'Generation Z's Journey to Discover and Engage with Start-ups'

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Table of Content

Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between Generation Z and start-ups, investigating how young consumers discover and engage with emerging brands in the digital age. The research question guiding this study is: 'How do the discovery and learning behaviors of Generation Z towards start-ups influence their engagement intentions, and what are the implications for entrepreneurial strategies?' by addressing this question, the study aims to uncover valuable insights into the motivations, preferences, and influences that drive Generation Z's interactions with start-ups.

The literature review identifies a gap in understanding the specific nuances of Generation Z's interactions with start-ups, highlighting the need for research to bridge this gap and contribute to the fields of entrepreneurial marketing and consumer behavior. Through qualitative interviews and data analysis, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Generation Z consumer journey and its implications for entrepreneurial ventures.

The findings illuminate the unique behavior through which Generation Z discovers and learns about start-ups, offering insights into their preferences, motivations, and decision-making aspects. By enhancing the Updated Theory of Planned Behavior Model with unique behavioral insights, this study advances our knowledge of Generation Z's consumer behavior and provides a framework for engaging with this digitally native generation in the evolving start-up landscape.

Keywords: Generation Z; Consumer behavior; Discovery and learning; Start-ups; Theory of Planned Behavior

Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

1.1   Start-ups are Facing Challenges

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon that has evolved to encompass a range of activities, including identifying market opportunities, acquiring resources, creating innovative solutions, and taking calculated risks (Baron, 2006; Davidsson, 2016). Unlike linear processes, entrepreneurship is characterized by a non-linear journey that involves multiple iterations, pivots, and feedback loops. Entrepreneurs, often seen as risk-takers, visionaries, and problem-solvers, must navigate these complexities with caution and agility, blending creativity, passion, and determination to succeed (Baron, 2006; Kreiser et al., 2013; Acs & Szerb, 2010).

The creation of a new venture begins with identifying opportunities within the market or environment, followed by assessing these opportunities for feasibility and potential success (Metallo et al., 2021). This pathway is fraught with challenges, particularly in emerging economies where start-ups are often constrained by limited resources and a lack of brand recognition. Unlike established companies, start-ups must secure funding, build strong teams, and navigate complex regulatory environments, all while striving to gain a foothold in competitive markets (Parra et al., 2023; Acs & Szerb, 2010).

One of the critical challenges for new ventures is attracting and retaining customers, which is vital for establishing a market presence. Entrepreneurial marketing tactics can play a significant role in alleviating this burden. These tactics involve creative and cost-effective strategies that build brand awareness, target the right audience, and effectively communicate the value proposition of the start-up (Morris et al., 2002; Morrish, 2011). Developing and maintaining a customer base is crucial not just at the launch of the venture but throughout its lifecycle, as it ensures ongoing relevance and sustainability in a highly competitive environment.

The high failure rate of start-ups, estimated at around 90%, underscores the difficulty these ventures face in capturing and maintaining their target audience (Shane et al., 2003; Szathmári et al., 2024). Unlike multinational corporations and SMEs, which have abundant resources to swiftly adapt to market changes, start-ups often struggle with limited knowledge, funding, and consumer bases. This makes it imperative for start-ups to deeply understand their target consumers to develop strategies that resonate with their needs and preferences (Bresciani & Eppler, 2010).

A significant demographic that start-ups are increasingly targeting is Generation Z, a group with considerable influence in the consumer market and an estimated spending power of $360 billion (Noenickx, 2023). Understanding and mastering the nuances of Generation Z's consumer behavior is not just beneficial but essential for start-ups seeking sustainable growth and success. This demographic's unique characteristics and digital nativity make their engagement with start-ups particularly valuable for entrepreneurs who are looking to establish and grow their brands from the ground up, despite the inherent challenges of entrepreneurship (Jawahar & McLaughlin, 2001).

This thesis aims to explore how Generation Z's discovery and engagement behaviors are crucial to the success of start-ups. By focusing on this specific demographic, the research seeks to provide insights that are instrumental in shaping entrepreneurial strategies and advancing the field of entrepreneurship. Current literature often presents a generic view of Generation Z's behaviors towards start-ups, failing to capture the unique dynamics between these two groups. This thesis, therefore, contributes to expanding the body of knowledge on the strategies that can

enhance the success of start-ups by understanding and leveraging the behaviors of Generation Z.

1.2   Generation Z Shaping the Market

As the world's largest population, with an estimated population of approximately 32% of the global population, Generation Z's unique characteristics and buying habits are sparking an interest in researching this cohort among businesses (Yardi, 2024). Unlike previous generations, Generation Z has grown up entirely in the digital age, shaping their values, preferences, and approach to consumption (Li & Hassan, 2023). Generation Z's constant digital connection has profoundly shaped their identities and preferences. They rely heavily on online sources to learn about companies and their offerings, with social media platforms influencing their decisions (Li & Hassan, 2023). Their buying decisions are driven by a desire for social connection and a brand that aligns with their values. Moreover, as they reach adulthood, Generation Z has a rising disposable income, making them a powerful and attractive force in the marketplace (Shin et al., 2021).

Understanding these unique characteristics is crucial for businesses to develop effective marketing strategies that resonate with Generation Z (Chang & Chang, 2023). Moreover, tailoring marketing messages and channels to resonate with Generation Z can significantly improve campaign effectiveness and brand loyalty. Lastly, knowing what Generation Z values allows companies to design and develop products and services that cater to their needs and desires (Thomas et al., 2015).

1.3   Capturing Generation Z's Consumer Behavior

While the potential rewards of understanding Generation Z consumers are undeniable, navigating this landscape presents unique challenges for start-up companies. The challenge of capturing a full picture of Generation Z's consumer behavior extends beyond research. Traditional consumer behavior models often rely on historical data and demographics to predict future purchases (Blackwell et al., 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2012). Additionally, they adopt a linear approach that fails to capture the more flexible nature of Generation Z's consumer behavior. The disconnect between traditional models and the dynamic landscape of Generation Z's consumer behavior has led to growing criticism from researchers and marketers (Wijerathne & Peter, 2023). These limitations highlight the need for alternative frameworks or adaptations of existing models to predict Generation Z's complex buying behavior accurately.

One model attempting to capture the consumer behavior of Generation Z adhering to their characteristics is the updated Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model by Kahawandala and Peter, based on the original TPB model by Ajzen (Ajzen, 1991; Kahawandala & Peter, 2020). This revised model offers a more comprehensive understanding of Generation Z's consumer behavior by incorporating additional constructs specific to this demographic.

1.4   Aim of the Study

Our research into the existing literature led us to identify a significant gap. While the updated Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model provides a strong foundation for understanding the consumer behavior of Generation Z in general, it does not deal with their behavior concerning start-up companies, particularly how they discover and learn about these ventures. Unlike established brands, start-ups must be strategic in their outreach and attract a target audience (Ionitã, 2012). Understanding Generation Z's discovery and learning behavior is essential for start-ups to cut through the information noise and stay ahead of the curve regarding future

market trends. Therefore, our research aims to address this specific gap by exploring the following question:

'How do Generation Z's discovery and learning behaviors toward start-ups influence their engagement intentions, and what are the implications for entrepreneurial strategies?'

Through an inductive approach and qualitative data collection methods, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of Generation Z's unique consumer behavior regarding start-up companies. Therefore, by examining this population, we need to understand how this population obtains and learns about start-ups using a case study. The study seeks to fill the existing literature gap and provide theoretical and practical implications for scholars and practitioners.

1.5   Thesis Outline

After introducing the main topics and research questions, chapter 2 will explore the models and literature referenced earlier. Chapter 3 will outline our methodology, covering research design, case selection, sampling strategy, and data collection methods. Chapter 4 will present our findings and analysis. In Chapter 5, we will discuss these findings. Finally, chapter 6 will conclude our research, highlight practical research implications, and suggest areas for future research.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Generation Z Characteristics

Generation Z are individuals born between 1995 and 2005 (Wijerathne & Peter, 2023). Fully immersed in the digital age, they obtain remarkable tech-savviness due to their upbringing surrounded by smartphones and social media platforms (Kahawandala et al., 2020). Highly adept at multitasking, Generation Z has improved the ability to simultaneously assess content across multiple devices (Thomas et al., 2015). Given their upbringing in the digital age, Generation Z's consumer behavior is characterized by its reliance on online sources for product information gathering, differentiating from the previous generation's reliance on traditional media sources, such as newspapers and TV (Li & Hassan, 2023). For this generation, it is a matter of a click to emerge in the wealth of knowledge readily online when required. Therefore, this generation's cognitive decision-making ability based on readily available information sources is considerably high (Kahawandala et al., 2020). The internet, from search engines to social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, is their primary avenue for product discovery and communication channels (Zhulal et al., 2023). These social media platforms' short audio and video clips complement their information intake (Kahawandala et al., 2020). A staggering 53% of Generation Z individuals spend four hours or more daily on these social media apps, with a mere 3% allocating less than an hour to them (Carter, 2024).

Social media platforms wield significant influence, serving as essential channels for product exploration through user-generated content and influencer endorsements. Trust and authenticity are crucial for Generation Z, leading them to prioritize user-generated content, online reviews, and influencers over traditional celebrity endorsements when making purchase decisions (Sachdev et al., 2021). This emphasis on authenticity extends to their preference for visual content, finding engaging presentations, video reviews, and user-generated content more compelling than text-heavy descriptions.

Generation Z's purchasing decisions are notably influenced by their generation, with peers often guiding in product and brand selection, whether directly or indirectly (Wijerathne & Peter, 2023). When Generation Z discovers and researches a product or a brand, they frequently prioritize its sustainability and innovation. They stand out as the most environmentally conscious generation, displaying a profound concern for the planet and readiness to change habits and invest in more sustainable products (Shaw, 2023). Additionally, Generation Z seeks novelty and excitement in products, valuing innovation that enriches their lives. However, innovation transcends mere functionality. They seek brands that challenge norms and provide unique experiences (Sjahruddin & Adif, 2024). Major companies quickly develop digital platforms and implement online revenue models (Chang & Chang, 2023). However, despite the potential of the Generation Z demographic, there remains a noticeable lack of thorough consumer behavior analysis, particularly within the start-up sector (Metallo et al., 2021).

2.2 Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior refers to how individuals and organizations satisfy their needs and wants (Lipowski, 2017). In the past, consumer behavior research often focused on understanding individual motivations and decision-making within a more limited set of influences as they relied on traditional media like television and print for information (Waguespack & Hyman, 1993). However, consumer behavior is not static. It has undergone significant transformation over time (Pachauri, 2002).

In today's digital age, consumers are tightly intertwined with technology, granting them access to information, products, and consumer reviews (Suherlan, 2023). This technological integration marks a profound shift in consumer behavior, reshaping how individuals search for, compare, and purchase goods and services. Online reviews, social media, and other digital information sources play a significant role in influencing consumer perceptions and buying decisions (Wang et al., 2022).

As consumers navigate this evolving landscape, their behavior follows a complex process, as stated by researchers over the past decades. Walters characterizes consumer behavior as a multifaceted decision-making process, considering what, when, where, how, and from whom to purchase (Walters, 1974). Mowen delves deeper into the dynamic of buying units and the intricate exchange processes involved in acquiring, consuming, and disposing of goods, services, experiences, and ideas (Mowen & Carlson, 2003). Similarly, Kotler and Keller identify cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors as influential drivers of consumer behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

2.2.1 Consumer Behavior Models

In researching this study, we encountered numerous definitions and theories regarding consumer behavior. In addition to these definitions, as described above, we also encountered many models specifically designed to analyze consumer behavior. Extensive research into consumer behavior models over the decades was conducted. Upon analysis, it became evident that many of the models discussed in the literature are grounded in five fundamental principles. To delve deeper into these principles, we will explore them within the context of two highly regarded consumer behavior models.

The Engel-Blackwell-Miniard Model

The Engel-Blackwell-Miniard (EBM) model is a renowned framework in consumer behavior research. Comprising five sequential stages, the model begins with 'problem recognition,' where consumers identify a gap between their current state and a desired state spurred by internal or external stimuli. Subsequently, consumers embark on an 'information search' quest, actively seeking relevant information from diverse sources. This stage is pivotal in shaping perceptions and influencing subsequent stages of the decision-making process. Following information acquisition, consumers proceed to the 'alternative evaluation' phase, where they meticulously assess available options based on a multitude of criteria, including price, quality, brand reputation, and personal preferences. This stage often involves comparative analysis and trade-offs as consumers weigh the pros and cons of each alternative. Once alternatives have been thoroughly evaluated, consumers reach a 'purchase decision' wherein they select the product or service deemed most suitable to fulfill their needs and preferences. This decision-making process may be influenced by rational considerations, emotional impulses, or a blend of both, which are contingent upon factors such as product involvement and individual characteristics. Finally, the journey culminates in the 'post-purchase evaluation' stage, where

consumers reflect on their purchase experience and assess whether the chosen product or service meets their expectations (Blackwell et al., 2006).

Kotler and Keller

As described by Kotler and Keller, the decision-making process also focuses on these five stages. 'Need recognition' is the spark that ignites the buying process arising from a discrepancy between a desired state and an actual state. 'Information search' involves actively seeking information better to understand the identified need and the available solutions. After seeking information, the consumer enters the stage of 'evaluation of alternatives'; in this stage, alternative possibilities will be compared. After the evaluation, the 'purchase decision' will be made; here, the product or service to buy will be chosen. However, the decision does not end at the purchase. Now, the consumer enters the 'post-purchase evaluation' stage. This stage involves reflecting on your purchase and assessing your satisfaction (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

2.3 Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1991), claims that an individual's behavior is determined by three key components: the target behavior, which comprises the attitude towards the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavior and control. Together, these components post behavioral intentions, which act as an indication of actual behavior. TPB has frequently been applied to explain and forecast consumption purchasing, health behaviors, and novelty technology usage (Ajzen, 1991; Conner & Armitage, 1998).

