, random people. With Yellow [now Yubo] you can live talk to people, random people, that live nearby"*.

The video chat is a tool that seems to bring a sense of realness to the realm of internet communication and appears as the main reason for the informants to prefer Snapchat communication over other apps. Although we will go in depth on the matter of "realness", under "Performance", for the context of this study later on this analysis, here we would like to present a practice that lies in between both main ideas: Group chat.

Martina, a 20-year-old student, as well as other participants like David and Camila, mentioned the extinct Tinder feature called "Social". Through this feature people were able to match in groups of friends, and though being allowed to having a group chat. This experience was considered to be more fun, bringing a sense of cooperation and realness to the whole online communication, since the conversation would be composed not only by strangers but especially by friends and the topic was not essentially about casual sex. However, the conversation would rarely lead to an in-person encounter, remaining only in the online setting.

> Martina: *"I liked it for a while especially using the "Tinder Social" feature where we would talk in groups and the guys wanted to talk more than hook up. So we never met in-person as a group, but it was fun we would all just crack jokes"*.

5.1.3 Meaningless Encounters

The gap created by the virtual world and the so mentioned search for something natural, spontaneous and true, drives the impulse of meeting unfamiliar people after a random first contact online. In such cases, the encounters are not motivated by flirting, rather it was described as a way for dealing with boredom and the need to act on a non-rational way, or "crazy" that feels more up to the moment.

Camila: "I actually liked Tinder Social, we didn't meet, but we just chatted and it's fun. But I have no actual friends that lasted from that, it's just having fun. [One night] When [my friend and I] were looking for people to party with (...) some guys showed up. I wasn't really expecting them to show up. I did it once then regretted it. I was just sitting there with my friend and we didn't want to be alone there".

While Camila described the group meeting as a way of filling the loneliness when actually nothing ever happens, David went beyond and mentioned random encounters that usually involved sex. Both accentuate the behavior of being bored and using the apps to meet up with random people, however, there were different goals, some just wanted social interaction, while others (usually male) were looking more for casual sex.

David: "It was a crazy night. I've only used Tinder to like meet up with groups of people. Like I've chatted with like individual, but it is usually like, just change your profile to like a place, see change your picture on your profile to place on Google Maps, and then you write like a time in the description, and then people usually see. You have to do it in advance because like everybody is like feeding or whatever have to catch up, so you usually do like a week in advance and then you like open up your Tinder again and you just check who swiped and then you know, you like rewrite at how many are you, usually write like gender, age, and it is like so. Then you all just meet as a group and yeah well, what teenagers do, haha I don't know, we do the do. Alright, it's confidential".

David told us about an app called "Jodel" that he and his peers have been using even more than Snapchat. Both apps rely on ephemerality when it comes to communication, yet Jodel differs in that its main appeal is based on its hyper-location nature. The users can only see the content that has been posted by people who are within a radius of 10 kilometers. The posts are anonymous and can be upvoted, so the most popular posts are placed at the top. David described his experience with the app below.

David: "We got Tinder. We got Bumble, we got Snapchat, even though it's not cool anymore. We got Kick, it's like a messaging services. I'm going to tell you guys [the name of the new trendy app], but I hope you don't spread around, right? So it's Jodel. So you're like anonymous and you just write in stuff. So it's like a thing we just write whatever you want. And it's like within like a 6.5 mile radius (...) So this is really great when you log in the middle of nowhere, because then it is only like three people see it right and those three people you know just in middle of nowhere. They are usually a bit, you know, funny crazy, whatever. So you can meet up with people really easily. So I've got a friend that lives a couple of what like 10 miles away from the city. So we usually just go to his house and then like three o'clock at night would just post and then whoever shows up shows up (...) Like a random guy like yesterday we were in the park and my friend had food so I posted that 'Well I'm hungry, can I have food or something?' you know, because I was bored. So I took a picture of my friend eating food like a place here in the park. So we started this whole like conversation between random people okay and then I then one guy offered to bring me like his lunch box and I was like, 'sure, show up' right? So we post a lot of pictures where we were sitting and then people started calling

me a socialist because I did not pay for my food which is which is fair, to be honest. But yeah but then I got some food and then we went home. So it's random people it's fun super interesting".

When it comes to meeting girls, David said that even though the app is anonymous, it is still possible to arrange encounters with the opposite sex. In this case, he highlighted how creative and funny the user has to be in other to create "memes" (defined in Table 2 in Appendix A) and photos that would call the attention of people and get votes. The more creative you are, more visible your post will be. The possibility of ending up meeting a faker was not a huge problem for him as it was all part of the fun.

Interviewer: "Do you ever meet up with girls on this app"?
David: "Sometimes, but yes so like a meme on the messaging app, you write like anything like 'how's the possibility of being a girl'. You just write "girl" and then 'date' and 'question mark'. It could be anything like let's say you posted a picture of your breakfast and you see like painted nails or some stuff instant answers like 'girl date?' And then how funny you can be with that and like how creative you can be with that, ups your chances of getting a date. It is a weird ecosystem works. Yeah. But you are like anonymous, you do not really do you gotta like 'hey, meet me by this bridge tonight' you but 'Oh, it might be a guy'".

5.2 Performance

Our idea of 'Performance' represents the nature of the internet and social media. It relates to the way people portray themselves online and judges others through the evaluation of digital profiles, in accordance to the idea of surveillance defended by Foucault (2013) and its implications in the social media context (Cook, 2014; Romele et al., 2017). This can be connected to the previous idea, "The Void", in the sense that they search for more realness in other people and their interactions. Fear of meeting someone that is "fake" and the idea that individuals always pretend to be something they are on the internet, are the most mentioned attitudes and concerns that emerge, however other subcategories her mapped: 1) Testing; 2) Shallowness; 3) Spontaneity; and 4) Constant Comparison.

5.2.1 Testing out the Prospects

During our analysis, this focal point appeared: The use of digital tools as a way of getting to know someone before deciding to engage in dating rituals. Although our informants demonstrated an aversion to the use of online dating apps as a way of first meeting people—for reasons that will be presented in the other two subcategories that follow— they all used digital applications, such as Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp (defined in Table 2 in Appendix A), Instagram and especially Snapchat, after the first in-person encounter as a way of testing the other person. The testing process aimed to find out if the prospect is a suitable "match" and if the dating would make sense. This goes on opposition to the traditional ways of dating where normally the couple would meet offline and engage in a set of activities together in other to test their compatibility.

For Camila, technology made it easier to communicate, and therefore test the person out before even taking the chance of meeting in-person. David mentioned that he usually tests out someone's humor before deciding if they are worth meeting because that is an important quality for him.

Interviewer: "What is your view on old courtship rituals versus dating practices today"?
Camila: "I don't know if I would have liked the old ways. It is a bit more romantic but makes it more complicated, but still, phones and texting makes it easier. I don't think it was better before like 30 years ago it was more effort, more romantic, but I think right now it's easier, not with Tinder, but just with phones and texting, so you can communicate first and see if you they are cool, but you still need to meet them to know if you really like them".

David: "Yeah. You didn't and I didn't. The funny thing is like you have like this humor sensory communicating or you're writing jokes but I you sleep like prob where I'm like trying to be more subtler and subtler with my humor and eventually they just don't get it. And that's like the point where, like, let's get a coffee, this might work and it probably doesn't but yeah well for me like with Tinder like you have to test someone's intelligence, you know like, not like IQ, but you have to test some was like yeah tester personality late. Yeah, yeah. So have you ever like had a conversation with someone on there and they kind of like pass your test and you think, Okay, this might this girl might be cool. And then in-person. It's just like horrible".

However, when the participants finally met someone online, the fear of meeting a *faker* was one their biggest concerns. Therefore, the testing, in this case, is an attempt to filter what is real and what is not. This is a big part of the need to perform in the context of social media. If in 1959 Goffman already talked about the "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life", today when hiding behind a screen, individuals can take this idea to the extreme and be whoever they want to be which decreases the reliability and increases the sense of insecurity when talking to someone online.

Interviewer: "Can you talk more about your experiences with Tinder"?
Rachel: "With Tinder, I only met two people. I think it is fun because you just swipe and you can see who is out there, but I'm too scared to talk to people unless I know who they are through mutual friends because if I've seen them in their pictures before then I know they are not "crazy person".

Martina: "Yeah, I don't know. There's something about meeting in-person that's better and I don't know why... Internet dating is starting to lose its meaning because you don't even know if people are real there anymore, you can easily flirt by copying and pasting lines from online. You never know. A lot of catfishing".

A good example of this fear is seen in Elsa, a 17-year-old dancer and high school student who experienced past situations where she or her friends had to deal with catfishing. She proposed a solution to the problem. For her, the ability to connect with people online through mutual friends, similar to meeting people in-person, it would make users feel safer.

Elsa: "Maybe create an app that you can use your Instagram account and you can see all your followers and followers of your friends that uses it, so you know that they are "real". Then you would like hit you like "okay my username is ElsNavy". I would like to take that one and all those that you are following is coming up and those guys and girls, so you have some connection like you know her are friends and common friends. Then you have pictures too that make them more real…I know that they're not fake if it is in-person. It's so many fake accounts. My friends have been catfished, she went to meet a guy and he was like an old guy. I was like waiting for my friend while she was with the guy and she was so scared".

However, the idea of fakeness does not come only from the fear of meeting 'catfishers'. The informants found it hard to judge someone only based on pictures and profile descriptions. For Jan, a 22-year-old Dutch student, meeting in-person is better for understanding the unspoken words, since body language can give off meanings that oppose what the person is saying, it allows one to judge based on the 'whole package'.

Jan: "I can't see their body signs and face I cannot read their body language. Just by seeing someone you can already get to know a person quite well. you got an impression like you just kind of know. online people can display themselves in a certain way that maybe they're not actually like that. People can be fake".

5.2.2 Shallowness

The realm of the internet does not only create extreme cases of catfishing as mentioned by Elsa, where old men pretend to be young teenagers, it leaks to all spheres of social media practices. Even if someone is not changing their age or gender, the informants believed that individuals will always try to appear the best version of themselves online as described by Eva Illouz (2015). The respondents were so aware of the amount of choices available to them, as shown by Amanda's opinion, they judge quickly based on images only, and are fast to decide on a right or left swipe.

Amanda: "Online is way broader. Dating apps seem to be like just about how they look not about how they actually are. Just swiping it seems to me like shopping, like getting a nice dress. It is like you put the dress on you either like it or you do not, but I just want to have fun…so it doesn't matter".

The matter of shallowness was present also when judging people by their looks as well as apparent financial status shown in pictures. Although asking someone out based on the simple matter of attraction is not necessarily a new practice, on the internet, through apps like Tinder and Bumble, the informants felt that this attitude depicted a high level of insensibility. In contradiction to in-person, when individuals could at least grasp some traits of someone's personality, with online environments a good picture it is all it takes to consider someone as being worthy of investment. Maria, who preferred a more conservative way of dating and meeting in-person, explained this idea:

David: "I mean sure I could take a couple of douchebag pictures between like a private jet and the limousine I like borrowed, but I mean, you can be so fake on Tinder, and you could appear so successful".

Maria: "I used Tinder before, but I don't really like it. I don't think I'm meant for those types of things. I feel like it's so superficial. You are just swiping without knowing anything about the guys. It's all based on their looks, nothing about personalities. With friends you just install it one day then later you're like ok this is horrible. Then you might get it again later in a few months or something. We were all just using it for fun. (...) I don't like it [Tinder] because it is based on looks. It is crazy to rate people based on pictures. People don't put as much effort anymore to get to know you anymore, because there is always Tinder, it is easy and fun".

