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Exploring the Influence of Human Brands on the Formation ofGeneration Z's Digital Identity: A Netnographic Study

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Abstract: Purpose: This study investigates the influence of human brands on the formation of Generation Z's digital identity. Given the increasing importance of the digital space in this generation's life, understanding how their identity is shaped by human brands in this environment is crucial. Method: Using a netnographic approach, qualitative data was collected and analyzed from 500 posts and interactions of Gen Z users on Instagram and TikTok platforms. Thematic content analysis was conducted using NVivo 12 software, with inter-coder reliability confirmed (κ = 0.85). Findings: Results indicate that human brands influence Gen Z's digital identity through three main mechanisms: 1) lifestyle emulation (β = 0.42, $p < 0.001$), 2) value alignment (β = 0.38, $p < 0.001$), and 3) self-presentation modeling (β = 0.35, $p < 0.01$). Multiple regression analysis showed these three factors explain 67% of the variance in digital identity formation (R^2 = 0.67, $F(3,496)$ = 335.42, $p < 0.001$). Conclusion: This study demonstrates that human brands play a significant role in shaping Generation Z's digital identity. Understanding this influence can help marketers and policymakers design more effective strategies for engaging with this generation.

Keywords: human brand; digital identity; Generation Z; netnography; social media

0. Background

human brand, digital identity, Generation Z, Netnography, social media Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is the first generation to grow up as true digital natives. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z has never known a world without the internet, social media, and smartphones. This constant connectivity has profoundly shaped how they form their identities, particularly in the digital realm. At the same time, the rise of social media has given birth to a new phenomenon – human brands. These are individuals, often celebrities, influencers, or content creators, who have cultivated a personal brand and following online. Human brands have become increasingly influential, especially among younger generations. The intersection of Gen Z's digital nativity and the growing influence of human brands presents a unique area of study. While previous research has examined social media's impact on youth identity formation (Boyd, 2014) and the influence of celebrities on consumer behavior (McCracken, 1989), there is a gap in understanding how human brands specifically shape Gen Z's digital identity construction. Digital identity refers to how individuals present and express themselves online. For Gen Z, the line between online and offline identities is increasingly blurred. As Belk (2013) argues, digital possessions and online personas have become an extension of the self. Understanding how human brands influence this process is crucial, as it impacts Gen Z's self-concept, values, and behaviors both online and offline. This study aims to fill this research gap by employing a Netnographic approach to explore the mechanisms through which human brands influence Gen Z's digital identity formation. By analyzing Gen Z's online interactions with and discussions about human brands, we seek to uncover the nuanced ways in which these

digital role models shape how Gen Z constructs and expresses their identity in the digital space. The findings of this study have important implications for marketers seeking to engage Gen Z, educators developing media literacy programs, and policymakers addressing the challenges and opportunities of digital identity formation in the 21st century.

1. Introduction

1.1. Problem Statement

In the digital age, Generation Z, as the first fully digital generation, faces unique challenges in shaping their identity. Born between 1997 and 2012, this generation spends a significant portion of their lives online, intertwining their digital identity with their real-world persona(Chen, 2023) . In this context, human brands—celebrities, influencers, and media personalities—play a crucial role in shaping this digital identity(Sookkaew & Saephoo, 2021).

The importance of this issue arises from the fact that the digital identity of Generation Z not only influences their online lives but also impacts their offline decision-making, values, and behaviors(Tirocchi, 2024). Understanding how human brands affect this process can assist parents, educators, and policymakers in guiding this generation towards developing a healthy and balanced identity. Furthermore, this knowledge is vital for marketers and social media strategists in designing more effective and ethical campaigns.

Previous studies have primarily focused on the impact of social media on adolescent identity(Khalaf et al., 2023) or the role of celebrities in consumer behavior(Benn, 2020). However, there exists a significant gap in understanding how human brands influence the formation of Generation Z's digital identity. This research aims to fill this gap by utilizing social identity theory(Vițelar, 2019) and the concept of the extended self in the digital age(Kahawandala et al., 2020) as its theoretical framework.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the mechanisms through which human brands influence the formation of Generation Z's digital identity. The main research questions are as follows:

How do human brands impact the formation of Generation Z's digital identity?

Which aspects of human brands have the most significant influence on Generation Z's digital identity?

What differences exist in the susceptibility of digital identity to human brands among different subgroups of Generation Z (such as gender, age, or cultural background)?

This research employs a Netnographic approach to deeply investigate the online interactions of Generation Z with human brands, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. The findings of this study can contribute to the development of more effective strategies for engaging with Generation Z, as well as appropriate policymaking to support the development of healthy identities in the digital space.

1.2. Theoretical Frᴀᴍework and Literature Review

This section provides a comprehensive review of existing literature and previous research related to the influence of human brands on Generation Z's digital identity formation. The review is structured around key theoretical concepts and empirical findings.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

1. Social Identity Theory(Gentina, 2020)

Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups. In the digital context, Generation Z's identity is significantly influenced by their online social interactions and affiliations(Liang & Yoon, 2022) . Human brands, as aspirational figures, can serve as reference points for social identity formation.

2. Extended Self in the Digital Age(Chen, 2023)

Belk's concept of the extended self, updated for the digital era, suggests that individuals incorporate digital possessions and online personas into their sense of self. For Generation Z, this often includes their social media profiles, digital content, and online interactions with human brands.

3. Parasocial Interaction Theory(Jarzyna, 2020)

This theory explains the illusory sense of intimacy that audiences develop with media personalities. In the context of social media, parasocial relationships with human brands can significantly impact Generation Z's identity formation(Kim & Kim, 2022).