In this case, attitude means the extent of perception of the behavior in question, positively or negatively. Regarding Generation Z and start-ups, this relates to the attitudes and appraisals of interacting with start-ups. The literature has indicated that people's perceptions of innovation, novelty, and entrepreneurial activities can strongly influence start-up interaction (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Shiau and Luo, 2012). Therefore, Subjective norm can be described as the social pressure to perform or not perform a particular behavior. To the youth of Generation Z, these norms are relative to their friends, celebrities, and what they find on social networks. The decisions regarding behavior and what kinds of start-ups are discovered and engaged with may be significantly influenced by the endorsement and acceptance of start-ups from one's circle of friends (Ajzen, 1991; Chen et al., 2015). Perceived behavioral control is the perceived simplicity or difficulty of performing a specific behavior, considering the experience and expected barriers. For Generation Z, this might result from familiarity with new technologies and platforms and confidence in dealing with start-ups. In the context of the health behavior model, intention is defined to reflect the person's decision to perform the behavior, and perceived behavioral control is defined as the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior, with higher perceived behavioral control implying higher likelihood of engaging in the behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Taylor & Todd, 1995).

While the TRA (Theory of Reasoned Action), the initial model before the TPB by Azjen and Fishbein, suggests that behavioral intention is the primary determinant of behavior, TPB recognizes that intentions alone may not always translate into action if individuals perceive barriers that hinder their ability to carry out the behavior. Therefore, TPB emphasizes the importance of considering individuals' perceived control over their behavior when predicting their actions (Azjen, 1991). The TPB posits that these determinants collectively shape an individual's intention to engage in a particular behavior, with stronger intentions generally leading to a higher likelihood of actual behavior performing (Azjen, 1991). Moreover, the theory acknowledges the role of past behavior in predicting future actions, recognizing that previous experiences and habits

can significantly influence an individual's behavioral intentions and subsequent choices (Kan & Fabrigar,2017)
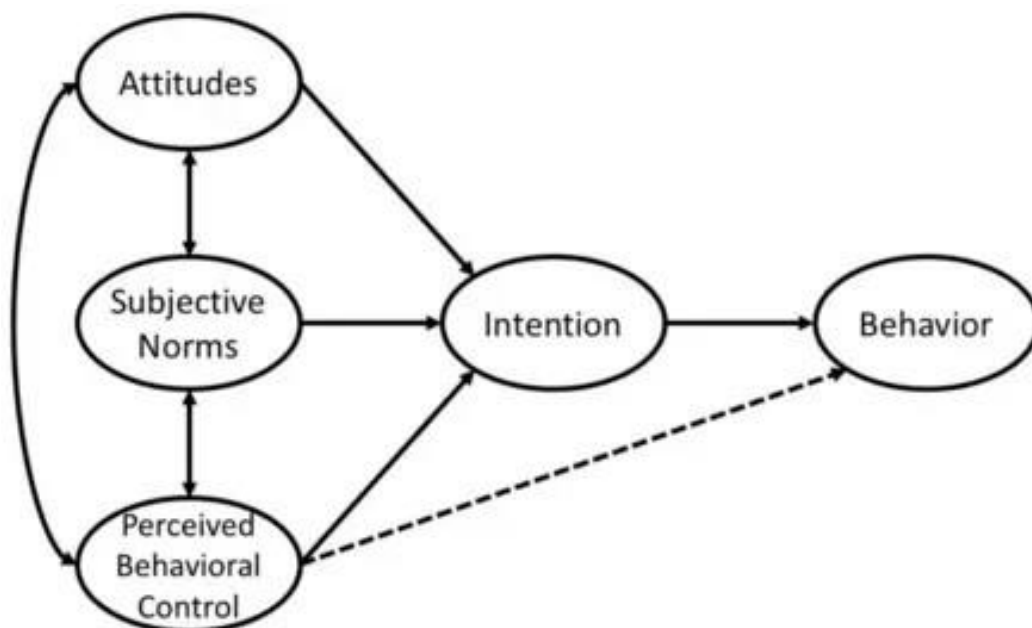
Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)

2.4   Limitations of Traditional Consumer Behavior Models

The importance of understanding Generation Z's consumer behavior is becoming increasingly clear, given their growing influence on the market (Zhulal et al., 2023). While current models, as explained above, shed light on various aspects of consumer behavior, they also have their limitations. The EBM model has long been a cornerstone of consumer behavior research. However, its applicability has faced criticism, leading to ongoing revisions and extensions (Ashman et al., 2015). One key limitation identified by Jacoby is the model's focus on markets, with potentially insufficient attention paid to sociocultural factors and neglecting the motivations and thought processes of the consumers themselves, which significantly affect buying decisions (Jacoby, 2002). Moreover, this model is seen as being too simplistic and lacks detail in the sequential stages of the decision process and struggles to capture the nuances of real-world decision- making, which can be more complex and emotional than the stages suggest (Milner &Rosenstreich, 2013).

Additionally, alongside the EBM model, Kotler and Keller's 5-stage model also adopts a linear approach. Despite the expectation that consumers weigh the pros and cons of products and services and make logical decisions based on thorough information processing, they do not consistently follow this rational process during every purchase (Kahawandala & Peter, 2020). In reality, consumer decision-making is more flexible and cyclical, with individuals often moving back and forth between stages (Viksne et al., 2016). Moreover, in today's fast-paced, digital world, consumer behavior has become more complex and harder to predict (Rabby et al., 2021). This challenges the simplistic linear approach proposed by these models.

These frameworks can restrict our understanding of Generation Z's consumer behavior, which is also influenced by online communities, peer recommendations, and the rapid evolution of trends (Chang & Chang, 2023; Wijerathne & Peter, 2023). The TPB model was also previously mentioned and is a model under inspection. Despite some drawbacks, such as a restricted number of variables, the TPB has demonstrated its utility in analyzing various behaviors, supported by empirical evidence highlighting the significance of its elements on behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Ashman et al., 2015). Furthermore, the TPB places a significant emphasis on understanding the motivations driving consumers' purchasing decisions and their reasoning through analyzing attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Azjen noted the model's adaptability and expressed a willingness for other researchers to contribute to his model, leading researchers Kahawandala and Peter to develop an innovative model for Generation Z consumer behavior based on the TPB model, addressing the shortcomings of traditional frameworks (Ajzen, 1991; Kahawandala & Peter, 2020).

2.5 Updated Theory of Planned Behavior

This model based on the TPB model involves a thorough literature review and screening of 22 studies to gain insights into the factors influencing the purchasing behavior of Generation Z consumers. Being the first generation of digital nomads, Generation Z has been intertwined with digital technology from birth, leading to their behavior, preferences, and decision-making processes contradicting significantly from previous generations (Zhulal et al., 2023). To effectively cater to the needs and wants of Generation Z consumers and analyze their purchasing habits, it was essential to create a model integrating additional constructs focused on this demographic (Kahawandala & Peter, 2020). By including Market Mavenism, Social- Identity, and Technology Self-Efficacy into the model based on the characteristics of Generation Z and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the researchers aimed to offer a more thorough comprehension of the factors shaping Generation Z consumer behavior and cater to their unique traits. By extending the TPB model with Generation Z-specific characteristics, the researchers aimed to establish a more tailored framework for studying the consumer of this digitally native generation (Kahawandala & Peter, 2020).
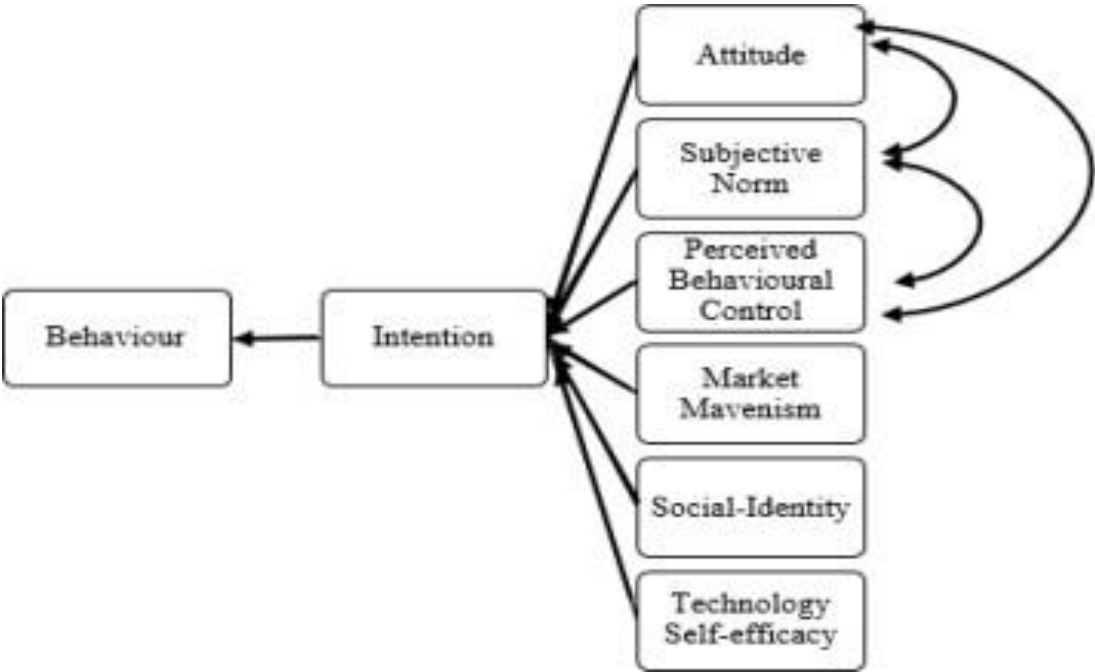
Figure 2: Updated Theory of Planned Behavior (Kahawandala & Peter, 2020)

The innovative and updated model based on TPB and created by researchers Kahawandela and Peter is presented above. Below is an explanation of the added factors incorporated in this model.

1. **Market Mavenism:** Refers to an individual's early awareness and comprehensive knowledge of various products and market trends. They often influence and advise others due to their expertise (Feick & Price, 1987). Given Generation Z's familiarity and consistent exposure to digital platforms, they are likely to exhibit Market Mavenism traits (Thomas et al., 2015).
2. **Social Identity:** Refers to how individuals see themselves based on their membership in social groups, such as sports teams, nationalities, and occupations, affecting their attitudes, behavior s, and interactions with groups (Leaper, 2011). Generation Z places high importance on social connections and belonging, shaping their identities based on shared interests and values (Wijerathne & Peter, 2023)
3. **Technology Self-Efficacy:** Refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to navigate and utilize technology effectively to achieve desired outcomes (Wilde & Hsu, 2019). Growing up in a digital environment, Generation Z is adept at using various digital tools and platforms (Thomas et al., 2015).

In conclusion, this adapted TPB model offers a promising framework for understanding Generation Z's unique consumer behavior in the digital age. By incorporating the aspects explained above, the model goes beyond the traditional TPB to provide a more nuanced picture of Generation Z's purchasing behavior. However, this revised model does not yet delve into the specifics of how Generation Z discovers and learns about companies, especially start-ups before engaging with the stages of the TPB model. Therefore, further research is needed to explore how Generation Z discovers and learns before progressing through the stages of the updated TPB model. This deeper understanding of Generation Z will allow for a more comprehensive application of the adapted TPB model in the context of start-up offerings.

2.6   Limitations Updated Theory of Planned Behavior

While the updated Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model by Kahawandala & Peter (2020) provides valuable insights into the consumer behavior of Generation Z, it is essential to critically assess the limitations associated with relying on a model primarily derived from a conference paper. Conference papers, though useful for presenting emerging ideas and preliminary research findings, often lack the depth and rigor of peer-reviewed journal articles. They may not undergo the same level of scrutiny and validation, which raises concerns about the robustness and generalizability of the findings.

One potential limitation of the updated TPB model is its reliance on self-reported data, which can be subject to biases such as social desirability or recall bias. Additionally, the model has not yet been widely tested or validated across diverse populations or contexts, which limits its applicability and reliability in different settings. The narrow scope of the sample used in the original study further constrains the generalizability of the model's conclusions, especially when applied to varied cultural or demographic groups.

Moreover, the model's adaptation and inclusion of constructs like Market Mavenism, Social Identity, and Technology Self-Efficacy, while innovative, require further empirical validation. These additions need to be tested over time and across different market segments to ensure their relevance and predictive power in understanding Generation Z's consumer behavior.

Given these limitations, it is important to approach the findings derived from this model with caution. Future research should aim to test the updated TPB model in broader contexts, using larger and more diverse samples, to strengthen its validity and reliability. Additionally, cross-referencing the model's insights with established theories and empirical studies will provide a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of Generation Z's consumer behavior.
In conclusion, while the updated TPB model offers a useful framework for this thesis, recognizing its limitations ensures a more critical and nuanced interpretation of the research findings.

2.7   Marketing in Start-ups

Entrepreneurship within the start-up environment is characterized by the pursuit of innovation and the introduction of new products, services, or business models designed to meet evolving consumer needs. Start-ups are often defined by their ability to disrupt traditional markets, leveraging agility and a deep understanding of their target audience to carve out market niches (Schumpeter & Backhaus, 2003). In the contemporary digital landscape, effectively reaching and engaging with digital-native consumers has become essential for start-up success.