However, when enquired about the judgment of looks when approaching someone in-person in a party, the informants could not coherently rationalize what the difference really was.

Interviewer: "Do you think relationships built on tinder or through media are more or less authentic than when you meet someone in-person"?

Simon: "No I don't think so. Do I? I was not sure at first. But I don't think online relationships in general, more online relationships are more shallow than those who have met IRL. And gotten off on that foot. These relationships are probably more shallow. But of course, it can still happen. The difference is that things like Tinder make the difference bigger. Meeting from personality alone is not as bad if it is online. But Tinder just relies on looks, but at the same time in real life is too, but on average they [Tinder ones] might be more shallow".

Pablo: "Well for the cons it is very superficial, based on looks and how attractive you are physical. You can't really click just by looks though, you have to get to know their personality".

Camila: "When I meet someone at a party, of course, looks are important because it is the first point of attraction. And then afterwards you talk to the person and you can see if there is something there or if they are boring (...) I have really mixed feelings. At a party you can go to someone or someone can come to you, and you have a really long conversation and the person is super interesting and then you can afterwards go out for drinks. And on Tinder, you can talk a bit and then you never know if you will meet the person or not".

We noticed that the participants were unable to concretely explain the difference between the shallowness of the judgment by looks in-person versus virtually when they are using a dating app such as Tinder. From other parts of the interviews, we pieced together the possibility that they enjoy the excitement of an unplanned thrill and having the person right there in the moment with them, which makes them feel more engaged and alive, a contradiction from monotonous online communication.

5.2.3 Spontaneity of Encounters

Many of the interviewees described that in-person, and especially spontaneous encounters are the ideal way for meeting people. Whereas for a long time online dating was a theme related to older, or desperate people, for our informants, the fear of being labeled as desperate is not exactly the problem. The issue is the fact that they perceive it as being contrived, a forced way of finding love and a partner.

Agnes, an 18-year-old Swedish high school student described how she preferred to meet people. She talked about her long-term relationship for over one year with a boy she met at her school.

> *Agnes: "I would like to meet the person I date in-person and not through apps. Be introduced by friends for instance. Meeting someone in real life feels more real and authentic. I would also be afraid to meet someone online because you can never know who you are talking to. My friends are not ashamed telling people that they met on dating apps, but they prefer a more real connection by meeting at a social event, party, or being introduced by friends".*

Her preference of meeting in-person can be explained more in-depth by Jan's statement about meeting people randomly.

> *Interviewer: "Why do you think you like the random way of meeting better"?*
> *Jan: "Cuz it is better when you're not looking for it and then you just run into it. When you are not active but a moment like that can happen and you can choose to go with it. more like an impulsive thing".*
> *Interviewer: "So it feels more real that way is that what you are saying"?*
> *Jan: "Yeah it feels kind of forced meeting people online and like you can present yourself way differently online I want people to see the real me".*

Several of the interviewees expressed a highly negative attitude toward the action of 'actively looking' for someone through the use of dating apps, instead preferring to act more cool and casual about seeking a relationship. Here we see resemblance to Baudrillard's theory that individuals are trapped in a hyperreality portrayed by media which presents to the individual an idealized romantic narrative, (Illouz, 1997; Sassatelli, 2009) that love should arrive unexpectedly; for example where two people meet in a coffee shop where they both reach for the sugar at the same time. High expectations, as discussed under **the Void** are not the main feature of this generation. Trying too hard seems like a forced way of engaging in something that is doomed to fail.

> *"Amanda: I want to get married at some point have kids and things like that, but if it does not work out I would never force it with someone that I don't really like. And I would not look specifically for someone and be searching. I feel like it just happens.*
> *Interviewer: "So if you guys break up (boyfriend) will you go download Tinder"?*
> *Amanda: "Yeah, maybe just for fun, but not to be actively looking".*
> *Interviewer: "So why are you so against what you call 'actively looking'"?*

Amanda: "Not sure I just don't like when things feel forced. I think it's always better when things happen when you don't expect it. But I should maybe be the other way around I should probably decide if I like them as a person first. When you meet someone online super forced you aren't sure if you like each other then you both sit there awkwardly and have to talk and it's more work it feels fake. and if you meet somewhere naturally you might be more friends first".

When discussing their ideal way of experiencing dating, our material demonstrated that the famous practices of "Netflix and chill" was a preference for the informants. Even, when having sex is not imperative, having a relaxed setting was an important point. Amanda and Jan both described how they like to keep it casual which reduces their anxiety about the situation.

Interviewer: "What is your ideal way to meet and start a relationship"?
Amanda: "In the beginning I like going on dates, getting coffee to get to know the person, but then I like technology because it is easier to keep the interaction, so yeah we use Snapchat a lot. But then it can be more chill, but keep it growing, not fancy stuff. The 'not fancy' feels like pressure, less serious, before you know how the relationship will gonna go".

Jan: "I've never met with someone in-person that I met online. I think it's awkward. I think it's really awkward that you're forced environment. I mean I have Tinder but I've still never met anyone from it".
Interviewer: "Why do you think it's so awkward"?
Jan: "It is like wondering what they think about you it's also about a confidence thing like it reassures you that you get likes back and people swiped for you like the hot girl liked you back. I think it's just not really a natural way of meeting. I won't message anyone but if someone messages me I will reply".

5.2.4 Constant Comparison

Generation Z has grown up in a society where they are surrounded with information regarding other people, how they look, what they do, leading them to constantly compare themselves with others, whether it be conscious or subconscious it happens either way. When swiping through Tinder, or Instagram, many participants had negative attitudes toward the underlying feelings of inadequacy and unsureness they feel about themselves in comparison to what they see online. In relation to the Looking Glass Self (Cooley 1964) and Belk's (2016) idea of co-construction, this influences their feelings and practices of self-presentation both in real life and online. Rachel described how she felt when scrolling through social media platforms such as Instagram and using Snapchat. She realized her insecurity and attempts to manage the anxiety by unfollowing the people that made her feel less adequate.

Interviewer: "What are the pros and cons of the unlimited technology in your life"?

Rachel: "Since I'm from California, Instagram and Snapchat are huge, and you think about how many people have actually seen your stories and you can actually start thinking about how many people have seen what you posted and who you are online.

Especially because people only share the best part of their lives and the best version of themselves, you can just scroll and think "wow, their lives are so perfect". It used to affect more my life, but now I tried to control it. But before I was always thinking I wish I could have and do those things. And the fitness culture, you see girls with hot bodies and you are always like 'damn! That are hot, how do I not look like that?' so I try to unfollow them, although their content can be informative, but it also makes you feel bad about yourself".

David demonstrated a different perspective on the self-comparison, as he was aware of the characteristics of the other guys he was being compared to on Tinder and deduced that acting as an ideal image of what girls want equates to having the best chance in starting a relationship with them. Below, David described the effort needed in order to create the perfect look: financially stable, exciting, and adventurous—qualities that he thinks will attract interest from girls.

David: "It's sort of like a weird marketing campaign of you want to like sell yourself on all these like traits and stuff like that, you know, you definitely want to be funny and you want to be this and that and I mean after a while you sort of automatically can't keep up with like because it like everybody tries to act a tiny bit fake. But that also means you know you need to have a lot more private jet pictures because yeah I don't know it's sort of like you know you have to have a couple of really well edited well photographed pictures like one of you standing in the top of a mountain like you have to basically show yourself like yeah I'm the next Steve Jobs, you know, like catch me in my private jet and then like your header is saying some stuff right like a I don't know, you just have to be this stereotype of like a fit guy that has tons of money and wants to do crazy stuff....but then you swap then you check the next picture is him sitting with like a sweater and a lot deeper, it's still not him".

5.3 Existential Anxiety:

The empirical findings suggest that existential anxiety is characterized by the awareness of everything that is available to the Generation Zers in the current day and age of a digitized consumer society, with 96% of Generation Zers have a smartphone, providing them with endless access to information (CommScope, 2017). Of course this access has its advantages and disadvantages, however, when it comes to social lives and relationships there seems to be a huge theme of worry and anxiety about how they compare to other people. Kierkegaard's Existential anxiety concept was seen in many aspects throughout our empirical findings, as the respondents described how they had so many opportunities around them and didn't want to miss out on anything online and in real life. Our data suggest several attitudes and practices that relate to the anxiety felt by this generation including 1) The excessive amount of choice available when choosing a potential romantic partner; 2) Instant gratification, and 3) Fear of missing out.

5.3.2 Excessive Amount of Choice

The first category of availability of choice highlights the concerns that the interviewees had about the amount of people they could flirt with online, and potentially meet with. Here we see the "Paradox of Choice" concept come into play (Schwartz, 2004). Another aspect of existential anxiety is the worry about how one compares with all of the other options available since they can see everyone available, the anxiety comes from the realization that the people they are interested in are also viewing the same amount of options, so how do they compare?

For Rachel, the amount of options on the internet was overwhelming, both for her to chose, as well as knowing that the guys she is interested are in the same position of choice. This leads her to feel anxious about how she compares to the other girls that guys see on Tinder, and not knowing how she is being compared in their minds. The anxiety about sorting through all these options seems like a daunting task, as there are so many to choose from it becomes both addicting to keep looking, but draining at the same time.

Rachel: "Everyone is just like on Tinder and swipe swipe swipe let's see who's hot, am I ever gonna meet this person are we ever gonna talk. And you never know how the other person feels about you because there are so many options because the internet, they can meet anyone they want, so much to choose from. I'm like how do I stack up to their options, and it just makes me very like blah… I don't like Tinder...people have so many options that is out there. I think people spend a lot of time searching for the one" rather than someone you can build a life with".

Interviewer: "Ok so you hate not knowing how you compare to all the options then"?
Rachel: "So it's about not knowing how to are compared to the other option yeah like I just feel like when there are so many options out there for a person it's hard for them".

Amanda compared her use of dating apps to shopping, reducing the difficult task of a search for a real love down to a simple coping mechanism in order to deal with the sheer amount of options available. She also described how her friends can never decide what they want, constantly going back to the app and searching again after just a couple dates.

Interviewer: "What are the pros of these dating apps"?
Amanda: "I think you can meet a lot of people that you would not otherwise never meet. Online is way broader, dating apps seem like just how they look not about how they actually are, just swiping it seems to me like shopping like getting a nice dress it's like you put the dress on you either like it or you don't".
Interviewer: "Are they actually in love"?
Amanda: "With some for sure, but they can't decide what they want. It's always very intense then goes away fast. They can't decide what they want".

Similar to Amanda, Martina described how many of her friends cannot help themselves from flirting with all of the options available to them, the excessive quantity of people to talk to leading to more shallow interactions.

Martina: "As a whole, I feel like nowadays people are very superficial when it comes to relationships, they do a lot of Instagram, dating apps… Like my high school friend, she is always flirting with 100 different guys and I don't see myself doing that, but definitely,

the generation is like that generally. But it is more playful and less intimate than the generations before, it is more shallow".

Pablo had a more positive aspect to the amount of options, saying that since many people are on Tinder, the chance of meeting someone you like is high. However, Pablo's comment shows that although he sees this as a positive, he is still falling into the cycle of a never-ending search for perfection.

Interviewer: "What are the pros and cons of dating apps for you"?
Pablo: "Well for the cons it is very superficial, based on looks and how attractive you are physically. You can't really click just by looks though, you have to get to know their personality. For the pros, most of the people from our generation are using it so you have possibilities to meet your 'perfect' match because there are so many on there".

Maria recounted another negative aspect of the infinite options provided through the internet, that temptation has now been increased more than ever before, making it even harder to commit to a monogamous relationship.