One of the core challenges for start-ups is effectively reaching and engaging with their target audience, which increasingly consists of tech-savvy, digitally connected consumers. Research by Priporas, Stylos, and Fotiadis emphasizes that these consumers, particularly younger generations, expect seamless, user-friendly digital interactions and demand high levels of personalization and authenticity in their interactions with brands (Priporas et al., 2017). This aligns with the principles of entrepreneurial marketing, a strategic approach that prioritizes innovative and cost-effective methods to connect with consumers (Stokes, 2000; Ionită, 2012). Unlike traditional marketing, which can be resource-intensive, entrepreneurial marketing relies on creativity and agility to maximize reach and impact within budget constraints (Shane et al., 2003).

To navigate the competitive landscape, start-ups often leverage digital channels such as social media, content marketing, and influencer partnerships. These strategies are designed to maximize engagement while remaining cost-effective (Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, 2023). Content marketing, for example, allows start-ups to position themselves as thought leaders by creating valuable and informative content that resonates with their audience (Koob, 2021; Chang & Wu, 2024). This approach not only builds trust but also fosters long-term relationships with consumers.

Social media platforms play a pivotal role in these strategies by providing direct access to the target audience and facilitating community building and brand loyalty (Pinto & Paramita, 2021). By actively engaging with their audience on social media, start-ups can create a sense of belonging and encourage word-of-mouth marketing, which is crucial for growth and sustainability (McAlexander et al., 2002). Influencer marketing, an extension of social media marketing, enables start-ups to leverage the credibility and reach of social media personalities who align with their brand values, thereby enhancing visibility and engagement (Belanche et al., 2021; Breves et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the fast-changing business environment demands that start-ups remain agile and responsive to consumer preferences and technological advances (Usta, 2023). This adaptability is key to staying competitive in a crowded market dominated by established brands (Ahmadi & O'Cass, 2015). Ensuring that their digital platforms are not only user-friendly but also accessible

is crucial for start-ups aiming to capture and retain a loyal customer base (Norman, 2002).

In conclusion, entrepreneurship in the start-up sector requires a strategic approach that leverages innovative marketing tactics, community engagement, and a deep understanding of digital consumer behavior. By aligning their strategies with the expectations of digital-native consumers, start-ups can foster strong customer relationships, enhance brand visibility, and drive sustainable growth in a competitive market.

2.8   Conclusion Theoretical Background

In conclusion, the theoretical background explored in this research highlights the unique consumer characteristics of Generation Z, emphasizing their digital nativity and unique purchasing habits. While exploring the entrepreneurial marketing approaches, we noted an alignment with the digital characteristics of Generation Z. After researching multiple consumer behavior models; we realized that these characteristics were not implemented comprehensively. However, the updated TPB model included constructs such as Market Mavenism, Social Identity, and Technological Self-Efficacy to provide a comprehensive understanding tailored to Generation Z. While there is existing literature on Generation Z's consumer behavior and characteristics in general, there is a lack of research specifically examining their discovery and learning behavior to start-ups. Therefore, we further explore how Generation Z discovers and learns about start-ups.

3. Methodology

3.1   Research Design

This research aims to create a better understanding and contribution to existing theories related to Generation Z's consumer behavior by adopting an inductive approach (Bonner et al., 2021). We opted to conduct the initial two interviews jointly, with each researcher leading one interview, to mitigate biases and ensure consistent interpretation of responses. During the interviews, raw data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with purposively sampled participants. Then, through careful analysis of this data by cross-referencing to ensure alignment in the data interpretation, we identify concepts and themes emerging from the behaviors of Generation Z consumers towards start-ups. This iterative process of collecting data, analyzing it, deriving insights, and refining theories based on empirical evidence allows flexibility and depth in exploring complex phenomena (Bassett, 2010). This approach ensures that the theories developed are based on observations and continuously refined as more data is gathered and analyzed. This leads to a more precise understanding of Generation Z's consumer behavior towards new ventures.

This research utilizes a single-case study approach, focusing on a start-up company called Breeze. Based on the arguments presented by Yin and Dyer & Wilkins, a single case study is particularly well suited as we are investigating a specific target group and their discovery and learning behavior for a single type of Start-up Company, allowing for an in-depth exploration within this focused context (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991; Yin, 2009). This approach allows for a concentrated examination of a specific phenomenon within a targeted group, Generation Z consumers, enabling a thorough exploration of their consumer behavior to start-up offerings. Furthermore, conducting a single case study allows researchers to challenge existing theoretical frameworks and explore new observations, which aids in developing high-quality and nuanced theories that specifically address the behaviors and preferences of Generation Z consumers towards start-ups (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991; Yin, 2009). This methodological choice prioritizes depth of understanding over breadth, ensuring thorough analysis and interpretation of the data gathered, yielding rich insights into how this demographic discovers and learns about new ventures.

The decision to use one case study focused on the target group of Generation Zs, which Breeze represents, the dating app company that functions as a start-up, even though we discussed potential consumers and users rather than the start-up company. This approach was chosen to understand how Generation Z's discovery and learning behaviors towards start-ups influence their engagement intentions and the implications for entrepreneurial strategies. Identifying the strategies that appeal to start-ups is essential to foster an understanding of their behavior patterns. Consequently, identifying users' impressions offers significant insights into their engagement intentions.

The sampling was conducted using purposive sampling to ensure that participants involved in the study were potential users of Breeze. Nonetheless, this process was described earlier but insufficiently. To counter this, we used targeted sampling to ensure our sample represents the Generation Z population and their engagement with start-ups. This methodological choice is consistent with the guidance in the literature on qualitative research methods regarding the recommendable criteria for choosing participants, such as their first-hand experience with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2013, p. 93). To this purpose, we set out to recruit a purposive sample of Generation Z users for the study, thus ensuring the appropriateness of the

sample and the obtained results about the research objectives.

3.2   Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

This research aims to uncover Generation Z's discovery and learning behavior for start-ups. Due to our inductive research question, we have decided to pursue a qualitative approach (Bell et al., 2022). In the context of this research, ontology involves considering the nature of reality related to Generation Z, start-ups, and their interactions. This study examines whether there is a single objective reality regarding how Generation Z discovers and learns about start-ups or if there are multiple interpretations based on individuals' experiences. Given that this research employs a qualitative approach, it aligns with a constructivist ontology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This perspective acknowledges the existence of multiple realities shaped by individual perception and social contexts. Constructivist ontology emphasizes that reality is constructed through interactions and interpretations rather than being a single objective entity (Fryer, 2020). In exploring how potential customers from Generation Z discover and learn about start-ups, particularly through the case study of Breeze, this research considers the diverse and subjective realities of the participants. Each participant's experience represents a unique interpretation of their interaction with start-ups, contributing to a multifaceted understanding of the phenomenon.

The epistemological stance of this research is rooted in exploring subjective experiences and interpretations of Generation Z participants. This study seeks to understand how these individuals discover and learn about start-ups through qualitative methods, specifically in-depth interviews. This approach aligns with constructivist epistemology, emphasizing context, subjectivity, and interpretation. Constructivist epistemology posits that knowledge is constructed through social processes and interaction rather than being an objective truth to be discovered (Fryer, 2020). By interviewing 15 participants about their findings and learning behavior regarding Breeze, the research gathered rich, contextual insights into their experiences. These subjective narratives provide valuable knowledge about how Generation Z engages with start-ups, highlighting the complexity and diversity of their behavior.

3.3   Case Selection

Breeze is an ideal case study for investigating how Generation Z discovers and learns about new ventures due to its alignment with the digital characteristics of its user base (Breeze, 2019). Its online presence mirrors the digital engagement behavior dominant among Generation Z, offering us an ideal opportunity to explore how this cohort interacts with this start-up catering to their interests. By examining how individuals from Generation Z engage with Breeze, we can gain valuable insights into their online consumer behavior, primarily focusing on patternsof product discovery and information-seeking behavior toward start-ups.

Initially, we intended to select an early-stage start-up that is still validating its market fit and developing its business model, giving us a more comprehensive understanding of discovering and learning about start-ups (Sanasi et al., 2023). However, upon scouting platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, we observed that many of these early-stage start-ups had limited social media visibility, potentially making them less discoverable to Generation Z. To address this challenge and still effectively examine how Generation Z discovers and learns about start-ups, we opted for a case study focusing on a start-up within the first few years of operation, being more established in the start-up landscape and ensuring a user base that had engaged with their service (Perry et al., 2018). Through several brainstorming sessions, we identified 20 promising and active start-up companies with a strong social media presence. After considering these companies, Breeze stood out with around 9,000 Instagram followers and 350 posts, making

their social media presence ideal for recruiting participants for our research.

Breeze is an innovative dating app designed to take online matches offline by encouraging real-life dates without the usual chatting phase. Users can skip the small talk and plan a date immediately if there is a mutual interest. Established in 2019 by seven young entrepreneurs, Breeze specifically targets Generation Z, catering to students and young professionals (Breeze, 2019).

3.4   Sampling Strategy

To reach out to participants, we chose Instagram as our preferred outreach platform primarily because of its direct messaging feature, which provides a user-friendly and accessible platform for contacting potential participants. This approach allowed us to initiate direct communication with individuals in a convenient and personalized manner, facilitating engagement and participation in the study. Additionally, research studies have highlighted that Instagram is the most widely used social media platform among Generation Z (Zhulal et al., 2023). This platform familiarity ensures that we engage with participants on a platform they are comfortable with and actively use, optimizing the likelihood of successful outreach and participation in our research interviews.

In addition to utilizing Instagram for outreach, we also reached out to individuals within our network who have used the Breeze app and follow Breeze on social media. This approach allowed us to gain diverse perspectives and insights into the company from individuals who may not be directly exposed to the start-up's online presence. Engaging with participants who have experienced Breeze first-hand yet are not followers of Breeze on Instagram enriches our understanding of how these participants discovered and learned about the start-up. This dual approach, combining outreach via Instagram and within our network, enhances the depth and breadth of our research insights related to start-discovery and learning behaviors concerning start-ups among Generation Z.

Thus, considering these outreach strategies and recruiting participants, we employed purposive sampling for the semi-structured interviews, focusing on individuals from Generation Z who have a connection or association with Breeze. Purposive sampling, or judgemental or selective sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique that enables researchers to strategically choose participants based on specific criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Unlike random sampling, which relies on chance, purposive sampling allows for deliberate participant selection. Utilizing the purposive sampling method, participants were chosen based on their direct relevance to the research question (Bisht, 2024). To ensure alignment with the study's objectives, the selection process was guided by the following criteria in identifying suitable participants:

1. **Generation Z Representation:** Participants should belong to Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2005, to ensure alignment with the target demographic of the study. We considered participants at different stages of young adulthood within Generation Z, ranging from late teens to early twenties. This variation in age can provide insights into how start-up discovery and information-seeking behavior evolve within this demographic cohort.

2. **Active on social media:** To ensure our participants are actively engaged on social media, particularly Instagram, we selected individuals with open, regularly updated accounts. We looked for users whose most recent posts were less than six months old, indicating ongoing use and engagement. This criterion ensures that participants are

familiarwith Instagram and reflect the digital habits of Generation Z.

3. **Geographical Location:** Breeze operates in The Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. However, we chose to focus exclusively on The Netherlands for our participant selection process as Breeze is established and the largest within this country. Given our stronger network and connections within The Netherlands, concentrating our research efforts in this region allowed us to closely examine how Generation Z in the start-up's primary operational base discovers and learns about new ventures like Breeze. This focused approach ensured the validity and depth of our findings, as insights gleaned from a concentrated sample within a core market provide more relevant and actionable data (Thomas, 2023).

4. **Exposure to Breeze:**
a. **Breeze users:** We included individuals from our network who use the Breeze app. This criterion ensures a broader representation of how users, who may not be directly exposed to the start-up's online presence, discover and learn about such ventures through alternative channels.
b. **Breeze followers:** Additionally, we sought participants outside our network who follow Breeze on Instagram. This criterion allowed for an in-depth exploration of how engaged followers interact with the start-up's online content, providing insights into their experiences, preferences, and motivations.

Figure 3 on the next page shows an overview of the mentioned criteria. To improve quality, interviewees were anonymized by using fictional names. However, the remaining information mentioned in the table is based on reality.

#	Name	Gender	Age	Geographical Location	Reached Through	Posted on social media		
						Within the last 1 month	*Within the last 3 months*	*Within the last 6 months*
1	Daan	Male	23	Amsterdam	Personal Network	■		
2	Lauren	Female	20	Amsterdam	Personal Network		■	
3	Pien	Female	19	Rotterdam	Instagram		■	
4	Myrthe	Female	25	Utrecht	Instagram		■	
5	Derk	Male	25	The Hague	Instagram			■
6	Matthieu	Male	19	Rotterdam	Instagram			■
7	Sophia	Female	26	Utrecht	Personal Network			■
8	Hanne	Female	23	Amsterdam	Personal Network		■	
9	Ties	Male	24	Leiden	Instagram			■
10	Emma	Female	20	Delft	Personal Network		■	
11	Roemer	Male	24	Amsterdam	Instagram	■		■
12	Kristina	Female	23	Amsterdam	Instagram			■
13	Amber	Female	27	The Hague	Personal Network			■
14	Annejet	Female	25	The Hague	Personal Network			■
15	Caroline	Female	27	Rotterdam	Instagram		■	■

Figure 3: Overview of participants

3.5 Data Collection Methods

For this research, we adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is well suited for exploring complex phenomena such as Generation Z's discovery and learning behavior in terms of start-ups (Xia et al., 2016). It allowed us to delve deeply into the experiences, perspectives, and consumer behavior s of individuals from this generation. The research strategy involved semi-structured interviews with individuals from Generation Z. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility while ensuring that key concepts and themes were explored systematically (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The research captured Generation Z participants' nuanced perspectives and experiences regarding discovering and learning about start-ups by conducting interviews.

We aimed to conduct approximately 15 interviews, each lasting 45 to 60 minutes, to gather in-depth data on Generation Z's discovery and information-gathering behavior related to start-ups. Although we initially considered conducting interviews for approximately one hour, we have tailored our approach to focus specifically on aspects relevant to our research question, streamlining the interview process and resulting in interviews lasting approximately 35 minutes. This targeted approach ensured that interviews efficiently captured key insights without delving into the entirety of Generation Z's consumer behavior journey, aligning closely with the study's objectives and research scope.

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews via Google Meet, chosen for its user-friendly interface and straightforward accessibility. Each interview session was audio-recorded with the explicit consent of participants to ensure the accurate capture of insights shared during the discussions. These audio recordings were transcribed, providing a detailed textual representation of the interviews for analysis and interpretation.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 The Gioia Method

The qualitative exploration into the discovery and learning behavior of potential customers of Generation Z regarding new ventures was conducted utilizing the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013). The choice of this methodology was driven by its established effectiveness in entrepreneurial research (Politis et al., 2019). Magnani and Gioia (2023) assert that the Gioia method provides a systematic and thorough approach to contributing to existing theories, aligning well with this study's inductive grounded theory approach. The overarching research aim is to construct a comprehensive data structure facilitating data analysis visualization. The Gioia methodology's iterative nature facilitated simultaneous data collection and analysis, allowing for the iterative refinement of interview questions to optimize the exploration process and identify emerging themes. The study adheres to Gioiamethodology's three fundamental stages: sorting, reducing, and theorizing data (Gioia et al., 2013).

3.6.2 First-order Concepts

In the initial stage, the data from interviews with Generation Z customers was examined to identify emerging concepts relating to their discovery and learning behaviors. Key concepts relevant to the research focus were extracted through a manual color-coding process applied to interview transcripts. The original transcripts were analyzed, leading to the establishment and categorization of data into 92 first-order concepts, as stated in Appendix 2. This categorization was informed by assessments of the frequency of occurrence and relevance to the research topic (Bell et al., 2022). Each researcher independently sorted the raw data into emerging concepts concerning Generation Z consumers' discovery and learning behaviors regarding start-ups.

After this individual coding process, both researchers thoroughly reviewed each other's analysis to ensure alignment on the key first-order concepts derived from the data structure. As our research progressed, we found similarities and differences among the concepts, eventually reducing the number of concepts to 24.

3.6.3 Second-order Themes

The subsequent stage involved constantly comparing data across time and informants to identify response patterns, differences, and similarities (Gioia et al., 2013). The objective was to organize and consolidate the first-order concepts into the most relevant second-order themes by discerning overlaps or associations among them and linking them to relevant theoretical concepts (Gioia et al., 2013). An extensive review of relevant literature was undertaken to enrich the analysis and provide a theoretical grounding for the emergent themes. We reorganized the concepts into eight second-order themes based on the emerging patterns.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are vital in qualitative research, shaping every stage of the research process. According to Miller, Birch, Mauthner, and Jessop (2012), key ethical principles guide the researcher's conduct, protecting participants' rights, well-being, and dignity. This includes obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, minimizing harm, and fostering a respectful and inclusive research environment. Throughout this research journey, we have critically reflected on our biases, power dynamics, and ethical responsibilities. All participants have given their consent to be recorded and to keep the participants anonymous; all names mentioned in this study are fictional. By adhering to these ethical principles, we uphold the integrity of this research while honoring the trust and contributions of our participants.

4. Findings

This chapter will present our findings regarding Generation Z's consumer behavior regarding start-ups. Gioia, focusing on first-order concepts and second-order themes and eventually leading towards aggregate dimensions as discussed above, bases the table below on the article. Our study seeks to comprehensively understand Generation Z's consumer behavior and eventually answer the research question.
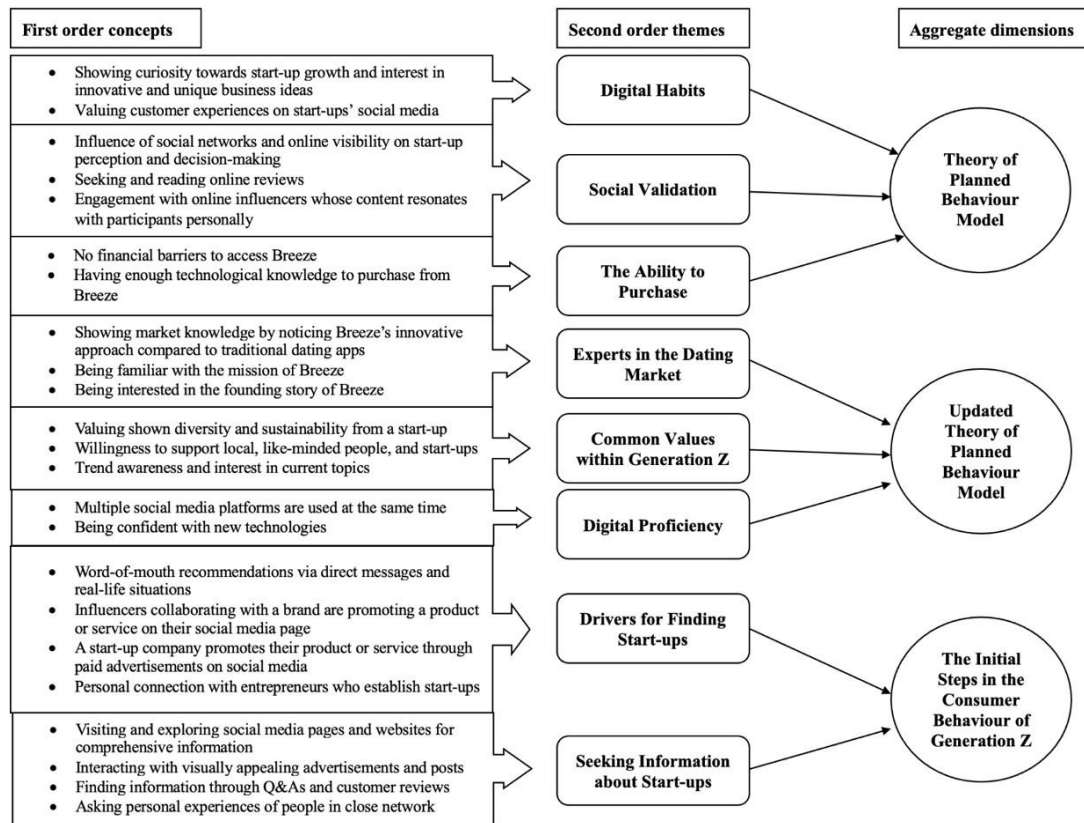
Figure 4: Data structure

4.1   Theory of Planned Behavior Model

4.1.1   Digital Habits

Throughout the interviews, multiple concepts arose regarding the participants' digital habits and attitudes regarding social media. These conceptsresonate with the overarching theme of 'Digital Habits.'

Showing Curiosity towards Start-up Growth and Interest in Innovative and Unique Business Ideas
The analysis of participant insights illuminates a deep curiosity and appreciation for start-up growth, underpinned by a fascination with innovative and distinctive business ideas. Kristina, for instance, articulates her intrigue with novel concepts, stating, '*I was intrigued about the concept, going on a first date right away without talking to the person. So, to me, their concept drew me towards them.*' Emma echoes this sentiment, noting, '*For example, PieterPot, an online grocery store, also does it slightly differently than its competitors, makingme want to look into the start-up.*' Ties, too, underscores the allure of originality, expressing, '*But this is a new way*

of online dating, and that is what attracts me.' Furthermore, participantslike Derk and Sophia actively engage with start-ups through social media, with Derk remarking,'*I follow some start-up companies on social media … And innovative new ideas, I think it is hard to come up with a successful company nowadays in this world, so I have respect for peoplewho try it.*' Sophia concurs, emphasizing, '*I like that they (Breeze) are innovative. They have avery different approach, and that is why I follow them.*' Pien's interest lies in tracking the development of start-ups, reflecting, '*I think it is interesting to see just how they (start-ups) grow and also what type of offers and deals they come out with.*' Collectively, these insights underscore an interest in start-ups growth and in start-ups that offer new solutions and drive industry innovation.

Valuing Customer Experiences on Start-ups' Social Media
The responses of the participants reveal a significant emphasis on valuing customer experiences on start-ups' social media platforms. Kristina expresses her appreciation for Breeze's social media content, particularly highlighting their stories feature, stating, '*I like their stories … I get an update about another girl who is doing the Dating Diaries and talking about her experiences.*' Emma agrees with this sentiment, noting, '*I feel like they try to make very personalized marketing by sharing these personal stories of people.*' Hanne further emphasized the importance of incorporating customer experiences into social media content, stating, '*I find that the posts that have people in them have a bit more personality and expression … It brings some sort of human element and personal touch to the content.*' These quotes underscore the value of customer experiences online.

4.1.2 Social Validation

Throughout the interviews, we observed a notable reliance on social validation in start-up decision-making behavior. The concepts identified in these discussions converge around the theme of 'Social Validation.'

Influence of Social Networks and Online Visibility on Start-up Perception and Decision-Making
Participants in the study consistently demonstrated a decreased interest in a start-up when no one in their network was familiar with it. Hanne expressed this sentiment by stating, *'If no one I know would be following a certain company, I think I would question why no one is following them or why they are not on social media at all. If no one has heard about them yet, it raises doubts for me.'* Lauren echoed this concern, emphasizing the importance of hearing about a brand from friends, saying, *'For me, I am more comfortable when I also hear my friends talking about a brand and engaging with it.'* Myrthe further emphasized the role of social validation, explaining, '*When I check a start-up, I would ask friends and family if they know the company … if nobody in my network knows or follows them, I will have my doubts and probably not buy their service or product.'*

Additionally, participants indicated less interest in a start-up with little to no online visibility. Daan highlighted the importance of a strong social media presence, stating, *'I don't follow a lot of start-ups on social media because most of the start-ups' social media presence is not very great.'* Derk also emphasized the significance of a start-up's social media presence in building trust, explaining, *'If a company had no or very little social media presence, I think it would give me a pause before downloading their app or using their service.'* He noted that a steady social media presence often signifies transparency and active communication with customers, factors that influence his decision-making process.

Furthermore, the findings underscored the significant influence of word-of-mouth, both through

real-life conversations and online messages, on opinions and behavior s regarding start-ups. Annejet, for example, highlighted the impact of others' experiences on the decision-making process, stating, *'I would mainly say other people's experiences influence my decision to go on a date.'* Ties agreed with this, emphasizing the importance of positive feedback from acquaintances, saying, *'I would only download it (Breeze) if I heard about it from people that I know and if I have only heard good comments and reviews from them.'* These quotes collectively illustrate the powerful influence of personal networks' opinions regarding start-ups.

Seeking and Reading Online Reviews

The responses in the interviews reveal a common inclination towards seeking and reading online reviews as part of decision-making processes. Hanne emphasizes the value of peer experiences, stating, '*When I see people in these posts, I often look for information like reviews about how they like the app. Their experiences provide me with valuable feedback and can influence my idea of their business.*' Pien echoes this by noting, '*I always check their online reviews,*' particularly highlighting the importance of assessing the quality of a start-up like Breeze. Sophia underscores the significance of reviews in guiding her choices, stating, '*For me, reviews of others are crucial because I would not experiment with something new ... Even if it is something bad, I do not mind seeing a negative review somewhere because it also shows that there are people who have a different perspective.*' Matthieu emphasizes the need for trustworthy information sources, stating, '*I like to see the website before I use something to see if that is trustworthy ... but I would also like to see online reviews of a specific company on a third party's website which is independent to see what other people think about the company.*'

Engagement with Online Influencers Who's Content Resonates with Participants Personally

The analysis of participants' responses reveals a significant engagement with online influencers whose content resonates personally with the participants. Kristina acknowledges the influential role of influencers in shaping her perceptions, stating, '*I think that the influencer that I follow, I like, so when they talk about a start-up, I get easily influenced because when they are talking positively about it, I want to experience it myself.*' Annejet highlights the importance of influencer credibility and personal connection, stating, '*First of all, who is this influencer? Because you know that the company would be valid if they use a valid influencer as well ... if*

you see them wearing something for instance and you like this influencer's style or their lifestyle you can feel connected and easily be influenced.' Derk emphasizes the alignment between influencer content and personal interests, stating, '*When an influencer promotes a product, I am more inclined to look up information about a company that resonates with me because their post influenced me.*'

Interestingly, not all participants mentioned following influencers on social media promoting products and services. Matthieu and Amber both expressed a clear disinterest in influencer marketing, as they think influencers 'overdo it': *'Everyone is now advertising brands within their videos or on social media or even YouTube. I think influencers overkill it; I'm like, no, not interested.'*

4.1.3   The Ability to Purchase

Noticeable throughout the interviews was the degree to which the participants believed they could make use of Breeze, there were no significant barriers mentioned. The concepts identified in these conversations came together in the 'The Ability to Purchase' theme.