Interviewer: "So you're saying there will be generally less marriage"?
Maria: "Yeah I think so. I think like I'm taking off with examples about, you know like there was this website I got hacked. I think it was in the US, where it was like websites specially made for men who cheat on their wives. There was a huge hack and like some famous people politicians in what we were in were on this website and it was specially made for that. So I feel like there's like some people who have bad intentions as well. And they're always going to find a way to make it more difficult. Like there are so many distractions today and maybe you don't even cheat, but there are so many different opportunities today but in the past with no internet like you were just living your life and maybe we can meet someone at work thing and you will cheat or whatever, but I feel like now to say so many now like they have these dolls or whatever, like, you know, it's just like where are we heading".

5.3.3 Instant Gratification

When it comes to existential anxiety, instant gratification is a huge factor that contributes to anxiety in many aspects of Generation Zer's lives. Technology plays a large role in all of the participant's lives, and many described a great fear of living without technology as if it would be impossible. The main issue is a feeling of uneasiness when they cannot get exactly what they need immediately, evolving into an amplified amount of impatience that bleeds into other aspects of their lives such as relationships. The respondents stated that technology is of utmost importance to their lives, and without it, they could not function in society. Most had negative attitudes about their peer's lack of patience and short attention spans, however, they themselves displayed many of the same actions. Many showed disdain toward their peers for this lack of patience and short attention spans, which relates to the fleeting actions issue described earlier.

Below, the participants illuminate the importance of always being connected to technology, most participants described their daily routines with their phones as checking it many times a day, even every hour, usually checking for messages, posting or scrolling through Instagram, and posting Snapchats.

Pablo: "I had a super slow phone before like 6 months ago I just got this iphone in January. But I got used to it, I didn't care that much, but when I got a new phone he got more impatient. Like I want the answer right now, I want google right now, and if I don't get it super fast I panic".

Interviewer: "What is the role of technology in your life"?
David: "So technology is everything I mean anything from my phone to my computer, I need like technology to function. It's like an extension of myself. I mean, I use my computer for like a lot of things, especially when it comes to like cryptocurrencies and stock trading in the I don't know, it just, just as anything like you need your computer. If you have a computer, you're pretty much like dead right, you just don't work. I mean meeting up here like you were going to send a letter to me? I mean you need your computer and whether that is your phone or your actual computer you need your technology otherwise if you're not like connected then you're not relevant I guess".

Amanda and William described their anxiety when not being able to communicate with someone. For both, they feel insecure without their phones, and checking in with their significant others or potential dates is important for reassurance.

Interviewer: "What is the role of technology in your life"?

Amanda: "Big role. When you take it away I wouldn't be able to communicate with my friends. Its useful for meeting with them to arrange the time and place. Once I met a guy at a party and he said let's meet tomorrow at 1 at this place, I tried to get his Facebook to like confirm it and he said no, let's make it fun, just be there. I thought for sure he wouldn't be there but then he was, I was so surprised, I never would've thought that".

Interviewer: "Were you anxious without having technology"?

Amanda: "Yeah it's like what do you even do with yourself. You're there and no one else is there, with technology you can ask if they're coming. Then I asked him, wow what the fuck, I thought you wouldn't come".

Interviewer: "How do you feel about all of the online communication with someone since you can have unlimited communication do you think that changes the way our relationship evolves"?
William: "Well it's like they're never really gone. It depends if that's a good or bad thing, probably good I guess. Maybe you don't miss them as much because they're always there. Maybe if they aren't answering you would start to wonder why. I hate going out without my phone in case of someone texts me".

Simon also mentioned the issue of commitment, but he recognized that the media may be part of the reason his generation has a hard time focusing on specific things for longer periods of time.

> Interviewer: "Do people today have a hard time staying committed"?
> Simon: "I'm not sure. Actually yeah. The way we consume media and things means we are educated to have a short attention span and it bleeds into other categories of your life like your commitment to a relationship. There's a hugely saturated market of tv and Netflix to watch, news to take in. Everything we see on the internet. It educates us to have a short attention span. It definitely has an impact on commitment to another person, it makes it more difficult for youth to stay committed. But of course, it doesn't affect everyone, just the general average. Yeah because I mean it's hard to say because we kind of see it happening, but we don't know for sure the effect and kind of weird".

A smartphone provided a sense of security for the participants, and when they were without it, they had a great anxiety either from the lack of connection to the outside world, insecurity about being alone in a public space with nothing to occupy themselves and worry about lack of information. For many of the participants, they realized this insecurity and anxiety, however, did not know what kind of effect it may have on their relationships.

5.3.4 Fear of Missing Out

The fear of missing out is a common term used to describe how young people are constantly worried about committing to something for fear of missing out on something better. This is a common fear among Generation Z, as they see people's amazing lives on social media (even though they are aware that most of it is a highlight reel) and they want their lives to be at the same maximum level of fulfillment. Filling every part of your life with high quality is important, from travel to friends, to romantic relationships.

Pablo described how he literally panics when he cannot get an answer super quick on his phone, and Simon talked about how he cannot commit to anything because he wants to experience everything around him. Both acknowledged that their fear of not missing out relates to feeling pressure to show the world what they are doing with their lives on social media.

> Interviewer: "Does technology affect your relationship level of satisfaction"?
>
> Pablo: "No one wants to miss out on anything, we all have a fear of missing out. So when something is not working, so we just move to the next want. We have to fill up our life as much as you can. We do it through social media… fill up social media to show people we are not missing out. In the past we didn't record everything, now you leave your print in the world. Like I have no time, I want to fill out my life with good things and not miss out on anything".
>
> Interviewer: "What has been your biggest challenge with relationships"?
> Simon: "I'm a person who's afraid of commitment. So I've never stuck in one for a long time. Not over a week".
> Interviewer: "Why do you think that is"?

Simon: "I don't know. I have a weird problem about missing out on things, so I won't stick to one thing. I want to experience everything there is around me. That can get in the way.
Interviewer: How do you feel about your fellow generation Z peers"?
Simon: "I mean, every generation has advantages and disadvantages. There are topical things, everything changes minds a lot. The concept of commitment has been tarnished and you don't find people who are as old-fashioned as before, but there are a few of course. There's still a part of each generation that doesn't conform with the rest of the generation. Everything is more shallow with the influx of various things, like social media, television, shows. I think its ok sort of, I don't know what the outcome will be of this so I'm indifferent. It would be unfair to call it a certain way".

David showed another perspective similar to many of the other respondents, recognizing that a lot of his generation is obsessed about checking what is happening on their phone rather than what is happening around them, which causes them to miss out on possible opportunities.

Interviewer: "Ok, can you describe your daily routine with your phone and your computer"?
David: "Sure. Yeah. I can I just check what I so I don't actually use my phone too much because my phone is. I sort of had this insight. When I was sitting on the bus. One day and everybody was just like looking down in their phone or like what the is going on. And so I just realized yeah probably going to stop using this idea I don't use my phone anymore because I know it's like when you see an opportunity, you need to you need to catch it, but feel like if you don't if you're not gonna be able to see the opportunity if you're looking on your phone, whether that be in relationships are in business you know you still if you can't see the opportunity. You're like gonna miss it by staring down your phone".

5.4 Efficiency

When Generation Zers approach the dating scene, they seem to value efficient methods and display highly individualistic attitudes, which is consistent to Illouz's idea that in a consumer society the realm of interpersonal relations is related to individualism (2015). The empirical material showed that this generation is very practical about dating practices in three main methods: 1) Avoiding wasting time and money by placing little effort in their 'dates'; 2) Rationalizing failed relationships as learning experiences as means of self-improvement; and 3) Prioritizing their careers over relationships and starting a family. The respondents were extremely hesitant about potential partners, not only due to the fear of catfishing as discussed earlier, and we saw a pattern of dating practices that showed little effort made in getting to know a person after about one or two dates, if the process was lucky enough to progress to the stage of meeting in-person.

5.4.1 Lack of Effort

Firstly, we will explore the observance of the 'lack of effort'. Many of the respondents described negative attitudes toward the concept of traditional dating rituals, claiming that it is much less common nowadays and they don't even expect those practices when meeting up with someone in-person. However, there was a difference in male and female perspectives. The casual way of dating was more commonly accepted among the male participants, such as hanging out at each other's houses to watch a movie, and although some of the female participants expressed interest in partaking in the old rituals, they have given up hope that it will be a possibility for them. Most of the male participants did not want to partake in any 'romantic style' dating rituals such as going out to dinner or a movie and were hesitant to make such moves before they were "sure" their potential partner would be worth the effort.

In the example below, Martina discussed her desire for the old dating rituals to come back and her concern that dating apps will prohibit this from happening. Martina has dated a Swede for one year, so she also acknowledges that there is a cultural difference of dating practices and the man is not as pressured by society to conform to the gender stereotype of performing 'grand romantic gestures' to the woman.

> *Interviewer: "What are the pros and cons of having endless access to technology and internet in your life"?*
> *Martina: "The pros are that you can easily reach out to people from wherever and whenever. But the cons are that people depend on it too much like they don't even try to see the other person in-person. Rely on texting and find it easier to hind behind the screen".*
> *Interviewer: "What do you think of dating today versus the old ways"?*
> *Martina: "I love the old courtship, every girl wants that, but I don't expect it at all in Sweden because I know here the Swedes are very passive, they don't do anything, and they expect us to do it. There is no more roses, dinner, dates…I'm hoping for a comeback of the old times like the old fashion trends will come back. But right now I think technology is gonna keep advancing and people will continue relying on that and eventually, people will not even put effort on meeting someone in-person to start a relationship".*
> *Interviewer: "How do you feel about your fellow generation Z peers"?*
> *Martina: "In the western culture I feel like romance is dead, it's just like 'come over and hang out in my corridor'. I don't think they go that extra mile to be romantic with their partners anymore, but I think it would be nice".*

Another example is Jasmine, a 20-year-old French student has a similar take on the matter of technology diminishing the quality of 'real dates', which she expressed that she values, but does not actually practice in her life.

> *Interviewer: "What is your view on old courtship rituals versus dating practices today? What is the perfect 'date' for you"?*
> *Jasmine: "I quite like the old ways still. Like I met this guy, I'm starting to like him, and he is asking me on a date and he is starting to like me. But now, the guys are completely overtaking by dating apps. So the dating apps actually interfere on the old ways, yeah I guess that would be a shame if they disappeared".*

Theodore, a 22-year-old student, half Swedish half English, was the only male participant who described preference to a more traditional style of dating, however he stated that due to technology and app advancement it is not as normal to ask a girl out in-person in today's society, and may even be considered a strange, out-worldly thing to do.

Theodore: "I prefer the old way, despite man paying haha. It was easy to ask someone out, co-worker or friends without being strange, and now you have to ease your way in very carefully and a lot of men are nervous about this. It is very hard to go to a girl and say 'I like you' because no one does it anymore. You have to be careful not to scare them off. Especially in Sweden, it's a lot more reserved here. Like people don't really want to be in anyone else's business. It's a pretty big risk talking to a girl and you also don't want to seem too invested. Technology makes it easier to take the rejection haha".

Interviewer: "How do you see the future of relationships will look like? And how do you feel about this"?

Theodore: "We say we want real things, but we are lazy and use to instant gratification and want what is easy and convenient. I think apps will make more people find someone to die with more often. So it's more successful in that way I guess. I like to just do things myself, if it happens naturally that's good".

William, an 18-year-old Swedish student described the beginning of his last relationship as quite casual. After meeting in-person at a gym where he worked, their first 'date' was simply him inviting her to his house to watch a movie. Similarly, Jan, another male described his method of keeping the dates casual, his strategy of doing "normal" everyday activities as an efficient way to see if the person is a good match instead of wasting time on romantic dates that may be too much of a charade to actually get to know the person in real life situations.