No Financial Barriers to Access Breeze

The analysis of participant responses reveals a common understanding and acceptance of the financial aspect associated with using Breeze. Amber articulates a perspective where the cost is justified if there is a reciprocal benefit, stating, '*I think it is okay to pay as long as I know that they in return arrange something for me … So, I think the price is not too high.*' Kristina echoes this sentiment, acknowledging the necessity for Breeze to generate revenue while expressing willingness to pay for the service, stating, '*The only thing is, when you cancel a date, there is some penalty to it. But that also makes a lot of sense … I do not mind paying for their service at all.*' Caroline also emphasizes the value proposition of the service and its inherent need for income, stating, '*I think the price offers a really good deal … Obviously, they need an income if they want to make a good working app and if they want to connect people.*' These quotes collectively illustrate a consensus among participants regarding the necessity and reasonableness of paying for the service provided by Breeze, reflecting an understanding of the financial aspects involved in sustaining the business model.

Having Enough Technological Knowledge to Purchase from Breeze

The findings regarding participants' technological knowledge and experience with using Breeze suggest that they did not encounter significant obstacles when using the platform. Amber expresses a seamless experience, stating, '*I did not encounter any obstacles at all when purchasing from Breeze.*' Caroline reinforces this sentiment, emphasizing the clarity and ease of use of the app, stating, '*Of course, you need a match to go on a date, but that was never an obstacle for me. So, no, not any obstacles, I think Breeze is a very clear app and easy to use.*' Lauren also commends the user interface and accessibility of information provided by Breeze, stating, '*The app gives you all the information you need, and their website is also very clear.*' Pien echoes these sentiments, stating, '*Breeze makes your entry into the dating world a lot easier; it is just convenient and easy to use.*' These findings indicate a positive user experience with Breeze, suggesting that participants felt confident and comfortable navigating the platform.

4.2   Updated Theory of Planned Behavior Model

4.2.1   Experts in the Dating App Market

During the interviews, recurring concepts arose regarding participants' level of familiarity with Breeze and its services, as well as insights into their knowledge about the broader dating market, mentioning names and knowledge about competitors such as Bumble and Tinder. The concepts identified during the interviews created the overarching theme of 'Experts in the dating app market.'

Showing Market Knowledge by Noticing Breeze's Innovative Approach Compared to Traditional Dating Apps

A key finding from our study highlights that a significant majority, specifically 12 out of 15 participants, were drawn to the Breeze app due to its innovative nature, a characteristic they found important within the oversaturated dating app market. They acknowledged that Breeze, as a start-up, stands out in the market due to its unique offerings and innovative features, contrasting it with its established competitors. However, participants varied in their interpretations of the term 'innovation,' with each providing examples. As articulated by Kristina, Breeze's unique approach, which pushes users out of their comfort zones by encouraging dates, resonated with her, underscoring the app's innovative edge: '*So, to me, it was their concept that stood out. It was something different from all the other dating apps I've used before. I think it's also different because you get forced to get out of your comfort zone by going on a date.*' Similarly, Annejet appreciated Breeze's absence of annoying advertisements, which diverged from the typical experience in the dating app world: '*That's also the thing with the app is that they have no nonsense advertisements. So, they want to focus on people meeting each other through this app instead of getting sponsors. ... with other dating apps like Inner Circle or Tinder, you can't even swipe to the right without an ad popping up. But you have to pay to remove ads, and that's what drew me off the other dating apps.*'

Moreover, insights from participants like Hanne and Pien shed light on Breeze's innovative strategy of starting on a small scale, focusing solely on The Netherlands before gradually expanding to neighboring regions. Hanne said, '*Unlike larger global platforms like Tinder, Breeze focuses more on a more concentrated area, primarily in The Netherlands. I found this quite interesting and appealing because it creates some sort of community where you have the chance to meet people in person, which is unique compared to broader and larger platforms. Seeing familiar faces and knowing that it is within a manageable distance adds some sort of personal touch that larger platforms lack.*' Pien said: '*I feel like there's more in it for the customer to follow them when they're a startup and not big because I feel like you have more chance to connect with them.*' These participants found this approach appealing, which contrasts with the usual eagerness of established dating apps' rapid expansion.

Despite these varied perspectives on innovation, it is evident that participants possess a comprehensive understanding of the dating app market, recognizing the distinctive features that set Breeze apart from its counterparts.

Being Familiar with the Mission of Breeze

Subsequently, a diverse range of mission awareness emerged from multiple participants. Among the 15 participants, 10 were active users of the Breeze app. Moreover, it became evident that even those who had not engaged with the app directly were familiar with the mission of Breeze.

Emma, for instance, emphasized how the company's mission resonated with her, particularly its aim to forge meaningful connections in a digital landscape often marred by negative experiences: *'I think in a way their mission is something that stood by me, like connecting people in a new way and trying to get rid of the stigma of the bad online dating scene. I think a lot of people are on these platforms nowadays for the wrong reasons. I think Breeze's mission is really to get people together online but connect offline.'* Similarly, Derk was drawn to Breeze's unique approach to online dating, which avoided traditional messaging in favor of direct, in-person meetings. He found the element of surprise and excitement refreshing: *'I wanted to try out something new and exciting. You are not able to chat with them before going on a date, so it gives you more excitement about going on a date. Maybe it will work out, or maybe it willnot.'* Hanne highlighted the importance of start-ups articulating their mission clearly: *'I think it's really important for start-ups to give a quick snapshot of what they're all about in their social media. It doesn't have to be super detailed with its entire mission statement, but having asummary like "We're a dating app"... is key. If I see an Instagram profile that just says "Breeze"with a couple of emojis, I might not stick around long.'* Pien echoed these sentiments, underscoring Breeze's focus on safety as one of the key factors driving her interest. She mentions her appreciation towards the proactive measures taken by Breeze to ensure a secure and enjoyable dating experience: *'They stand for how safe they want to be. Someone from the restaurant where the date is held is always informed and knows that you're on your first date so that if anything looks sketchy or were to happen, they are informed.'*

In addition to their awareness of Breeze's mission, participants demonstrated familiarity with the mission of other established dating apps such as Tinder, Hinge, and Bumble. Roemer mentioned: *'I have used Tinder before, so I know their whole thing is about swiping left or right and kind of making you addicted to the swiping, instead of creating real-life connections.'* Annejet remarketed: *'I've heard about other established dating apps like Hinge from friends, and I think their focus is in line with Tinder by swiping and chatting with people in your surroundings.'*

Being Interested in the Founding Story of Breeze
Finally, participants highlighted their awareness and familiarity of Breeze's founding story, with 8 out of 15 participants emphasizing their interest in knowing a start-up's backstory to gain insights into its identity, expressing curiosity about the narrative behind the start-up beyond merely using the app.

For example, Caroline expressed interest in the founding narrative to gain insights on what sets the company apart from its competition: 'When it comes to start-ups, I think I would be interested in their founding story. What separates them from bigger competitors in the market like Tinder?' Moreover, Roemer added, *'I find the story of a start-up important as it gives me good insights into a company, especially when it is a start-up. I want to know if I can trust the company before purchasing.'*Lastly, Hanne emphasized that familiarizing herself with a brand's story enables her to connect with its mission and follow its future trajectory: *'Understanding their story helps me connect with their mission and see where they're headed in the future. I think the website, especially the "About Us" section, is a great starting point.'*

4.2.2   Common Values within Generation Z
During the interviews, we noticed a trend suggesting similarities between the behavior and characteristics of individuals in Generation Z. As such, the concepts found in the interviews are consistent and created the overarching theme of 'Common values within Generation Z.'

Valuing Shown Diversity and Sustainability from a Start-up

Most participants, including Annejet and Daan, expressed a preference for start-ups that promote sustainability and diversity. Annejet and Hanne specifically mentioned valuing start-ups that drive change in the world and promote sustainability, something that resonates with their values and aspirations for a better world: *'The main reason to follow a start-up outside of my immediate network would be if I see alignment with their mission and goals. I like to make a difference in this world... and see what I can do to help them for example.'* Daan emphasized the importance of start-ups like Breeze addressing a diverse range of identities and expressions within the dating scene and valuing inclusivity: *'Their Instagram page is very focused on diversity. I think dating is about diversity and Breeze focuses their marketing on people from all different cultures and nationalities, which is something I like to see and appreciate.'*

Willingness to Support Local, Like-minded People, and Start-ups

Participants demonstrated a strong interest in supporting start-ups like Breeze by actively following and using their service. As mentioned earlier, some participants shared personal connections with the owners or their partners, fostering a sense of community with the brand. Through these personal ties, participants showed their support by engaging with the app and/or following Breeze on social media. Hanne expressed, *'We started getting messages from the founder's girlfriend through WhatsApp to follow them on Instagram to get a little bit more recognition and engagement, so I did that to support them.'* Additionally, participants who lacked direct connections with the owners still expressed a desire to support Breeze as a start-up company. Daan articulated his interest in supporting Breeze and other start-ups on social media as a means to gain insights into entrepreneurial practices, which could potentially inform his future business ventures: *'I'm interested in how they started because I like entrepreneurship and I think it's always great to see start-ups succeed. And if I'm interested, how did they do it? How did they start and what are their strategies, you can learn quite a lot from start-ups that succeed.'*

Notably, 5 out of 15 participants shared a personal connection to the brand, through direct relationships either with the founders or their partners. Although these individuals were vocal about their bond with the owner or their partners and felt a sense of shared connection with the brand, other participants who were not involved with the founder or their partner, also emphasized the importance of personal connections with a start-up company. For example, Derk expressed a sense of affinity towards Breeze due to its establishment in Amsterdam, his hometown '…*especially when they are based in Amsterdam, where I was born and raised because it gives some sort of connected feel to these companies',* while Ties felt a personal connection with the brand because of the founder's similar age and background *'I like to help out a little bit as well with the following on Instagram and give them a bit more support, especially because I like that the founders are around my age and one of them is from my hometown.'*

Trend Awareness and Interest in Current Topics

Out of the 15 participants, six individuals demonstrated an interest in start-ups that actively engage with current trends. For example, Daan and Matthieu expressed enthusiasm for start-ups that remain up-to-date with trends and current topics, while giving them an entertaining twist. Daan mentioned for instance: *'Breeze could use a little bit of this type of marketing. Following trends and posting a bit of funnier stuff. It will attract our generation more* while also emphasizing the importance of start-ups like Breeze staying alert to trends to remain relevant and attract the following: *'I think following the trends is so important to me as I would like to be inspired and kept up to date with the trends because as a start-up, you should be relevant*

and should not stand still as you will fall behind and lose followers.' Ties further emphasized that incorporating trends with humor and entertainment would intrigue both existing and potential customers: *'It can also help with expanding your brand to a larger group. Maybe a group who was not interested in the beginning when the company was established. But yeah, they might be a user later on and follow them on social media. I think this start-up is also something that I would then recommend to my friends more and send them more of these trends and funny posts.'*

Additionally, participants noted that Breeze could increase its presence on TikTok, given the platform's popularity among Generation Z. For instance, Kristina mentioned: *'They are not big on TikTok, but I think trendy advertisement there would work. TikTok is really easy to use, and I think a lot of people nowadays use it, so I really would focus on that to reach a bigger audience. Not only on their Instagram account but also expanding to TikTok because I think it's super upcoming and has a lot of reach.'*

4.2.3   Digital Proficiency

Throughout the interviews, a shared confidence in using technology emerged among Generation Z participants. This confidence underscores recurring concepts reflecting their adeptness with technology and social media, which is in line with the overarching theme of 'Digital proficiency'.

Multiple Social Media Platforms are used at the Same Time
Each participant noted employing a minimum of two social media platforms in their daily routines, whether for entertainment or educational endeavours. The majority mentioned devoting 2-3 hours daily to these platforms. For instance, Emma explores diverse social media platforms to stay ahead of what people are doing in their day-to-day lives: *'I use multiple social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat to see what people are doing in their daily lives. It's aneasy way to stay updated about people you follow on social media*, while Daan utilizes multipleplatforms for information gathering: *'I use Instagram to find information about people for example and X I mostly use for information and like I said before, to keep up to date about things that are happening in the world because X is focused on real-time information and things that are happening'.* They effortlessly navigate and transition between platforms.

Being Confident with New Technologies
Participants, including Matthieu, Pien, and Roemer, expressed seamless confidence in utilizing their smartphones and other technological devices. Matthieu expressed his comfort, noting: *'I use my smartphone the whole time throughout the day. I think this is also why I am used to using other devices and technology, especially with social media being a big part of my daily routine.'* Pien echoed this sentiment: *'I find it easy to use different apps at the same time on my phone and my laptop, like multi-tasking on both devices. When there is an issue on my devices, I know how to fix them immediately.'* Lastly, Roemer said, *'I have used different types of software on my phone and laptop, but I think it is easy to use them. It is quite clear to me, and I don't have any struggles.'*

4.3   The Initial Steps in the Consumer Behavior of Generation Z

4.3.1   Drivers for Finding Start-ups
The reasons for exploring new ventures were frequently discussed during the interviews, with

participants elaborating on their drivers for interacting with start-ups. The concepts we have identified have merged into the overarching theme of the 'Drivers for Finding Start-ups'.