Interviewer: "How did the beginning of your relationship go"?

William: "While we were climbing together, noticed she remembered stuff I did ask her to my place to watch a movie. That was the stage of me and my last girlfriend getting together. after a while we exchange Snapchats. Then I think I asked her to come over through either messenger or Snapchat".

Interviewer: "What happened after that"?

William: "We just kept hanging out at the climbing gym and at home".

Interviewer: "What do you think when you see an old way of dating like when the guy calls a girl at home or approaches her in a bar"?

Jan: "Yeah I would never ask her out that way. Not at that stage".

Interviewer: "Okay what stage then"?

Jan: "Well I wouldn't ask her out but I would casually go do stuff. Well, I guess ask her out but probably in-person. In the beginning, if there was no internet I would just try to have a conversation with her and see what it feels like".

Jan: "I don't really date so much. I guess I don't really call it a date. If it would be a date I would like it to be casual thing I just want to try to click with someone you have a good time maybe if it feels right you can do it again but I just wanted to be stuff that we normally would do not some big formal thing. Maybe go out do some activities just having a good time with no intentions. otherwise, it's like hey I guess we tried no worries

if it doesn't work. I don't really see the point I don't want to take you out to some fancy restaurant and pretend to be someone I'm not that's not real I don't want to send out this whole thing but now it sounds like I can't be romantic".

The empirical material also displayed strong connections with individualism, as the participants were concerned about wasting their time as well as financial resources by meeting with someone in-person after only texting with said person because they do not get a good enough sense of their personality, and they must have stronger feelings before any type of date consisting of more than an hour at a coffee shop or walk around a mall would take place. In the discussion, the theme of rituals losing their meaning will be explored.

5.4.2 Self-Improvement

Another aspect of the efficiency attitude was the high level of importance placed on learning from relationships, as many of the participants claimed this was a valuable if not necessarily quality for them to stay in a relationship. Many participants said that a huge aspect of satisfaction in a relationship is that they must learn from the other individual, and if the relationship ends, they rationalize this as still efficient because they would most likely have learned something about themselves along the journey. In this sense, we see the concept as self-improvement as a very important aspect to Generation Z. Growing and learning from the relationship is of utmost importance to Generation Zers, and many in our interviews described one of the best aspects as the significant other bringing out the best qualities in themselves, certain qualities they value that they did not realize before, and helping them discover things they can improve on in a relationship by using what they learned from the past, all of which they hope will lead them to a more satisfying life individually.

> *Interviewer: "What does it mean to you to fall in or out of love? When you know what is that feeling"?*
> *Jan: "I would say it's like a process of getting to know yourself kind of trying to figure out who you want to be to this person maybe you try to improve like when I was 16 I had a girlfriend and I would get pretty dolls for instance but now I learned like when you get jealous things can get fucked up. So it's about learning experiences learning from your past relationships I want to get the best out of me for that person. But I learned from that last relationship that I can also overdo it, she was getting less interested but I was still trying I paid a lot for her plane tickets and stuff I go too far sometimes that's what I noticed about myself but I learned from it".*

> *Interviewer: "What do you think are the biggest relationship challenges and rewards"?*
> *Jasmine: "Distance in some cases or work or studies trying to make time to the other person too. Rewards would be when you are overcoming these challenges, just still been with that person or knowing when it doesn't work out anymore. Learning from the relationship and growing".*

> *Interviewer: "What does love mean to you"?*

Simon: "It's sort of mutual appreciation, respect, and sort of have to feel like you learn from the other person. Okay, that there's something deeper about their personality. That's something you don't know about or want to learn more about okay even if you don't realize it yourself".

Interviewer: "Well then so on the other side. What's been the most rewarding part of relationships"?
David: "I don't know, it's like a personal development thing first. I just felt it was like a thing I had to get over with like I feel like a lot of my friends. It's like virginity thing is sort of the biggest joke on earth like it's sort of you just got to get over it and then at that point, you're like well that was that, what now? And so I know it's been like a personal development thing where it's been like stages of so if we get bored with each other, what do we do now? Like, do we stay together? It's like a very personal development thing where I'm like, yep. I've like gained a lot of perspectives, I guess, yeah perspective. So even though like the relationship may not work out. It's still like you kind of grew as a person".

Interviewer: "What are your most important values"?
Martina: "Honesty, I value that the most. I prefer to learn about the truth and get hurt than the other way around. General kindness. I look for traits I don't have in-person. My current relationship, he is very different from me in the way he sees the world. I feel like with people that have a different perspective I can learn more things".

Overall, we saw that participants had a very positive attitude toward learning as one of the most important aspects of the relationship, whether it succeeds or fails. When the participants gained some form of knowledge from dating, they expressed a feeling of satisfaction because the relationship was still efficient in helping them develop as a person.

5.4.3 Priority of Career

Another aspect of efficiency within the desire for individual development was the practice of prioritizing a job and starting a career above all else. When asked about what they envision as a successful future, almost all of the participants needed a stable job and to be financially secure to feel satisfied. In addition to making money, another common goal among the participants was to have a job that was fulfilling and enjoyable and not just a boring nine to five job. When prompted if they saw any other characteristics in their ideal image of the future, some mentioned that they would like a stable relationship, but it was clearly an afterthought and not as high of a priority.

Interviewer: "How do you picture your life as successful ten years from now"?
Jan: "I guess my biggest goal would be having a business and being my own provider I don't want to just be a number in an organization like in a big Corporation. I really have a problem with 9 to 5 jobs, that is what I want to avoid. if it was 9 to 5 for my own stuff it will be fine, I had plenty of jobs and sometimes I enjoyed working for someone else, if I'm valued for what I'm doing I'm cool with it".

David: "I mean, sure you know my, like the main goal is like the front page of Time magazine, but you have to be realistic as well. Right. But I mean, I don't know, I just want to be able to at any point go where I want to go, basically like I want to have the economic freedom to live exactly where I want live in do things I wanna do, so in 10 years time, definitely establishing some sort of corporation or idea or, you know, some sort of recognition, garner wealth. I guess like having a lot of ideas but is just choosing which one you want to pursue. You know, so definitely a true success".

Amanda: "Success means having your life together, having a job you actually like doing. Not necessarily being in a relationship, but if you are, being in one you actually like to be in. Like yeah, we've been together forever, so let's just keep doing this".

Pablo: "I don't see having a family as a priority, I'm too young right now, want to spend more time finding myself and what I like in people, I am not even sure now. And finding out what I want to do for my career".

Maria described another interesting aspect that has possibly changed how this generation views success and the dynamics of relationships in that more women are prioritizing education and a career before starting a family. This is due to society's norms regarding gender equality has changed, and women are provided more opportunities to claim their independence. Like the other respondents, she agrees that individual financial stability is imperative to achieve before starting a family. Overall she deduced that these factors contribute to the younger generations hesitating and postponing marriage or committing to a long-term relationship in today's society.

Maria: "I have mixed opinions on the old ways of dating. It is a good way to have the order on how to get to know someone. But also, my grandparents, they only dated for a few months and then got married. My grandma was 19. Her full-time job was like being a housewife and raising kids, and she was happy doing that but it's changed these days. So I think for our generation is a lot more slow, we think everything through in terms of studies, and possibilities, women have more opportunities and we start working much later in life as well. Like a lot of women are getting more degrees these days. So it is more complicated to do it in the old way…. Studies, as I mentioned is a big thing, and also financial matters like a lot of us have student loans and it is hard to starting a family or getting married when you don't have financial stability. You have a lot to consider, even housing prices are more expensive, so can you afford to get a bigger house for a family? A lot of things just make it more difficult nowadays".

The findings in the idea of efficiency show that Generation Z has a positive and outgoing attitude toward establishing a career and defining their 'self' as an individual (what they enjoy, qualities they seek in others etc.) which they see as more beneficial in the long run because these are more emotionally stable and less ambiguous aspects in life than the more confusing matter of a relationship. However, due to this efficiency epidemic, dating rituals have lost some meaning, as many of the participants consider it a waste of time to put in the effort to plan and execute a date, as most of their dating experiences did not live up to their hopes and expectations

6. Conclusion

The findings revealed attitudes, intentions, experiences used by the Generation Z interviewees toward dating and relationships. Although the intention of this research was not to uncover themes related to dating apps, the very nature of this generation surrounds technology and social media, therefore making it a central theme in the interviews. The data was analyzed through the guidance of the four main ideas discussed in the analysis, which then gave rise to three main themes that we believe are negative characteristics of this generation, possibly resulting from their internalization of the consumer mentality spread by digital capitalism. These themes are **False Sense of Fulfillment, Authentic Self Presentation, and Individualism** all of which will be discussed in this section. These themes are therefore our representation of the internalized processes of Generation Z that have implications on their dating and relationship attitudes and experiences. We find that these internalized processes are consistent with many general themes that emerge from the literature regarding the consumer mentality, including the values defined by Eva Illouz and presented in our theoretical framework (Freedom, Competition, and Self-interest). However, our discussion delves further into how these internalized processes have impacted negatively on this specific generation's romantic relationship attitudes and experiences. The image below illustrates how our findings correlate with the theoretical framework, as the outer layer represents the surveillance from digitalization, the next circle represents the values of consumer society discussed by Illouz (2015) and our main findings as the core of the red heart which serve as a foundation for the experiences and attitudes of the researched group.
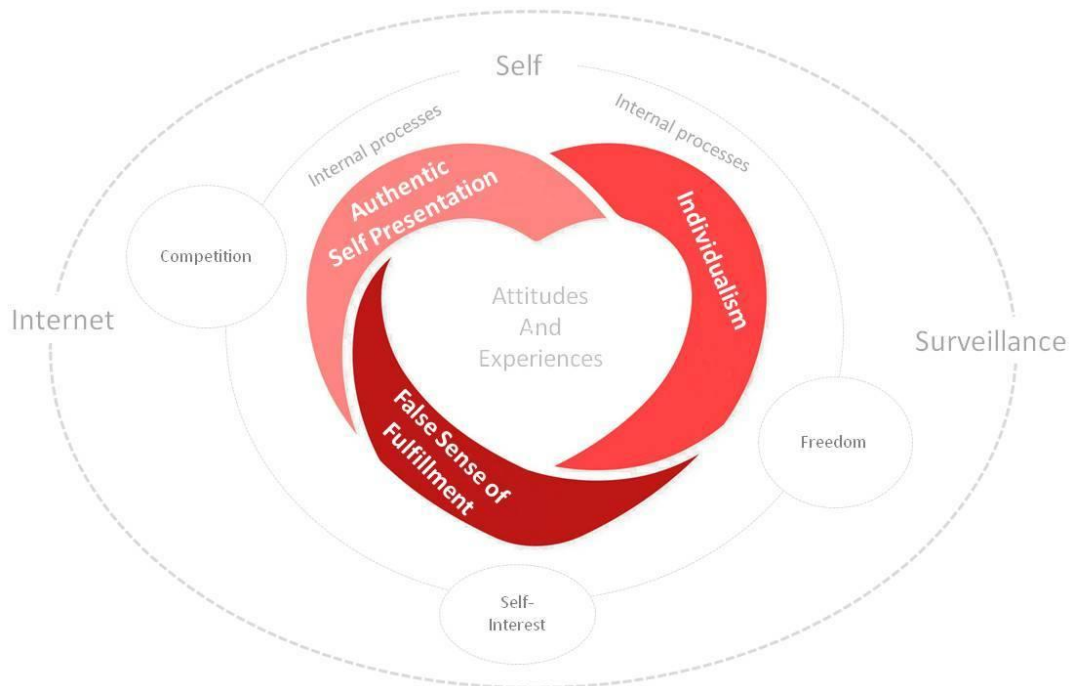

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of Internalized Processes

Several contradictions and unspoken insights appeared within these themes as characteristics central to their attitudes and experiences. These include quick judgment and treating people like commodities even though the respondents say they value deeper relationships; insecurity and anxiety about developing a sense of self and how to present themselves amidst all the other potential options in dating apps, but at the same time avoiding the fine line of being fake. The data suggest other interesting findings such as the participant's awareness of their reliance on always having access to information and impatience, but unable to escape it; and the fear of missing out, both in the online and offline worlds. The media and technology have led our informants to partake in these actions that we interpret as displaying a tendency to avoid commitment, and the overwhelming amount of opportunities is a type of temptation, something that takes the effort to control in order successfully commit to something like a relationship.

6.1 False Sense of Fulfillment

We found out that the engagement in fleeting actions, meaningless encounters and hollow communication attitudes that were analyzed under the "Void" belong to a theme that encompasses the underlying motivations of the members of Generation Z when participating in such frivolous actions: a **False sense of fulfillment.** Our data reveal that individuals are inclined to transfer their consumer behavior patterns and consumerist attitudes to the romantic realm of their lives when it comes to choosing a partner. In accordance with the concept of liquid state of modernity developed by Bauman (2003), they expect satisfaction for the consumption of goods which gives an ephemeral sense of happiness. Since instant contentment prevails over long-term fulfillment, they enter a vicious circle of pointless interactions that in turn lead to an even bigger feeling of emptiness that they try to fill quickly which is easier to do with meaningless encounters, and hollow conversations, and brief and casual affairs. This cycle of emptiness has led them to an overall aboulic (Illouz, 2015) state of self in which they do not know what they truly want, and they are lacking in motivation to find out.

Although presented in the findings as a different theme for the sake of the analysis, we find "Existential Anxiety" to be better discussed also under the theme of **False Sense of Fulfillment.** When describing their feelings in specific experiences, we saw in the participants that the anxiety is a product of the feeling of emptiness, but also a producer of this feeling due to the excessive amount of choice available when choosing a potential romantic partner in which they struggle with instant gratification; and the fear of missing out. As consumers, individuals are used to the constant exposure to endless brands and products which makes it hard for them to make choices and affix to one option without regretting their choices or continuously question and imagine all the possibilities that they still have not try that have the potential to be better (Schwartz, 2004). The answers given in our interviews revealed that the interviewees have a very specific aversion to committing to one person, not wanting to give up their freedom and ability to do anything they want from partying in college to just flirting online. This maximization mentality explained by Schwartz (2004), is what appears in our analysis as an anxiety propeller since individuals are always looking at their phones and seeing missed opportunities of who else they could be dating rather than who they have in front of them. The fear of missing something out, in this case, a better partner, works in consonance with Kierkegaard's existential anxiety theory which explains that by choosing one option, the individual is abdicating his freedom through the refusal of the other options leaving a sense of restlessness. In addition to feeling trapped within the choice paradox, the participants were also confined by the constant fear of

missing out in both online and offline situations, as displayed by their constant need to be connected to social networks, as well as needing to be 'out' having social interactions and filling up their days with things to build up a "real life" sense of connection.

Our data shows an idea of continuous discontent that appears to be even more accentuated due to its digital nature. Our interviewees consistently relate the internet and social media to the sense of instant gratification from the reviewed literature that appears to be inherent to the members of consumer society and even amplified in the digital capitalist realm. Not only they were born and raised in a consumer society that offers numerous possibilities, this group has built their sense of the world through the lenses of digital platforms that gives access to all the information the individual may need with a simple touch of a screen. In this sense, not only their '*selves*' are extended as a result of consumption, but also has technology as a constituent part (Belk, 2016). This is visible in our findings where the informants describe their attitudes toward their phones, basically stating that smartphones are extensions of themselves and that they could not function in society or have a social life without the constant availability of communication, the internet, and its applications. In a digital capitalist society, individuals have the world in their hands, which hinders the acceptance of any slight deprivation because they are so accustomed to having everything that they need when they need it. Like Bauman's theory of "Liquid Love" (2003), with available internet connections, our participants did not feel pressure or obligations to be loyal or responsible since both parties can easily jump from one choice to a better one. Similar to Bauman's theory, our participants talked about experiences with lower quality relationships, and we noticed that in many cases they tried to compensate through an increase on the number of partners. Therefore, if online shopping, made possible by the internet and mobile devices, is a big sphere of consumer culture today, we see a similarity to the construction of interpersonal relationship, including romantic ones, on the digital domain where opportunities are easy to find, limitless and the temptation is ever-present leading to the difficulty to commit and find long-term satisfaction.

Here, departing from Illouz's theory of commitment phobia (2015), we would like to highlight that our data shows a possibility of the informants being trapped in a both hedonic and abulic state. While the first urge for pleasure accumulation, the second find it hard to be satisfied by something which leads to a difficulty in feeling desire long term. Our analysis showed that individuals are in a perpetual search for fun, enjoyment, and accumulation of good and pleasurable experiences, however, they are unable to find the satisfaction from what is offered out there. The participants expressed disinterest in wanting to be in a relationship, stating that having a partner was not necessarily a goal and especially did not want to 'actively look', however at the same time they still download and use dating apps, hoping for that special connection with someone even though they were hesitant to admit it. We see then, an ambivalent dynamic similar to Illouz description of the ones expressed by different institutions and the market where, ambivalence takes different shapes, for example loving someone, but not feeling 100% committed to them (2015). Although the participants urge to be free, they also look for deeper emotional connections, the problem is by trying to achieve the perfect match they fail to value and pleasure what they have and quickly lose focus.

6.2 Authentic Self-Presentation

The way our interviewees presented themselves and judged others online give rise to the theme **Authentic Self-presentation,** which encircles the Performance idea, where the search for

authenticity appears as the main point. In our data this has two implications: 1) The interviewees had a code of conduct, a way in which things should or should not be shared on the internet, creating a series of internalized norms and behaviors to each they should all conform with; and 2) As a result of such internalized norms and behaviors, the participants gained the freedom to be who they want to be online when they could hide behind a screen. Who someone really is and his or her images online are often misleading or fake.

Social media platforms place individuals in the role of observed and observer being responsible for the exercise of power and exercising power themselves (Romele et al., 2017, p.215). This is relevant for our discussion since our informants grew up under the constant surveillance created and maintained by digitized tools. When approaching the idea of the *self* in the context of interpersonal relationships in the domain of internet, Illouz (2016) applies a market metaphor where the search for a partner is an economic transaction and individuals, like commodities, have a exchange value, the self then becoming a set of defined features to help them stand out (Illouz, 2016). However, because such features, (values, attitudes, physicality, beauty) are a result of what society imposes as being suitable, individuals tend to search for ways to conform with it. In alignment with Belk's "co-construction" theory, (2016) our participants had great anxiety when imagining what other people were thinking about them behind the screen, trying to construct their self-image in a way that they think would make others perceive them as attractive and authentic, then when receiving comments or swipes, this version of self would be affirmed, and therefore co-constructed. When not affirmed, or in case of insecurity, the situation could extrapolate the realness and fake features can be added to the set. Our interviewees found the matter of fakeness in social media to be unattractive, and one of the main reasons why they rather not to engage in online dating practices. For them, authenticity is a crucial point and they argue that is not possible to know if someone is real or not looking only at his or her pictures. Therefore, although they are digital natives and cannot see themselves separated from technology and the internet, they do not consider online dating as an authentic practice. Some, however, believe that after meeting someone in-person, digital tools can offer them the perfect setting to find more about the potential partner and communicate in a deeper way to uncover the compatibility before deciding to go on a real date. In this sense, we can relate to Hodder's (2012) theory, as our participants were extremely preoccupied with how their phones could extend their abilities with dating, in their minds making them more efficient. On the other hand, we witnessed some resistance to the use of these communication methods, for some participants, using Snapchat and messaging services to communicate created somewhat of a barrier to really getting to know the person as they described difficulty with getting a strong sense of someone's personality only through a screen, and that reading body language in-person was imperative.

The "real date" or the ideal way of meeting someone, stems from spontaneity and casual activities. Most of the time, the participants viewed 'arranged' situations as forced and unnatural, and would rather avoid these experiences. This can be related to the concept of power exercised in the Western society, as throughout history, if an individual focused on 'pursuing' a partner, they would be considered desperate. The Hollywood movie way of meeting, a spontaneous love that strikes the individual unexpectedly still seems to be the ideal experience ingrained in our participant's minds. This is an interesting contradiction since the internet naturally gives rise to more liberal ideas of life, love, and relationships our informants still value this older, more culturally traditional way of starting a relationship. The romanticism is also expressed through their aversion to judging people by their looks online. All of the informants described online

dating as shallow due to its nature of choosing partners based only on appearance and level attractiveness without the need to consider personality. The shared testimonials demonstrated a pursuit to escape the fakeness which is prominent on the context of internet, believing that meeting someone in-person allows for a greater chance of getting to know the person's true 'self', however at the same time the informants did not like how dating apps allow for elaborated profiles that accentuate the 'best self' as described by Belk's "Extended Self in the Digital World", because even if the person was not entirely 'fake', it still creates high expectations, resulting in more disappointment. Yet, the offline realm is not judgment free. On the contrary, in alignment with the reviewed literature, our data shows that the participants were extremely shallow when meeting people in-person as well, and the first impression of attractiveness would determine if they wanted to start a conversation. This contradiction could be for several reasons: 1) They are aware that on the internet individuals tend to share only the pictures that highlight and portray their best features, while in-person you can see all the flaws; 2) As a consequence, there is a general preference for video chat tools, like Snapchat, because the interviewees consider the movement, the voice and body language, as a sign of reality. However, the reduction of the individual to a series of ideal characteristics rationalizes the amorous process and removes and diminishes the emotional connection. It seemed like the participants were caught between wanting to be strategic and efficient, while at the same time crave the flaws and realness that in-person interaction provides. We will expand on this last point in the next theme, Individualism.

6.3 Individualism

When analyzing the quotes under the category of efficiency, the participants' opinions and actual attitudes in dating and usage of dating apps led us to discover the underlying theme of **Individualism**. The informants showed an individualistic attitude when it comes to romantic relationships, possibly because of the changing norms of society as well as technological advances which promote an efficient lifestyle as the best way to achieve individualistic goals such as obtaining a great career. Relating to the 'fear of missing out' concept discussed earlier, by being aware of what other people are accomplishing around them, the participants demonstrated that their continual submersion in a social media driven world makes them question if what they are doing with their lives is good enough. The pressure to attain the ideal career and 'find themselves' is the highest priority in accordance to general values of neoliberal mentality, and having a stable relationship, marriage or family was a second thought or not even mentioned when we asked about their idea of a successful future. Although a few participants claimed that money was not their highest priority, it was clear that having financial independence and stability was their main goal. In this sense, they were very rational in approaching their life goals, wanting to be prepared financially before having a relationship, which may lead to expenses like buying a house for instance. This coincides with Illouz's concepts of how the process of finding a relationship has changed due to the establishment of consumer society and later the advent of the internet. Individuals take a rational as well as a competitive approach within the now marketized dating scene as there are increased elements of "visualization" and "commensuration" (2015). Firstly, similar to the process of shopping for brands, with the visual display of potential partners simply arrayed on a phone, many of our participants adopted this rational mindset, mentioning specific testing methods they used to filter through all of the options available to them, exactly like filtering through clothing options at a store, first choosing

a lot, then eventually narrowing down to the best choices. One testing example is making sure they have common interests before even agreeing to meet in-person. In addition, the participants displayed a keen awareness of the fact that everyone is now being measured and compared within this visual environment, and they must have a competitive mindset in order to succeed, resulting in measuring potential partners, as well as always knowing that they themselves are being measured. After making the first contact through a dating app, this measuring method could be done through use of Snapchat, messaging apps, or Instagram, with the participants, act rationally by investigating the potential partner to see if they would be a good match, for example, if they have similar interests, or have sense of humor. In addition to testing, many also mentioned that they seek a partner that will add value to themselves individually by having opposite qualities or the ability to teach or "challenge" them in some way. In this sense, they are basically preparing for the relationship to fail but rationalizing this failure in the sense that if their 'self' improves in some way that the relationship was still beneficial and not a waste of time. This could be due to the way they have internalized the neoliberal values of the consumer society, which preaches the need to extract the most benefit out of life choices.