Word-of-mouth Recommendations via Direct Messages and Real-Life Situations
The findings regarding word-of-mouth recommendations via direct messages and real-life situations highlight the significant role played by personal recommendations in influencing participants' decisions to use Breeze. Kristina recounts how a friend's positive experience with Breeze sparked her interest in the app, stating, '*I know about Breeze because a good friend of mine told me about the app because we were talking about how to meet new boys and she had a great experience with Breeze. It made me enthusiastic, so I decided to download the app myself.*' Ties similarly describes how discussions with friends led him to explore Breeze after hearing about a positive dating experience, stating, '*I was talking to some friends about how to meet girls and what is interesting in the current dating world … My friend told me he had a great experience, so I decided to download the app as well.*' Annejet also emphasizes the impact of a friend's recommendation in piquing her interest in Breeze, stating, '*I heard about it (Breeze), I quickly looked it up, via WhatsApp. My friend told me about it … So, I was quite drawn to it because I thought it was a good idea and she was positive about it.*'

Influencers Collaborating with a Brand are Promoting a Product or Service on their Social Media Page
The findings concerning influencers collaborating with brands to promote products or services on their social media pages reveal the significant impact of influencer marketing in shaping consumers' perceptions and behaviors. Annejet highlights the role of influencers in discovering new companies, stating, '*I think influencers play a big role in discovering new companies, you can see them wearing stuff and it draws my attention.*' Caroline echoes this sentiment, underscoring the substantial role of influencers in the discovery phase of start-ups. Derk further emphasizes the influential power of influencers, noting that he often discovers start-ups through social media and influencers. He states, '*When they promote a product as well, I would most likely become more interested in the product as well because I follow them for a reason.*'

A Start-up Company Promotes Their Product or Service through Paid Advertisements on Social Media
The findings regarding start-up companies promoting their products or services through paid advertisements on social media underscore the effectiveness of targeted advertising in capturing consumer attention and driving engagement. According to Amber, '*I think I mainly find out about new start-ups through online ads. I just remembered at Breeze they do have some nice videos and advertisements which I saw in my feed, that initially drew my attention to them.*' This sentiment is shared by Kristina, who acknowledges the impact of social media advertisements, stating, '*I think most of the time I find new companies through word-of-mouth and social media. I see a lot of advertisements, that is when I see start-ups come up on my phone.*' Derk provides insights into the effectiveness of Breeze's Instagram ads, highlighting their visually appealing nature and focus on real-life interactions. He notes, '*Breeze's Instagram ads were quite impressive. They were visually appealing and focused on real-life interactions rather than just the product itself. This approach felt more relatable and genuine in a world of*

flashy online advertising. It piqued my interest and made me want to learn more about how the app could enhance real-world connections.' Moreover, Pien emphasizes the effectiveness of targeted advertisements on platforms like TikTok, stating, '*TikTok uses targeted ads prominently nowadays. These ads are so tailored to my interests that almost every one of them catches my eye.*'

Personal Connection with Entrepreneurs Who Establish Start-ups
The findings regarding personal connections with entrepreneurs who establish start-ups highlight the significant role that these relationships play in behavior toward new ventures. Hanne emphasizes the importance of personal connections, stating, '*Personal connections also play a big role. If you know someone who is involved with the start-up, it motivates me tostay engaged and supportive. Having a personal connection makes the company more relatable and meaningful.*' This sentiment is echoed by Caroline, who shares her experience with Breeze, saying, '*One of the founders is one of my best friends from when we were six years old. So, she started Breeze and then she obviously talked about it, and I did not have a boyfriend back then and not now either. And so yeah, then it was just like okay, you started this app, I will try it out.*' Similarly, Emma and Amber cite personal connections as the primary way they come across start-ups. Emma mentions, '*A good friend of mine, her boyfriend developed the app (Breeze) together with friends. So that is when I first heard aboutit because she told me.*' While Amber shares, '*It is quite funny because I have a friend and herboyfriend is the owner of Breeze. So, I think I heard it a few years ago, she told me about it when it was quite small.*' These quotes collectively underscore the influence of personal relationships in discovering new ventures.

4.3.2 Seeking Information about Start-ups

During the interviews, participants revealed their diverse approaches to seeking information about start-ups and what kind of information they are looking for when researching these companies. These findings contributed to the emergence of several key concepts, ultimately forming an overarching theme of 'Seeking information about start-ups'.

Visiting and Exploring Social Media Pages and Websites for Comprehensive Information
While Instagram is the primary source to find information for most of the participants, Caroline and Lauren had different opinions. Caroline mentioned not using social media that much to research, due to her limited time on social media due to her full-time job. She prefers going to the company's website to find information about companies and keep social media for entertainment: '*I think I mostly find information on the websites of the start-ups if they even have a website because social media is just something that I want to see almost no advertisements on as I like to keep that for entertainment purposes.*' Lauren mentioned that she does use social media to research, but prefers talking with her friends and family to find information about a start-up company as on social media you may scroll past relevant information, '*So just really word of mouth would motivate me to look into a start-up company further, because of course if you scroll on Instagram, it's it can be quite quick that you just scroll past it and you just miss it or you don't go into that further. So yeah, I think friends would be a big part as well.*' Information that is searched by the participants as mentioned in the interviews is the product or service details, company story and values, user experiences and reviews, and innovation and uniqueness of the company.

Interacting with Visually Appealing Advertisements and Posts

As mentioned above, all participants make use of several social media platforms for various reasons. During the interviews, we noticed that participants are most intrigued to learn from companies, especially start-ups when they have a visually appealing social media page, making the information search more interesting and fun.

Based on the interviews, visually appealing advertisements and posts play a crucial role in the participants' information search with start-ups like Breeze. For instance, Ties values personal stories shared on social media platforms, as they provide a more genuine and relatable perspective of the start-up, making it feel more authentic and real, *'I enjoy looking at the posts with the personal stories from users about it. Therefore, they also share personal stories that users hadwhich is nice and makes it a little bit more real for you. Of course, the nice colors always takeyour attention. So that's where you click on it because it catches your attention immediately.'*

Similarly, Myrthe values clear messaging and visually appealing content on social media, particularly enjoying posts that offer practical tips and tricks, *'They're quite direct and they use bright colours, which made me curious about what they do and how it works. The posts that interest me the most are the ones where they give tips and tricks on their social media page about using the platform, which are super important for me to get to know a new platform. So that's how I got to know the platform.'* She finds such content engaging and informative, enhancing her perception of Breeze. Hanne, while not particularly interested in bold colours on social media posts, still values the usage of bright colors if they accompany informative posts, such as interviews from people using the service of Breeze, *'Breeze sometimes posts images and videos with just a pink background and some bold letters, but they don't engage me that much and I think they can do this better. I instead focus more on posts that showcase real-life scenarios.'*

Additionally, Sophia appreciates the entertaining and reliable content she finds on Breeze's Instagram, highlighting the importance of humorous and relatable posts in capturing her interest and maintaining her engagement, *'I think it's important to have an aesthetically pleasing Instagram but then you swipe and then the funny things start coming. It's not like you see the funny things immediately, so maybe posting more funny types of posts as well rather than focusing on one theme or something. That would keep me engaged I would say.'* Adding to this, Matthieu emphasizes the preference for a mix of informative and entertaining content, indicating that engaging posts with a touch of humour are more likely to catch his attention and make him research the start-up, *'I think it needs to be a good mix when I want to research a company. You need to have a good indication about what the post is about, so then I would say use some entertaining picture or video of the post or like the essence of the topic, but the explanation would be nice if it would be more in-depth in the text underneath the post.'*

Finding Information Through Q&As and Customer Reviews
Participants also demonstrated finding information in Question-and-Answer posts and customer reviews about start-ups. Out of the 15 participants, seven individuals mentioned the importance of seeking reviews from customers about a start-up to find information. For instance, Annejet highlights her reliance on Google to read reviews about start-ups to find information about the start-up, *'Well with Breeze I don't think I used their social media or Instagram to find information because I don't think I would find a lot about it on there. But I did go on Google and looked for other people's reviews about Breeze.'* Similarly, Ties mentions his preference for reading reviews on websites like Trust Pilot to gain information about the start-up company, *'I think it's important that previous users also like the product and share that with the rest. Therefore,if it is only one-star reviews on the internet, I don't think I will like it or use it.*

However, if it has nice reviews also like on Google or Trust Pilot or anything, I think it will help as well and then youknow that you're in a good place to download the app or purchase a product for example.' Additionally, Pien's inclination to read Q&A sections reflects her way of finding information about a start-up's operations and functionalities, *'I think the Q&A gave me a good feeling and information about the service of Breeze because it gave me answers to the questions I had, andother users as well. I had some questions about some settings of the app, and this Q&A gave me the answers I needed.'*

Asking Personal Experiences of People in Close Network
Besides seeking information online, a reliance on personal recommendations from trusted circles for information seeking was also mentioned a few times. For instance, Amber emphasizes the importance of word-of-mouth endorsements from friends, highlighting the role of personal connections in shaping her decisions, *'I think it's nice when friends tell you about a start-up because they've experimented with it already. I think other ways I find out about startups is I think via social media, but I think I prefer asking friends for more information and then possibly purchasing the product because it is easier and more reliable in my opinion.'* Caroline mentioned a similar sentiment, indicating that she makes decisions based on the influence of recommendations from her close network, *'I think when my friends recommend something to me, I am more interested in purchasing it for example. I think they influence me the most to purchase a product or service.'* Lastly, Lauren mentioned that she mostly finds information on social media about a start-up but prefers talking with her network to find information about a company as mentioned earlier.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, we will explore our empirical findings, connecting them to the literature reviews and addressing our research question. Subsequently, we will introduce an integrative model for Generation Z's consumer behavior regarding start-ups.

5.1 Theory of Planned Behavior Model

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a psychological model that explains human behavior through three main components: intention comprises of attitude toward the behavior, perceived norms, and perceived control. TPB can affect the procedures of data collection and of analysis in the case of applying it to a given case study.

5.1.1 Digital Habits

Generation Z's digital habits are a critical aspect of their consumer behavior, significantly influencing how they discover and engage with start-ups. The empirical data reveals that participants are drawn to start-ups that demonstrate innovation and creativity, aligning with the attitudinal component of the TPB model (Ajzen, 1991). Participants frequently mentioned their curiosity about new ventures is often sparked by unique and innovative business ideas, which they actively seek out through digital platforms (Kahawandala & Peter, 2020).

This behavior is indicative of Generation Z's preference for content that is both engaging and authentic, highlighting the importance of personalized and experience-driven marketing strategies for start-ups. As research by Priporas, Stylos, and Fotiadis (2017) suggests, younger consumers expect seamless digital interactions and prioritize authenticity in their engagements with brands. Participants consistently expressed that start-ups which can effectively leverage content marketing and social media to create authentic, user-centric experiences are more likely to capture and retain the interest of Generation Z.

Moreover, these digital habits reflect a shift in how Generation Z interacts with brands compared to previous generations. The constant engagement with digital content suggests that start-ups must not only be present on social media but must also create content that resonates with the values and interests of this demographic (Chang & Wu, 2024). By understanding and adapting to these digital habits, start-ups can better position themselves to meet the expectations of Generation Z, thereby enhancing their market presence and consumer loyalty (Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, 2023).

5.1.2 Social Validation

Social validation is another significant factor influencing Generation Z's consumer behavior, particularly in their interactions with start-ups. The reliance on social networks and online visibility underscores the importance of subjective norms in the TPB model (Ajzen, 1991). The empirical data indicates that Generation Z heavily depends on peer recommendations and the social media presence of a start-up when making purchasing decisions. Participants frequently mentioned that they look to their peers and social networks for validation before deciding to engage with a start-up, highlighting the role of social norms in their decision-making process.

This reliance on social validation is consistent with findings from Belanche et al. (2021) and Breves et al. (2019), who highlight the critical role of social media influencers and peer endorsements in shaping consumer behavior. Participants noted that for them, the opinions and behaviors of their social circles carry significant weight, often more so than traditional advertising.

This demographic's preference for user-generated content and peer reviews over corporate messaging suggests that start-ups need to build strong online communities and leverage influencer marketing effectively to gain credibility and trust (Belanche et al., 2021; Breves et al., 2019). By actively engaging with their audience on social media, start-ups can create a sense of belonging and encourage word-of-mouth marketing, which is crucial for growth and sustainability (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002).

The social validation process also emphasizes the need for start-ups to be visible and active on social media platforms. As Pinto and Paramita (2021) discuss, social media offers a direct channel for start-ups to engage with their audience, facilitating community building and brand loyalty. Participants consistently highlighted that start-ups which can create a sense of community and foster positive word-of-mouth through these platforms are more likely to succeed in attracting and retaining Generation Z consumers.

5.1.3 The Ability to Purchase

The ability to purchase, as it relates to perceived behavioral control in the TPB model, is another critical component of Generation Z's consumer behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The empirical findings suggest that Generation Z is confident in their ability to engage with start-ups, particularly when there are no significant financial or technical barriers. Participants frequently mentioned their comfort and proficiency in using digital platforms, which aligns with the broader trend of digital proficiency within this demographic, who have grown up in a technologically advanced environment and are comfortable navigating various digital platforms (Wilde & Hsu, 2019).

This digital proficiency is a key factor that start-ups must consider when developing their platforms and customer interfaces (Usta, 2023). Participants noted that the expectation for user-friendly, accessible digital experiences is high among Generation Z, and any perceived difficulty can quickly deter them from engaging with a start-up. Therefore, start-ups must prioritize the development of intuitive digital platforms that cater to the needs and expectations of this tech-savvy demographic.