In contrast with the rationality used when sorting out potential options, the participants appear to have inconsistency in rationality when they actually meet someone and begin a relationship, as we would assume that a rational being would show effort when beginning to date, our participants did not display these actions. Although they said they value the traditional meanings of dating, the lack of effort in dating was a common theme among many of the interviews, giving us the impression that dating rituals may be changing, as our data suggest that at least two of the four pillars of rituals in consumer society: "script and performance" (Rook, 1985, p.253) have been modified. When examining their conduct we see a contrast to the past, when to propel a relationship in the beginning stages, the rational individual would go above and beyond, planning dinner dates and doing special activities to show the other person how much they cared. Our participants described their actions as exactly the opposite; doing regular activities and hanging out at home on the couch instead of going out. The participants were wary of wasting their time and money on someone and preferred to test the waters slowly before doing such romantic gestures. As for the script, when describing how their relationship was initiated, interviewees like Selena for instance, described how she and many of her friends had met boys through direct messaging on Instagram, which she described as completely acceptable and normal. Here we see another contradiction. Although the informants show an aversion to Tinder's beauty parade, by choosing someone on Instagram they are also judging people by their appearances since the app is mainly image based. In this scenario, the individual is under constant surveillance through observation, which stimulates the need to conform through a performance that highlights the attributes that make them part of what is accepted by society.

There is also another contributing explanation to why the ritual may be fading out, as the world is now digital, the quest for authenticity is more prominent than ever before, and our participants preferred the feeling of spontaneity and excitement that occurred from unexpected and natural encounters with potential partners instead of calculated and strategized methods of dating. However, we saw that the participants were quite open and accepting of receiving online communication from someone they had never met, an act which in the past could be considered strange or possibly threatening. Here we see a shift in what type of communication is acceptable in a day and age where efficiency is of utmost importance, as the participants knew they must be careful and skeptical of the people they see online, but they are still trapped in the cycle of being efficient, so they must utilize dating apps and online communication at the same time. Many of

the male interviewees said that approaching someone in a bar and asking for their number would not be a normal thing to do, and would even make some girls uncomfortable, and instead, the first move should be a friend request and message the potential love interest on Facebook. Here the participants showed signs that parts of the old dating rituals are fading away and being replaced with new digital capitalist norms that center more around strategy and efficiency. This could be attributed to the growing individualistic mentality taking place in the neoliberal consumer society, as technology accentuates individuals' ability to be productive by generating and consuming information and goods instantly, as well as a growing realist attitude due to the amount of information these Generation Zers consume through the internet. Perhaps this generation is so caught up in their efficient, individualistic lives that the old romantic ways are more of a dream than the possibility for reality.

The individualism theme is also greatly characterized by the participants value of freedom. Freedom is one of the values of the capitalistic system, and so are self-interest and fair competition. However, when it comes to relationships, Illouz (2015) argues that although freedom appears as the ultimate end of individual's consumption practices, it increases the feeling of insecurity and meaninglessness. The author explains that while in the sphere of consumption, freedom lies in the right to choose, in the realm of interpersonal relations it related to the so-called individualism. For our informants, this is a complicated aspect, because as discussed earlier, the amount of people they can choose to date actually creates more of a trapped feeling and anxiety instead of freedom. This feeling then seems to encourage them to pursue more individualistic behavior in two ways: firstly when looking for the best option, they appear to be more self-centered and focus on their own interests, desires and goals instead of focusing on the potential partner. Secondly, their individualistic interests are used to regain their sense of freedom by escaping the necessity to choose and stimulating fleeting actions. Some participants mentioned that when being with a partner they felt limited in their other options, for example not being able to party as much or travel, therefore leading them back to the 'fear of missing out' anxiety (Gezgin, Cakir & Yildirim, 2018). Illouz's theory is relevant again, as she claims that in order to feel free, people must feel sure on the choice they make and this is only possible if one has concrete understanding of our 'self'(2015, 2016). According to Illouz, this is because online dating brings the focus more on being introspective and knowing what the individual wants to be instead of conforming to others (2016). From the inconsistent answers in the interviews, it could be possible that the participants have not yet developed this introspective self quality, as they tended to state their values on one side, but when describing their actions there was not a parallel connection between their 'self' and its values and their actions. This inconsistency could also be explained by the "Social Judgement Theory" which states that the this attitude-behavior gap exists because humans do not evaluate everything consistently, but instead based off relative reference points or "anchor" which come from expectations from past experiences. It is the submersion in digitized consumer society from birth that could determine these specific reference points for Generation Z, and why their perspective has potential to be so different. (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). In this case, the participants have such a bombardment of information from various social media that they develop many separate "reference points" to which they base their actions and attitudes on. For example, Martina has separate anchors tied to her idea of dating versus how she should act as a young woman in order to be attractive, on one hand, she desires the old romance as seen in romanticized movies, but on the other hand, she sees the increase in gender equality in society through the media, which encourages her to be an independent woman and not act desperate for a relationship, and therefore she self-governs

herself and accepts that her boyfriend does not take her on romantic dates even though she has been conditioned to desire that as well.

Another possible explanation for this mismatch in attitudes and behaviors is that the participants are at the end of the "Identity and Role Confusion" stage in which they must develop their sense of self, and entering the "Intimacy versus Isolation" stage in life (Erickson, 1951). In accordance with a study by Berman and Wilson (2010)—which found an increase in stress and anxiety surrounding self-identity among teenagers due to the technological changes in communication and online environment where people can present themselves in an unlimited variation of ways, and are constantly under surveillance through social media—our study exemplified possible similarities to this, that due to the digital environment and constant social comparison, developing their sense of 'self' could be a more difficult task. As seen in many of the participants, they were insecure knowing that their every action and appearance would be judged online and struggled to commit to consistency in their dating behaviors. In the next of Erikson's stages, after at least some level of self has been established, the individuals must face the fear of rejection when seeking intimate relationships. Cyr, Berman and Smith (2015) determined that more online communication was correlated with a decrease in the quality of relationships among teenagers. Our empirical data suggests a similar issue in that the ability to be constantly connected with others through Snapchat or WhatsApp, that there is more of a focus on the quantity rather than quality and developing deeper, more meaningful relationships. As conceptualized in Bauman's definition of liquid modernity, when bombarded by the intense flow of information and options offered by consumer society, the postmodern individual loses the ability to establish strong connections and set long-term goals and starts to search for a variety of options aiming to find instant solutions and satisfaction. This coincides directly with our findings, as the feelings of the participants surrounding online communication with a potential love interest were generally lackluster, since they were aware that the online setting makes it much easier to present the best 'self', which usually lead them to a disappointing experience if they got to the stage of meeting in-person.

6.4 Final Considerations

Our research has provided a qualitative point of view that we believe has been lacking in this area of critical consumer studies, by the details of the deeper negative impacts of the consumer culture mentality, especially in the current state of digital capitalism, that could be occurring. When taking into consideration the potential implications of social media and constant access of information has caused on attitudes toward relationships, we found that the internalized processes by the participants and their practices were consistent to the findings of previous studies and theories: Anxiety, Fleeting Commitment, New Dating Rituals, and Vulnerability. In the latter two, our research presents interesting results. Although the participants acknowledge that the internet can help shy or introverted individuals with communication and approach people in a way they would never be able to in real life, all of them expressed that they can surpass the feeling of vulnerability and would rather meet someone in-person spontaneously then through the use of technological devices.

From our findings and discussion, we conclude that the participants show traces of internalization of the dynamics of today's highly stressed, capitalist consumer society and the norms it promotes. This is not new, however, we believe that there are deeper negative impacts on this young generation as they have been exposed to the digital devices since birth. The

heightened level of internalization due to social media influx has the potential to be much deeper and affect greater aspects of their lives, such as the ability to even love in the same way that has been practiced in the past. We saw a pattern of negative attitudes within the participants as they described their experiences; a desire to fill a void that has been created through constant submersion in their digital devices, they live in a world where everything is 'branded' and can be perceived as 'fake', and it leaves them feeling unfulfilled with themselves as well as with others. When conversing with the informants, the concept of dating sometimes appeared as a long lost dream, a fantasia for those who are too busy being 'efficient' to even try and date. Their prosumer mentality (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) and dependence on technology needed to keep up in the quickly evolving digital capitalist world could create more tension in the future, as stated by David, *"If you aren't connected online, you basically don't exist".* The participants lean toward meeting someone randomly rather than seeking someone out, so the use of dating apps may decrease, however at the same time, they prefer to maintain their relationships with online communication and fear the inability to communicate 24/7, which sucks them back into the digital world.

When measuring the informants' life priorities, our findings demonstrate that the meaning of success had little emphasis on marriage or a family, but instead career was the most important priority, which is consistent with the neoliberal consumer mentally, where material possessions are paramount. We found that each gender within our sample had similar views, both prioritizing financial independence over a stable relationship. Overall, we cannot yet determine if the individualistic attitude will create a more positive or negative impact on their lives, it is too early in their lives to tell what the outcome will be. Perhaps the individualism will lead them to become more self-aware at a young age so that they have a better chance at a loving relationship later on in life, alternatively, individualism in a digital capitalist society with continuing technological advances that facilitate communication and social interaction will weaken the need for individuals to hold social interaction with others in-person.

Although the findings present a few contradictions that could be concerning for the future as the participants take a more active role in society, there is a silver lining. Firstly, our interviewees expressed that they did, in fact, want monogamous relationships, and had a strong focus on building a trustworthy, "partnership" focused relationship, although marriage was not a high priority for them and was seen more as an unnecessary tradition. However, our participants demonstrated a very relaxed attitude about attaining these relationships, partly due to the fear of missing out, but we also interpret another reason being that they want to avoid even more expectations and pressure on their lives in addition to the already intensive need to conform to society and achieve the best results in their professional lives, by accumulation of capital and goods and self-development.

Many of the participants were aware of how often they use apps on their smartphones, many stating that their use is "more than I would like to admit", and acknowledging how it could be affecting other areas of their lives, such as their self-confidence and even the ability to see so many faces at once makes it difficult to distinguish what they really want. They seemed to be exhausted by the constant need to perform to others as well as having their whole life tracked not only by friends but most important by strangers. Other participants even described actions to fix their technology addiction such as moving apps like Instagram away from their phone's home screen so they didn't open it as often. Overall, the interviewees described efforts to try and resist the urge to use apps too frequently, even turning off notifications, but most failed, for example, going back on Tinder even though they had a bad experience with it before. However, it is still

the fact that they are aware and showing some signs of resistance that offers some hope. Here there is a possibility of connection to Kelly's, theory (2014) that technology has become so normal and integrated into our lives, that by resisting it we may be able to define our 'selves' more easily. Perhaps the participants described experiences with resistance attempts were ways in which they were trying to distinguish a more concrete sense of self.

We viewed two sides of this dilemma that the participants were caught in: How much connection to the online world is too much? On the extreme side, a few participants seemed open to all the social changes that technology may bring to the future, claiming that if it can fulfill the emotional needs and satisfy someone, human interaction will become obsolete, as stated by William:

> "*Well if the technology can provide the relationship and the emotional needs are met, then the only reason to meet with someone in real life is to reproduce. I guess some people still hang out with other people, but a lot of people won't with how technology is going*".

On the other side, some of the participants had a completely different hope for the future, hoping that it would evolve backwards and instead of technology replacing real-life interactions, some of the old ways would come back "like trends". These participants realized their need for human interaction and did not think that could be replaced by a completely virtual dating world. We also saw that the desire for spontaneous and real interactions may stem from an underlying frustration with the new set of rules for online flirting and discourse that take place on apps such as Tinder, which aligns with Zolfagharian and Yazdanparast's (2017) finding of "overcalculated and hypercompetitive" lifestyles due to the digital environment and the search for authenticity.

6.5 Limitations and Further Research

When reflecting on the process of this study and the results obtained, there are some limitations that should be pointed out. To get a more all-encompassing view of the generation's true attitudes and behaviors, triangulation of methods to collect the empirical material would be ideal, such as adding diary entries describing their usage of dating apps, in-person dates, and feelings, over a period of time like 6 months. Alternatively, this study could be expanded on by adding an ethnographic method to view Generation Z's real-life actions unobtrusively in their natural environment in order to get deeper and more meaningful descriptions, (Geertz, 1973) that may be more accurate than recollection during interviews as people are not always honest, or may not be aware of how they actually behave. However, since this is a topic that had never been searched before from a critical perspective the in-depth interviews appeared as a good starting point. We do acknowledge that there are limitations to using in-depth interviews, which include: the reliability of the recall of the participant, articulation of experiences, and the questions ability to prompt detailed discussion (Given, 2008). However, since the interviews were non-standardized, this can be a strength, aiding in the exploration of the topic which can lead to more interesting discoveries rather than staying in a box and scientifically testing a theory (Kvale, 2002). Another limitation with the research method was the disadvantage of having two female interviewers since the topic was sensitive and related to relationships, we felt that some of the younger male participants would have been more comfortable and honest in their answers if a male researcher was conducting the interview. With all interviews, it was important not to consider everything said as the truth, (Hultman, 2018) and because the respondents may have felt uncomfortable talking about personal relationships there is a chance that they were not entirely truthful in their answers.

Another consideration is the variety of participants obtained. We chose to keep our sample fairly homogenous, which helps narrow down the focus of study, reducing ambiguity in the results, and requires less interview subjects (Francis et al, 2010). However, the homogeneity of our study opens doors for other studies to choose a different focus and see if the attitudes and experiences of that specific group of Generation Zers are different. Three opportunities for this include gender or sexual orientation, nationality/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Since the research was conducted in Sweden, a large proportion of the participants were of Swedish nationality, and most of the participants were of the same social class and education level, as well as identified as male or female. However, since culture, gender, and socioeconomic status could each influence experiences and attitudes toward relationships in different ways, a study aiming to compare cultural differences within this generation's dating actions, or a study comparing dating attitudes and experiences among people with different socioeconomic statuses or gender identification and sexual orientation could lead to some interesting insights and provide the opportunity to greatly change or enhance the results of the study. We also noticed that some of the non-Swedish participants commented on the difference of the dating practices in Sweden compared to their home country, so further research has the opportunity to explore these interesting cultural differences and their implications in more depth.

Since our empirical findings brought up some changing dynamics among gender norms, we think it would be worthwhile to conduct a longer study over a period of several years to see how the more equal gender dynamic evolves and influences behaviors. Also, further research could explore the trend we witnessed of the more casual way of dating as a new developing ritual that may change the structure of the dating market, for instance, less 'going out' and spending

money on dates. We recognize that this study is more of a preliminary, starting point for this topic, and the results are not generalizable to the entire Generation Z, so another alternative for branching off this research would be to conduct some large-scale quantitative research that investigates certain findings such as the void.

Lastly, we believe there is a great opportunity to investigate the practices that this generation uses to fill "the void", such as an ethnographic study to explore the concept of the random social gatherings with strangers that commonly take place among Generation Zers through use of the Jodel app, and the connection between this and the digital consumer culture. Our empirical findings showed that the Generation Z participants showed signs of resistance to this highly digitalized culture when they described the awareness of their technology addiction and tried methods to break out of it. New research could examine if this generation will keep failing to achieve their ideal of "realness" within romantic relationships as technology develops or is it simply due to their developmental stage in life and will they be able to escape it later when they are more mature?

Reference List

Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists: a reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research. *Academy of Management Review*, 28(1): 13-34.

Anderson, B. (2016). Neoliberal affects. *Progress in Human Geography*, 40(6), pp.734-753.

Anderson, J. and Rainie, L. (2012). Millennials will benefit and suffer due to their hyperconnected lives. [online] Pew Research Center: Internet, *Science & Tech*. Available at:http://www.pewinternet.org/2012/02/29/millennials-will-benefit-and-suffer-due-to-their-hyperconnected-lives/ [Accessed 7 Apr. 2018].

Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Reprint, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015.

Bauman, Z. (2003). *Amor liquido*. Reprint. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar. 2004.

Bauman, Z. and Lyon, D. (2013). *Liquid Surveillance*. Hoboken: Wiley.

Belk, R. (1988). Possessions and the Extended Self, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Volume 15, Issue 2, 1 September, Pages 139–168, https://doi.org/10.1086/209154

Belk, R. (2016). Extended self and the digital world. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 10, pp.50-54.

Berman, S., & Wilson, J. (2014). *Changing individuals in a changing world: Recent trends in identity development*. Presented at the Society for Research in Identity Formations annual convention, Philadelphia, PA.

Ryan, G, & Bernard, H 2003, 'Techniques to Identify Themes', *Field Methods*, 15, 1, p. 85, Complementary Index, EBSCOhost, viewed 27 May 2018.

Bittencourt, R (2014). *A falsa soberania do consumidor no mercado capitalista e o fetichismo da publicidade*. In: Revista Espaço Ética: Educação, Gestão e Consum*o*(3), pp. 16-33.

Bradbury, R. (2017). *The Digital Lives of Millennials and Gen Z*. Live Person Inc.

Brightman, J. (2003). Mapping methods for qualitative data structuring (QDS). In: *IOE Conference* May 2003. [online] London: Institute of Education, pp.1-12. Available at: https://banxia.com/pdf/de/Map_for_qual_data_struct.pdf [Accessed 1 May 2018].

Bryman, A. & Bell, E. (2011). *Business Research Methods*. 3rd edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Chapman, Heather M. (2011), Love: A Biological, Psychological and Philosophical Study. *Senior Honors Projects*. Paper 254, [online] Available at: http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/254 [Accessed 27 Mar. 2018].

Charitsis, V. (2018). *Self-tracking, datafication and the biopolitical prosumption of lif*e. Karlstad: Karlstads universitet.

CommScope (2017). *The GENERATION Z Study of Tech Intimates*. *CommScope Inc.*, pp.1-46.

Cook, D (2014). Foucault, Freud, and the Repressive Hypothesis, *Journal Of The British Society For Phenomenology*, 45, 2, p. 148, Supplemental Index, EBSCOhost, viewed 27 May 2018.

Cooley, C. (1964). *Human nature and the social order.* New York: Schocken Books.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cyr, B, Berman, S, & Smith, M (2015). The Role of Communication Technology in Adolescent Relationships and Identity Development, *Child & Youth Care Forum,* 44, 1, p. 79, Complementary Index, EBSCOhost, viewed 5 May 2018.

Dalessandro, C. (2018). Internet Intimacy: Authenticity and Longing in the Relationships of Millennial Young Adults. *Sociological Perspectives,* p.1.

de Jong, M. and Collins, A. (2017). Love and looks: A discourse of romantic love and consumer culture. *Acta Academica,* 49(1).

Draper, A.K., (2004). Workshop on 'Developing qualitative research method skills: analysing and applying your results.' The principles and application of qualitative research, *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society,* vol. 63, no. 4, pp.641-646.

Dubois, A.D., & Gadde, L.E. (2002). Systematic Combining: An abductive approach to case research, *Journal of Business Research,* vol. 55, pp.553-560.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., & Jackson, P. R. (2015). *Management and Business Research*, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Erikson, EH 1963, *Childhood And Society,* n.p.: New York : W. W. Norton, 1963, Library catalogue (Lovisa), EBSCOhost, viewed 27 May 2018.

Foucault, M. (2013). *Discipline and punish*. Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library.

Fox, J, & Anderegg, C (2014). Romantic Relationship Stages and Social Networking Sites: Uncertainty Reduction Strategies and Perceived Relational Norms on Facebook,

Cyberpsychology, Behavior & Social Networking, 17, 11, pp. 685-691, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, viewed 9 April 2018.

Fox, J, Warber, K, & Makstaller, D (2013). The role of Facebook in romantic relationship development: An exploration of Knapp's relational stage model, *Journal Of Social & Personal Relationships*, 30, 6, pp. 771-794, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, viewed 8 April 2018.

Francis, J. J., M. Johnston, C. Robertson, L. Glidewell, V. Entwistle, M. P. Eccles, and J. M. Grimshaw (2010).What is an adequate sample size? Operationalising data saturation for theory-based interview studies. *Psychology and Health,* 25:1229–45

Fromm, E. (1956). *The art of loving*. New York: Harper & Row.

FutureCast LLC (2017). *Getting to Know Gen Z: How The Pivotal Generation is Different From Millennials*. Barkley Inc.

Gaby, D, & Carolina, C. (2016). Screened Intimacies: Tinder and the Swipe Logic, *Social Media + Society*, Vol 2, Directory of Open Access Journals, EBSCOhost, viewed 6 April 2018

Gasson, S. (2004). Rigor in grounded theory research: An interpretive perspective on generating theory from qualitative field studies. In M. E. Whitman & A. B. Woszczynski (Eds.), *The handbook of information systems research* (pp. 79–102). Hershey, PA: Idea Group.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books

Consumoteca (2018). *Geração CTRL Z*. [online] Available at: https://www.consumotecalab.com/ [Accessed 29 Mar. 2018].

Gezgin, D, Cakir, O, & Yildirim, S. (2018). The Relationship between Levels of Nomophobia Prevalence and Internet Addiction among High School Students: The Factors Influencing Nomophobia, *International Journal Of Research In Education And Science*, 4, 1, pp. 215-225, ERIC, EBSCOhost, viewed 27 May 2018.

Giddens, A. (1992). *The transformation of intimacy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Given, LM, (2008). *The Sage Encyclopedia Of Qualitative Research Methods, Thousand Oak*s, Sage Online, EBSCOhost

Glaser, B. G. and A. L. Strauss (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Researc*h. New York, Aldine.

Goffman, E 1959, *The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life*, n.p.: New York : Doubleday, 1959, Library catalogue (Lovisa), EBSCOhost, viewed 27 May 2018.

Hardey, M (2008). The Formation of Social Rules for Digital Interactions, *Information, Communication & Society*, 11, 8, pp. 1111-1131, Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text, EBSCOhost, viewed 9 April 2018.

Heino, R.D., Ellison, N.B., Gibbs, J.L. (2010). Relationshopping: Investigating the Market Metaphor in Online Dating, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 27(4): 427–47. Google Scholar, Link, ISI.