Additionally, participants expressed a willingness to engage financially with start-ups, provided there is perceived value, aligning with findings by Ioniță (2012), who emphasizes that entrepreneurial marketing must be both innovative and cost-effective to appeal to resource-conscious consumers. Start-ups that can demonstrate value and align their pricing strategies with the expectations of Generation Z are better positioned to convert this demographic into loyal customers.

5.2   Updated Theory of Planned Behavior Model

5.2.1   Experts in the Dating App Market

The reliance on experts and informed recommendations within niche markets, such as dating apps, underscores the importance of credibility and trust in Generation Z's consumer behavior. Participants mentioned that they often seek out expert opinions and recommendations, particularly in niche markets such as dating apps. This behavior is closely linked to Market Mavenism, where knowledgeable consumers influence their peers by sharing insights and recommendations about start-ups. The data suggests that in markets where trust and safety are paramount, such as dating apps, the opinions of experts and influencers are crucial in shaping consumer perceptions and decisions (Belanche et al., 2021; Breves et al., 2019).

For start-ups in the dating app market, establishing credibility through partnerships with trusted voices and providing transparent, reliable information is essential (Belanche et al., 2021; Breves et al., 2019). Participants highlighted that this strategy not only builds trust but also aligns with Generation Z's preference for authenticity and informed decision-making. As Chang and Chang (2023) note, tailoring marketing messages and channels to resonate with Generation Z can significantly improve campaign effectiveness and brand loyalty.

5.2.2 Common Values within Generation Z

Generation Z is deeply influenced by their values, particularly in the areas of sustainability, authenticity, and social responsibility. These values are not only personal but are often reflected in their consumer behaviors. Participants consistently mentioned that they are drawn to start-ups that align with these values, emphasizing the importance of a brand's ethical stance and social impact in their decision-making processes.

The empirical data supports the notion that Generation Z is not merely looking for products or services but is also seeking brands that resonate with their broader worldviews. This aligns with research by Sjahruddin and Adif (2024), who found that younger consumers are increasingly prioritizing ethical considerations when making purchasing decisions. Participants in the study expressed a strong preference for start-ups that demonstrate a commitment to these values, suggesting that start-ups that clearly communicate their mission related to sustainability and social impact are more likely to foster long-term loyalty among this demographic.

Start-ups that effectively integrate these values into their brand identity and marketing strategies are better positioned to engage with Generation Z (Chang & Wu, 2024). By aligning with the values that this generation holds dear, start-ups can not only attract but also retain customers who are looking for more than just a transaction, but they are looking for a brand that reflects their own principles and beliefs.

5.2.3 Digital Proficiency

Generation Z's digital proficiency is a defining characteristic of their consumer behavior. Having grown up with technology, this demographic is adept at navigating various digital platforms and expects seamless online experiences. Participants frequently mentioned their confidence in using multiple digital tools simultaneously, highlighting the importance of digital proficiency in their interactions with start-ups.

This proficiency is a key factor that start-ups must consider when developing their platforms and customer interfaces. As Usta (2023) points out, the fast-paced evolution of technology demands that start-ups remain agile and responsive to these advancements, ensuring that their digital platforms are not only user-friendly but also offer the latest functionalities that appeal to this tech-savvy audience.

The empirical data suggests that Generation Z values efficiency and ease of use in their online interactions, making it crucial for start-ups to invest in developing intuitive digital interfaces. Participants noted that any friction or complexity in their digital journey could deter them from engaging further with a brand, underscoring the importance of user-centric design in retaining this demographic's attention and loyalty.

5.3 The Initial Steps in the Consumer Behavior of Generation Z

The results outlined in sections 5.1 and 5.2 are consistent with prior theoretical background. Nevertheless, our data analysis revealed two new themes, 'Drivers for finding start-ups' and 'seeking information about start-ups'. These aspects are not covered in Kahawandala and Peter's updated TPB model, yet we identified them as significant drivers of Generation Z's consumer behavior regarding start-ups. Understanding these initial steps is crucial for start-ups, as they highlight the need for a strong online presence and a well-crafted digital narrative that resonates with Generation Z's values and expectations. By effectively managing these early interactions, start-ups can create a positive first impression that encourages deeper engagement and builds long-term relationships with this demographic.

5.3.1 Drivers for Findings Start-ups

Our analysis of Generation Z's discovery and learning behaviors reveals limitations in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and provides insights into engaging this demographic effectively. While the TPB offers a robust framework for understanding consumer behavior, it does not fully address the discovery phase, particularly in the context of digital-native consumers (Bresciani & Eppler, 2010).

A key driver for finding start-ups is word-of-mouth recommendations. Participants frequently mentioned that personal endorsements from friends played a crucial role in their decision to explore start-ups such as Breeze. This finding aligns with research by Priporas, Stylos, and Fotiadis (2017), which highlights the importance of authenticity and personal recommendations for younger, digitally connected consumers. The TPB's current framework lacks emphasis on the significant impact of peer influence in start-up discovery.

Influencer marketing is another major driver. Participants described how collaborations between influencers and start-ups were crucial in introducing them to new brands. This aligns with the observation that digital-native consumers expect personalized and authentic interactions (Priporas et al., 2017). Influencer marketing leverages the credibility of social media personalities, suggesting that the TPB needs to better incorporate the role of digital influencers (Belanche et al., 2021; Breves et al., 2019).

Targeted advertising on social media platforms was also significant. Participants noted that personalized ads often served as initial touchpoints, sparking their interest in start-ups. This reflects a broader trend where digital channels dominate Generation Z's discovery behaviors (Li & Hassan, 2023). The effectiveness of targeted ads highlights Generation Z's preference for personalized and visually appealing content, underscoring the importance of agile and cost-effective marketing strategies (Kahawandala et al., 2020; Stokes, 2000).

Personal connections with entrepreneurs also emerged as influential. Participants indicated that knowing individuals involved in start-ups affected their attitudes and behaviors toward these ventures. This highlights the importance of social connections and shared values in shaping brand preferences (Wijerathne & Peter, 2023), revealing another gap in the TPB model.

5.3.2 Seeking Information about Start-ups

Our investigation into Generation Z's information-seeking behavior reveals insights that challenge the updated TPB model. Participants stressed the importance of thorough research before making purchasing decisions, suggesting that the TPB does not fully capture their information-seeking behaviors.

Participants preferred engaging and visually appealing content on social media for learning about start-ups. This preference underscores the role of visual storytelling and content marketing in attracting and retaining Generation Z consumers. For start-ups, creating valuable and informative content is essential for building trust and fostering long-term relationships (Koob, 2021; Chang & Wu, 2024).

Social media platforms, especially Instagram, were identified as primary sources of information. This aligns with research showing the increasing influence of social media on consumer behavior (Zhulal et al., 2023). Social media's role in information-seeking reflects a trend towards digital platforms becoming central to consumer decision-making (Li & Hassan, 2023). Engaging with the audience on these platforms helps build a sense of community and encourages word-of-mouth marketing (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002).

The impact of peer recommendations and user-generated content was also significant. Participants valued customer reviews, Q&A posts, and personal recommendations from trusted sources. This supports research on the importance of authentic, user-generated content in shaping consumer perceptions (Sachdev et al., 2021; Wijerathne & Peter, 2023). Start-ups should use these insights to create flexible marketing strategies that respond to consumer feedback and preferences (Ahmadi & O'Cass, 2015).

In summary, while the TPB provides a foundational understanding of Generation Z's consumer behavior, it needs refinement to address the discovery and information-seeking phases. The significant roles of word-of-mouth, influencer marketing, targeted advertising, personal connections, and engaging content highlight the need for a more comprehensive model. By aligning strategies with these insights, start-ups can effectively engage Generation Z, enhance brand visibility, and drive sustainable growth (Schumpeter, 1934; Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, 2023).

5.3.3 Revised Consumer Behavior Model

In response to the evolving landscape of Generation Z consumer behavior, we have developeda new model based on the updated TPB model. This model encompasses Generation Z's discovery and learning behaviors, addressing the crucial gap in the literature. By integrating insights from our interview data with established theories and findings, we aim to provide a more holistic understanding of Generation Z's consumer behavior dynamics, particularly in the context of start-ups, as presented below.
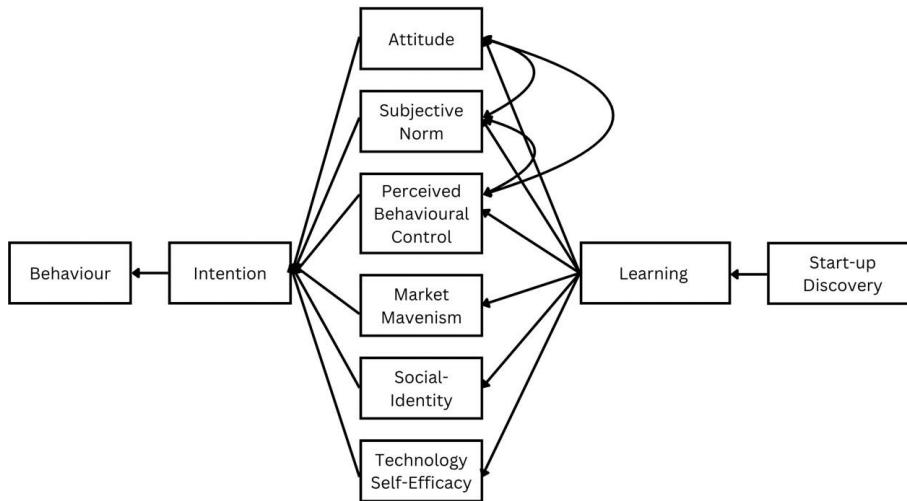

Figure 5: Revised Consumer Behavior Model

6. Conclusion

6.1   Research Contributions

Our thesis uncovered Generation Z's discovery and learning behaviors toward start-ups, which influence their engagement intentions and the implications for entrepreneurial strategies. By delving into the consumer behavior of this demographic group and adding to an existing consumer behavior model, we have uncovered valuable insights into their preferences, motivations, and decision-making aspects when discovering and learning about new ventures. Through a comprehensive analysis of first-order concepts and second-order themes, this study has illuminated the significant factors influencing how Generation Z discovers and learns about start-ups, enhancing the updated TPB Model by Kahawandala and Peter (Kahawandala & Peter, 2020).

Kahawandala and Peter adapted Ajzen's TPB theoretical model to explain Generation Z's consumer behavior. The TPB model, known for its focus on attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control, is extensively used to understand human decision-making(Ajzen, 1991). Kahawandala and Peter chose this model for its relevance in analyzing the motivations and decisions of Generation Z, a digitally native cohort with unique behaviors and preferences, different from previous generations (Kahawandala et al., 2020). By incorporating Market Mavenism, Social Identity, and Technological Self-Efficacy, the researchers aimed to provide a thorough understanding of the factors influencing Generation Z's consumer behavior (Kahawandala & Peter, 2020).

Besides the TPB model, many consumer behavior models exist in the research landscape. While extensive, these models, such as the Engel-Blackwell-Miniard and the Kotler and Kellermodels, lack a specific focus on Generation Z, especially within the context of start-ups. Our findings uncovered the consumer behavior of Generation Z in terms of start-up companies, which were most in line with the elements of the updated TPB model by Kahawandala and Peter. However, we also found more to it than these already existing elements within the model. Our research extends this model by examining how Generation Z discovers and learns about start-up companies, as our findings expose. We found that Generation Z places considerable emphasis on gathering information about start-ups and has a different way of discovering them before progressing through the stages outlined in the updated TPB model during their consumer behavior.

By keeping the updated TPB model into consideration and adding to it, we deepened our understanding of the drivers behind Generation Z's consumer behavior in terms of start-ups. While Kahawandala and Peter did not choose some models as an outline for researching Generation Z consumer behavior due to their linear approach, our research revealed a linear pattern in researching Generation Z's behavior toward start-ups (Kahawandala & Peter, 2020). Initially, Generation Z discovers start-ups and then conducts extensive research to learn about the company, heavily relying on online sources for information (Kahawandala et al., 2020; Li & Hassan, 2023).

During the interviews, we observed patterns aligning with the updated TPB model. Our findings confirmed these elements highlighted in the literature, showing similar consumer behavior in general and towards start-ups, as detailed in the discussions chapter. However, Generation Z emphasized their approach to discovering and learning about start-ups before engaging with the updated TPB model. They rely on peer recommendations, influencer endorsements, and social

media to find new start-ups and highlight the importance of social networks (Wijerathne & Peter, 2023).

Generation Z takes a comprehensive approach to learning and discovering new ventures, examining product backgrounds, reviews, and brand values (Sachdev et al., 2021). This thorough evaluation ensures the venture aligns with their personal values and social identity. Only after this discovering and learning phase do they engage with the stages in the updated TPB model, such as forming intentions and making purchasing decisions. In conclusion, this research has thoroughly addressed the research question:

'How do Generation Z's discovery and learning behaviors toward start-ups influence their engagement intentions, and what are the implications for entrepreneurial strategies?'

Our research addresses a gap in the literature by examining Generation Z's consumer behavior specifically within the start-up environment. By incorporating these distinct behavioral patterns into the revised Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model, we gain deeper insights into how Generation Z discovers and learns about start-ups, which in turn influences their engagement intentions. Understanding these dynamics provides a robust framework for both studying and engaging this digitally native generation, offering valuable implications for crafting entrepreneurial strategies that resonate with their unique preferences and behaviors in the rapidly evolving start-up landscape.