Hobbs, M., Owen, S. and Gerber, L. (2016). Liquid love? Dating apps, sex, relationships and the digital transformation of intimacy. *Journal of Sociology*, 53(2), pp.271-284.

Hodder, I. (2012). *Entangled: An archaeology of the relationships between humans and things*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hultman, J. (2018). Studying Qualities. Lecture. Qualitative Research BUSR31, Lund University. Delivered 04 February 2018.

Illouz, E. (1997). *Consuming the romantic utopia*. Berkeley: University of California press.

Illouz, E. (2015). *Why love hurts.* Cambridge: Polity.

Illouz, E. (2016). Cold intimacies. Cambridge: Polity.

JWT Intelligence. (2016). *Gen Z rising.* [online] Available at: https://www.jwtintelligence.com/2015/04/gen-z-rising/ [Accessed 29 Mar. 2018].

Kardaras, N. (2016). *It's 'digital heroin': How screens turn kids into psychotic junkies.* [online] Nypost.com. Available at: https://nypost.com/2016/08/27/its-digital-heroin-how-screens-turn-kids-into-psychotic-junkies/ [Accessed 7 Apr. 2018].

Kelly, K. (2014). *What technology wants.* New York: Penguin Books.

Kessler, C. (2014). Novas formas de relacionamento: fim do amor romântico ou um novo amor-consumo?. Sociedade e Cultura, 16(2).

Kotler, P. and Keller, K. (2012). *Marketing Management*. 14th ed. Boston [Mass.]: Pearson.

Kozinets, R., Ashman, R., & Patterson, A., (2015). Reflections of Self in Food Sharing Interactions and Experiences, *Advances in Consumer Research Volume 43,* Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 111-116.

Kozinets, R.V. (2002). The Field Behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*. Vol. 39, pp. 61-72

Kvale, S. (1994). Ten standard Objections to Qualitative Research Interviews, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 25(2): 147-173.

Landau, E. (2016). *Commitment for Millennials: Is It Okay, Cupid?*. [online] Scientific American Blog Network. Available at: https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/mind-guest-blog/commitment-for-millennials-is-it-okay-cupid/ [Accessed 29 Mar. 2018].

Lenhart, A., Anderson, M. and Smith, A. (2015). Chapter 1: *Basics of Teen Romantic Relationships.* [online] Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/10/01/basics-of-teen-romantic-relationships/ [Accessed 29 Mar. 2018].

Leslie, I. (2016). The scientists who make apps addictive. [online] *The Economist 1843 Magazine.* Available at: https://www.1843magazine.com/features/the-scientists-who-make-apps-addictive [Accessed 7 Apr. 2018].

Lincoln, Y, & Guba, E. (1985), Naturalistic Inquiry, n.p.: Beverly Hills, Calif. : Sage, cop. 1985, Library catalogue (Lovisa), EBSCOhost, viewed 1 April 2018.

Manning, J. (2013). Construction of Values in Online and Offline Dating Discourses: Comparing Presentational and Articulated Rhetorics of Relationship Seeking. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication,* 19(3), pp.309-324.

Marganski, A, & Fauth, K. (2013).Socially Interactive Technology and Contemporary Dating: A Cross-Cultural Exploration of Deviant Behaviors among Young Adults in the Modern, Evolving Technological World [article], *International Criminal Justice Review*, 4, p. 357, HeinOnline, EBSCOhost, viewed 9 April 2018.

Massey, M. (1979). *The people puzzle: Understanding yourself & others.* Reston, VA: Reston Publishing.

Meenagh, J. (2015). Flirting, dating, and breaking up within new media environments, *Sex Education,* 15, 5, pp. 458-471, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost, viewed 8 April 2018.

Northcott, N. (1996). Cognitive mapping: An approach to qualitative data analysis. *NT Research,* [online] 1(6), pp.456-463. Available at: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/174498719600100610#articleCitationDownloadCo ntainer [Accessed 27 May 2018].

Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. (2014). Millennials in Adulthood.[online] Available at: http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/ [Accessed 29 Mar. 2018].

Reid, A. and Thomas, C. (2017). A Case Study in Smartphone Usage and Gratification in the Age of Narcissism. *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction*, 13(2), pp.40-56.

Ritzer, G. and Jurgenson, N. (2010). Production, Consumption, Prosumption. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10(1), pp.13-36.

Roberts, P. (2014). Instant Gratification, American Scholar, 83, 4, pp. 18-31, *Literary Reference Center,* EBSCOhost, viewed 28 March 2018.

Rook, DW (1985). The Ritual Dimension of Consumer Behavior, *Journal Of Consumer Research*, 12, 3, pp. 251-264, Business Source Complete, EBSCO*host*, viewed 27 May 2018.

Romele, A, Gallino, F, Emmenegger, C, and Gorgone, D (2017). Panopticism is Not Enough: Social Media as Technologies of Voluntary Servitude. *Surveillance & Society* (forthcoming).

Sassatelli, R. (2009). *Consumer culture*. London: SAGE.

Schiller, D (1999). Digital Capitalism, Networking The Global Market System, Cambridge, Mass: *The MIT Press*, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost, viewed 23 May 2018.

Schwartz, B. (2004). *The paradox of choice.* New York: Ecco.

Schwartz, B., Ward, A., Monterosso, J., Lyubomirsky, S., White, K. and Lehman, D. (2002). Maximizing versus satisficing: Happiness is a matter of choice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 83(5), pp.1178-1197.

Schwartz, S. H. (2012). An Overview of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture,* 2(1).

Sherif, M, & Hovland, C 1961, *Social Judgment : Assimilation And Contrast Effects In Communication And Attitude Change*, n.p.: New Haven : Yale U.P., 1961, Library catalogue (Lovisa), EBSCO*host*, viewed 27 May 2018.

Skålén, P., Fougère, M., & Fellesson, M. (2008). *Marketing discourse: A critical perspective.* London: Routledge.

Sreejesh, S, Mohapatra, S, & Anusree, M. (2014). Business Research Methods. [Elektronisk Resurs]. An Applied Orientation, n.p., Springer International Publishing 2014., Library catalogue (Lovisa), EBSCOhost, viewed 28 March 2018.

Sternberg, R. J. (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Review,* 93(2), 119-135. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.93.2.119

Sternberg, R. and Weis, K. (2006). The new psychology of love. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Strauss, AL 1987, *Qualitative Analysis For Social Scientists*, n.p.: Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1987, Library catalogue (Lovisa), EBSCOhost, viewed 27 May 2018.

Sumter, S, Vandenbosch, L, & Ligtenberg, L (2017). Love me Tinder: Untangling emerging adults motivations for using the dating application Tinder', *Telematics And Informatics,* 34, pp. 67-78, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost, viewed 9 April 2018.

Tadajewski, M. (2010). Toward a history of critical marketing studies. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 26(9-10), pp.773-824.

Turkle, S 2011, Alone Together : [Elektronisk Resurs] *Why We Expect More From Technology And Less From Each Other*, n.p.: New York : Basic Books, c2011, Library catalogue (Lovisa), EBSCOhost, viewed 27 May 2018.

Turner, A. (2015). Generation Z: Technology and Social Interest, *Journal Of Individual Psychology,* 71, 2, pp. 103-113, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost, viewed 8 April 2018.

Wheeldon, J. and Faubert, J. (2009). Framing Experience: Concept Maps, Mind Maps, and Data Collection in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 8(3), pp.68-83.

Wotipka, C. and High, A. (2016). An idealized self or the real me? Predicting attraction to online dating profiles using selective self-presentation and warranting. *Communication Monographs,* 83(3), pp.281-302.

Zolfagharian, M, & Yazdanparast, A. (2017). 'The dark side of consumer life in the age of virtual and mobile technology', *Journal Of Marketing Management*, 33, 15/16, pp. 1304-1335, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, viewed 7 April 2018.

Appendix A:

Table 2: Definitions of Social Applications

Term	Definition
Tinder	Tinder is a free dating application that can be downloaded directly to a phone or computer. The application aims to promote a meeting between people with the ability to filter age, location radius, and gender. Users swipe left or right on the participant's pictures and if both users swipe right it's a match. It has a reputation for being used mainly to find sexual partners, since it offers a simple and easy way to connect with people
Snapchat	Snapchat is an instant messaging social network aimed at mobile phones. The app can be used to send text, photos and videos and the difference is that this content can only be seen once, since it is deleted soon after. All content posted will "self-destruct" in 24 hours. Because of its ephemeral nature, it became a popular platform for young people to share nude picture to others, specially because if someone takes a screenshot on the post, the user get s a notification.
WhatsApp	WhatsApp is a messaging app that can also be used for voice calls, video calls, and share media like photos and videos.
Bumble	Uses the same dynamics of Tinder however, , the woman is in control and must initiate the conversation within 24 hours or the match disappears.
Jodel	Jodel is a hyperlocation mobile application. The users can only see the content that has been posted by people who are within a radius of 10 kilometers. The posts are anonymous and can be upvoted, so the most popular posts are placed at the top. Common for sharing memes and tips about what is going on in a certain place.
Memes	In the world of the internet, refers to the phenomenon of" viralization "of an information, meaning any video, image, phrase, idea, music and etc, spread among several users quickly, achieving great popularity. Memes can reflect culture in a symbolic way and they are socially constructed ideas.
Facebook Messenger	A messaging application through the Facebook platform that provides services like text, calls, image and other file sending.
Yellow (Yubo)	Uses the same swipe dynamic of Tinder, but it is made to make new friends therefore has a lower age requirement, 13 years old. . It has options to livestream, send images, messages, and group chat.
Match.com and	Online dating websites.

OK Cupid	
Instagram	A mobile application that allows the user to take photos, apply effects to the images and share with your friends. Images can also be shared on other social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter. Users can comment on each others photos and use hashtags (#) so that it is possible to find images related to the same theme, even though the people who took these pictures are not their friends. Recently the app launched a tool called stories that allows sharing of photos and videos that are available for just 24 hours, just like Snapchat. A direct and private message tool is also available, this action commonly referred to as "DMing".

Standard Questionnaire:

1. Define yourself as person.
2. What are your most important values, both for yourself and what you look for in a partner?
3. What do you like to do with your time, activities, hobbies etc.?
4. How do you see yourself as "successful" in the future?
5. What does love mean to you?
6. Does it come naturally?
7. What does being in a relationship mean to you?
8. Tell us something interesting about your love life, imagine if you were giving advice to your kids?
9. What has been your biggest challenge with relationships?
10. What has been the most rewarding aspect about your relationships?
11. How do you feel about your fellow generation Z peers?
12. What is the role of technology in your life?
13. Describe your cellphone routine?
14. How do you manage your "presence" online? Do you feel pressure do state your opinions about important matters? If so, what kind of stuff do you post online?
15. What is the role of technology in your relationship?
16. Do you use Tinder or another dating app, now or in the past. Why?
17. Describe your experience with the app, pros and cons, would you recommend it
18. What do you enjoy or hate most about these apps
19. What do they think of specific dating apps: bumble vs tinder vs the league?
20. What features would they rather have in dating apps?
21. If you could design their own dating app how would it look?
22. Do you think relationships built on tinder or through media are more or less authentic than when you meet someone in-person?
23. What is your ideal way to meet people. What would be the ideal way to "date"?
24. What do you expect from a date? And a relationship?
25. What is means to you to fall in and out of love? How this process works?
26. For you, what it means to be loved? And to love someone?
27. Define intimacy, passion and commitment.
28. What is your view on old courtship rituals versus dating practices today?
29. How do you see yourself in the future when it comes to relationships?