6.2 Practical Implications

The practical implications of this research hold value for academia and industry stakeholders, offering actionable insights that could shape strategies and approaches. Academically, this study contributes to the existing literature on Generation Z's consumer behavior. It provides empirical evidence into their unique behavior of discovering and learning about start-ups, thereby advancing consumer behavior theory.

The findings could serve as a guide for more effective engagement with Generation Z for industry practitioners, particularly those in start-ups and emerging ventures. Authenticity, digital interaction, and innovation are crucial for this demographic, aligning seamlessly with their characteristics, as stated in the literature (Stokes, 2000). Building on theseinsights, start-ups can employ a content marketing strategy, constructing compelling and informativecontent tailored to Generation Z's interests (Koob, 2021).

Furthermore, according to research and confirmed in the findings, establishing a strong presence on relevant social media platforms is imperative to aiding direct interaction with Generation Z consumers (Pinto & Paramita, 2021). This could enhance brand visibility, foster organic reach, and lay the foundation for enduring brand-consumer relationships (Chang & Wu, 2024).Complementing social media engagement, influencer marketing emerges as a potent approachfor start-ups, enabling start-ups to tap into the credibility and reach of influencers trusted by specific segments of Generation Z as also mentioned in the findings (Belanche et al., 2021).

6.3   Limitations

While this research has provided valuable insights into the discovery and learning phase of Generation Z's consumer behavior towards start-ups, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations that may have affected the study's outcomes and interpretations. In this section, we will shed light on these limitations.

First, the researchers' and interviewees' individual experiences and interpretationscan affect the study results. In other words, the social desirability bias. The data collectedin this study relied on self-reported information from participants during interviews. This method is susceptible to social desirability bias, where participants may provide responses, they perceive as socially acceptable or favorable. This bias could have influenced the accuracy and reliability of the data collected (Salkind, 2010). Moreover, despite efforts to minimize researcher bias through peer seminars and crosschecking, the researchers' perspectives and interpretations may have influenced the analysis and findings. Different researchers may interpret the data differently, leading to potential biases in the study results (Gioia et al., 2013).

Secondly, using a single case study instead of multiple case studies may limit the depth of understanding of the research phenomenon (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991). It can be a challenge to generalize the findings to a broader population. The insights and conclusions drawn from a single case study of Breeze may only apply to some start-ups targeting Generation Z consumers. The unique characteristics and circumstances, for instance, the fact that consumers have to be single and looking for a partner, Breeze, may limit the transferability of the findings to other start-up ventures in different industries or contexts.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge the potential limitations and biases of the sample used in this study. The participants were exclusively recruited from one geographic area, which may limit the applicability of our findings to other regions. Additionally, our research did not account for educational and cultural background factors, which could influence a participant's behavior and preferences.

6.4   Future Research

While researching the discovery and learning behavior of Generation Z to start-ups, we organically gained insights into how they remain engaged with and develop trust in start-ups. Although this was not our aim of the study, and we did not delve deeper into it, it presents an intriguing area for future research. We recommend that future researchers conduct longitudinal studies to track theevolving consumer behavior of Generation Z over time. This can provide valuable insights into how their preferences, habits, and interactions with start-ups change as they mature. We also recommend doing comparative case studies with larger and more diverse samples to validate and expand upon our conclusions and bring our framework into practice. Exploring multiple case studies of start-ups targeting Generation Z across different industries and contexts can offer a comparative analysis of consumer behavior patterns. By exploring these recommended areas for future research, scholars and practitioners can continue to advance our knowledge of Generation Z's consumer behavior towards start-ups, uncovering new insights, trends, and opportunities for innovation in the entrepreneurial landscape.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guideline

Questions	Theoretical Framework
Warm-up questions	

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your general online habits on social media?
    a. How often do you use social media?
    b. Which specific social media platforms do you frequent the most, and why?
	Characteristics of Generation Z

Using more specific questions to keep the conversation going and to gain more insights about Generation Z's consumer behavior	

2. Can you walk me through the process on how you came across Breeze?
    a. When did you come across Breeze? What year?
    b. What initially drew your attention to the company?
    c. Is this usually the way how you find start-ups, or do you have alternative methods?
	Consumer Behavior

3. Can you describe a recent experience of finding a different start-up or product? a. How did it compare to your experience with Breeze?	Consumer Behavior
4. In your opinion, what role do influencers or online personalities play in introducing you to new start-ups or products? a. Have you ever found a start-up through an influencer's recommendations and how did that experience impact your perception of the brand?	Entrepreneurial Marketing
5. When you see a sponsored advertisement on your social media,	Entrepreneurial Marketing

what factors determine whether you engage with the ad or scroll past it?	

6. When you find a company like Breeze, what motivates you to get to know the company?
 	
    a. Are there any specific factors or qualities that make you more inclined to explore further?
 	
    b. How do these motivations differ from when you encounter more established brands?
	Consumer Behavior

7. How did you navigate through various online platforms or social media channels to find information about Breeze and its offerings?
 	
    a. What specific online platforms did you use?
 	
    b. What stood by you about the company that you will not forget?
 	
    c. Were there any challenges or obstacles you faced in gathering information?
	Consumer Behavior + Characteristics of Generation Z

8. What type of information are you looking for in start-ups and what influences you to explore Breeze further to engage with the brand?
 	
    a. Are there particular aspects of a start-up's story, values, or products/services that resonate most with you?
 	
    b. How do you prioritize different types of information when deciding to engage with a start-up?
	Consumer Behavior + Characteristics of Generation Z

9. Are there more start-up companies you follow on social media? If so, what draws you to them, and how do you stay updated on their activities and offerings?	Consumer Behavior + Characteristics of Generation Z

10. How did you evaluate the trustworthiness and legitimacy of Breeze?
    a. Were there specific cues or signals that helped you determine whether the company was valid?
    b. Would you still trust them if they have little to no social media presence and engagement?
	Consumer Behavior + Characteristics of Generation Z

11. Can you share any observations or insights about Breeze's online presence or marketing strategies based on your experience navigating through their platforms?
    a. What aspects of their online presence stood out to you positively or negatively?
    b. Were there any particular marketing tactics or messaging that resonated with you?
	Entrepreneurial Marketing

12. Looking back, how do you think Breeze could improve in terms of their online visibility or communication to make it easier for potential customers like yourself to find their products/services?
    a. Are there any specific suggestions or recommendations you would offer to enhance their online presence or communication strategy?
    b. How important do you think online visibility is for start-ups compared to more traditional forms of marketing and advertising?
	Entrepreneurial Marketing

13. Looking ahead, how do you envision the future of how Generation Z finds (information about) start-ups? a. What emerging trends or technologies do you think	Characteristics of Generation Z

will have the biggest impact on this process in the coming years?	

14. Did you ever consider buying from Breeze, so in this case going on a date?
 	
    a. What factors influenced your decision to consider purchasing the service Breeze offers?
 	
    b. Can you describe the steps you took from initially discovering Breeze to deciding on whether or not to buy their services?
 	
    c. Did you encounter any obstacles or concerns during your decision-making process? If so, what were they, and how did you address them?
	Consumer Behavior + Characteristics of Generation Z

Appendix 2: Concepts Derived from Primary Data

1. Instagram is used often
2. TikTok is used often
3. Google and Bing are used to do research
4. X is used for information-seeking purposes
5. Facebook is sometimes used
6. LinkedIn is used for professional purposes
7. WhatsApp is used for personal conversations
8. Snapchat is used often
9. Post content on social media: contribute to online conversations by sharing thoughts, updates, or creative content
10. Share their voice on social media: Express themselves and their opinions on social media platforms
11. Endless scrolling on social media: Continuously browsing content feeds without a specific goal in mind
12. Stay in touch with friends and family through social media: Maintain connections and share updates with loved ones using social media tools
13. Share posts through direct messages with friends and family: Privately send content to friends and family on social media
14. Going on social media for entertainment: Use social media for leisure and enjoyment, such as consuming funny content or watching videos
15. Going on social media for educational purposes: Seek out and learn from informative content shared on social media platforms
16. Gain inspiration on the for you page on Instagram: Discover ideas and trends through personalized content curation on Instagram
17. First scan the social media page of the company, then go to the website to seek information: initially assess the company's social media profile before seeking more detailed information on their website
18. Utilizing LinkedIn for professional networking purposes
19. Browing TikTok passively without creating videos
20. Engaging with influencers whose content resonates with personal interests
21. Interacting with advertisements that meet specific needs or are visually appealing
22. Not actively on the lookout for new companies
23. Word-of-mouth recommendations via direct messages: Learning about companies through personal suggestions shared in private messages on social media
24. Viral video exposure: Discovering companies through videos that gain widespread popularity and reach on social media
25. Peer-to-peer product discussions: Hearing about products and services through conversations with friends
26. Algorithm recommendations: Encountering companies suggested by social media platforms based on user data and past behavior
27. Sponsored content discovery: Finding companies through paid advertisements displayed within social media feeds
28. Establishing real-life connections with employees of startup ventures
29. Forming direct connections with startup founders
30. Acknowledging that influencer collaborations can sometimes be overwhelming
31. Student/full-time worker: Participants are in different life stages with varying amounts of free time
32. Active social life: Participants prioritize socializing, potentially less so as they age

33. Seeking adventure: Participants desire new experiences with a balance of excitement and familiarity
34. Values privacy: Participants prioritize their personal lives and may be selective about sharing information
35. Business curiosity: Participants are interested in how new companies operate and function
36. Devoting significant leisure time to online activities
37. Leveraging social media for interpersonal connections
38. Consuming news primarily through social media platforms
39. Preferring online shopping
40. Actively engaging with soecial media influencers
41. Influencer marketing sway: Participant susceptibility to endorsements from trusted online personalities
42. Educational content preference: Participants prioritize informative content that educates them about the company, product usage, and helpful tips
43. Transparency: Participants desire a glimpse into a company's inner workings through behind-the-scenes content
44. Sustainability focus: Participants prioritize companies with practices that align with environmental and social responsibility
45. Seeking differentiation: User looks for new companies with innovative ideas that stand out in a crowded market
46. Price sensitivity: Participants consider the costs of a new product or service when making a decision
47. Free trial preferences: Participants are more likely to try a new product or service if a free trial is available
48. Company values and relevance: Participants gravitate towards companies that align with their values and interests
49. Supporting local startups and valuing reciprocation
50. Establishing personal connections with startup founders or team members
51. Acknowledging startups that differentiate themselves and promote diversity
52. Word-of-mouth recommendations: This sparks an interest in participants' learning more about companies
53. Curious about brand growth: Participants are interested in seeing what a brand does next and how it evolves over time
54. Supporting small companies: Participants enjoy helping small businesses grow by giving them their attention and engagement
55. Interested in meeting the team: Participants like to get to know the people behind the company and see their passion
56. Sharing personal stories: Participants appreciate when a company shares personal stories about their company
57. Visually appealing social media: Company social media feeds are attractive and visually engaging
58. Implementing more engaging pop-up messages within the app for enhanced user experience
59. Avoiding email correspondence to prevent spam perception
60. Leveraging TikTok to broaden the app's outreach and engagement
61. Engaging social media messaging: Company social media posts are clear, easy to understand, and connect with participants on a personal level
62. Accessible platforms: The platforms companies use to showcase their work make it easy for potential customers to find and explore the company

63. Follow trends: Participants want Breeze to keep up with current trends to feel more relatable
64. Appreciating the diversity showcased by startups
65. Post consistently: People want Breeze to post content regularly to stay engaged
66. Authenticity: Participants want Breeze to be genuine and share personalized content on their social media
67. Unique ideas: Participants are looking for startups with innovative and creative business ideas
68. Authenticity vs Generic: People value authenticity over generic marketing messages
69. Online reviews: Positive reviews from past customers demonstrate a good track record
70. Influencer endorsements: Recommendations from respected figures can be persuasive
71. Social proof: Seeing others use and endorse Breeze suggests widespread adoption and credibility
72. Trustpilot reviews: Positive reviews on Trustpilot, a reputable review platform, build trust
73. Consistent branding: A consistent brand image across all platforms (website, social media, etc.) creates a sense of professionalism and legitimacy
74. Verification symbols: Official verification badges from social media platforms can be reassuring, indicating the account is authentic
75. Transparency: Open and honest communication about products, services, and challenges builds trust with potential customers
76. Acknowledging that an absence of social media presence might raise trust concerns
77. Evaluating the startup's legitimacy based on the credibility of its website and content
78. Valuing transparent and comprehensive Q&A sessions on websites
79. Considering word-of-mouth endorsements from trusted individuals in personal networks
80. Personal recommendations: Word-of-mouth recommendations from trusted friends and family hold significant weight in trust
81. Social media presence: An active and engaging social media presence that interacts with followers creates a positive impression and fosters trust
82. Brand authenticity: Participants value genuine and relatable companies
83. Transparency: Sharing data and being open builds trust
84. Storytelling: Compelling narratives and real-life experiences connect with audiences on social media
85. Interactive experiences: Engaging content fosters two-way communication and builds loyalty for a brand
86. Recognizing the impact of authentic video diaries that foster a sense of connection and relatability
87. Eye-catching visuals: Vibrant colours and strong visuals grab attention, particularly on platforms like Instagram
88. Trend awareness: Staying relevant by incorporating current trends can attract new audiences and engage with current ones
89. Engaging content: Humour, excitement, and interesting content keeps users engaged
90. Social responsibility: Aligning with important causes resonates with the participants
91. Sustainability focus: Promoting responsible consumption practices positions a company favourably for some of the participants
92. Concise Instagram posts: Short, impactful content is key for capturing the attention of the consumer