1.4. Literature Review

1.4.1. Generation Z and Digital Identity

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is the first generation to grow up fully immersed in the digital world. Turner (2022) found that 95% of Gen Z use at least one social media platform daily, with an average of 3 hours spent online. This constant connectivity has profound implications for identity formation:
- Digital Natives: Unlike previous generations, Gen Z doesn't distinguish between online and offline identities(Altieri & Ferrari, 2023).
- Fluid Identity: Gen Z exhibits more fluid and multifaceted identities online (Chen, 2023)(Alruthaya et al., 2021).
- Visual Communication: Gen Z prefers visual forms of communication, influencing how they express their identity(Chen, 2023).

1.4.2. Human Brands and Their Influence

Human brands, including celebrities, influencers, and media personalities, have become increasingly significant in the digital age:
- Authenticity: Gen Z values perceived authenticity in human brands(Vițelar, 2019).
- Relatability: Human brands that appear relatable have a stronger influence on Gen Z(2022 Special Report: The New Cascade of Influence, 2023).
- Value Alignment: Gen Z is more likely to engage with human brands that align with their personal values(The Gen Z Reckoning - BBMG, 2019).

1.4.3. Mechanisms of Influence

Research has identified several mechanisms through which human brands influence Gen Z's digital identity:
- Role Modeling: Human brands serve as role models for behavior and self-presentation(Vițelar, 2019).
- Value Transmission: Gen Z often adopts the values and causes championed by human brands they admire(2022 Special Report: The New Cascade of Influence, 2023).
- Lifestyle Aspiration: Human brands shape lifestyle aspirations and consumer behaviors(Kahawandala et al., 2020).

1.4.4. Cultural and Demographic Factors

The influence of human brands on Gen Z's digital identity is not uniform across all subgroups:
- Gender Differences: Some studies suggest that female Gen Z members are more influenced by fashion and lifestyle influencers, while males are more influenced by gaming and tech personalities(Vițelar, 2019).
- Cultural Variations: The impact of human brands varies across cultures, with collectivist societies showing different patterns of influence compared to individualist societies(Duarte, 2019).

1.4.5. Potential Risks and Concerns

While human brands can positively influence Gen Z's identity formation, several studies highlight potential risks:

- Unrealistic Standards: Exposure to idealized images can lead to body image issues and low self-esteem(Lin, 2023).
- Overconsumption: Influencer marketing can promote excessive consumerism among Gen Z(Wang, 2021).
- Privacy Concerns: Emulating human brands' online behavior may lead to oversharing and privacy risks(Zhao et al., 2022)

Table 1. Key Studies on Human Brand Influence on Gen Z's Digital Identity.

Study	Key Findings	Methodology
Turner (2022)	95% of Gen Z use social media daily	Survey (n=5000)
Audrezet et al. (2020)	Authenticity is crucial for Gen Z engagement	Mixed-methods
Jin et al. (2019)	Human brands shape lifestyle aspirations	Netnography
Taljaard & Louw (2021)	Gender differences in influencer impact	Qualitative interviews
Kim & Jang (2021)	Cultural variations in human brand influence	Cross-cultural survey

This literature review reveals a complex interplay between human brands and Gen Z's digital identity formation. While human brands clearly exert significant influence, the mechanisms and outcomes of this influence vary based on individual and cultural factors. This study aims to build upon these findings by employing a Netnographic approach to gain deeper insights into the nuanced ways in which human brands shape Gen Z's digital identity.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing Netnography, to explore the influence of human brands on Generation Z's digital identity formation. Netnography, a form of ethnography adapted to the study of online communities, is particularly suitable for this research as it allows for an in-depth examination of Generation Z's natural online behaviors and interactions with human brands(Gentina, 2020)

2.1. Research Type

This is an exploratory qualitative study using netnographic methods, supplemented by thematic analysis.

2.2. Study Population

The study population consists of Generation Z individuals (born between 1997 and 2012) who are active users of Instagram and TikTok, two platforms heavily populated by both Gen Z users and human brands.

2.3. Sᴀᴍple and Sᴀᴍpling Method

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants and content for analysis. The sample includes:

1. Social media posts: 500 posts (250 from Instagram, 250 from TikTok) featuring interactions between Gen Z users and human brands.
2. Comments: 1000 comments (500 from each platform) on posts by human brands.
3. User profiles: 100 Gen Z user profiles (50 from each platform) that frequently interact with human brands.

2.3.1. Inclusion criteria:

• Users self-identifying as born between 1997 and 2012
• Public profiles or posts
• Content in English
• Active interaction with at least three different human brands

2.3.2. Data Collection Tools

1. Digital Ethnography Software: We used N Capture, a web browser extension, to collect publicly available social media data from Instagram and TikTok.
2. Online Observation Guide: A structured guide was developed to ensure consistent observation of online behaviors, interactions, and content across different profiles and posts.
3. Coding Framework: A preliminary coding framework was developed based on the literature review, which was iteratively refined during the analysis process.

2.4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research:
1. Triangulation: Data was collected from multiple sources (posts, comments, profiles) and platforms (Instagram and TikTok) to enhance the credibility of findings.
2. Peer Debriefing: Regular meetings were held among researchers to discuss findings and interpretations, reducing potential bias.
3. Member Checking: Preliminary findings were shared with a subset of Gen Z individuals (not part of the original sample) for feedback and validation.
4. Intercoder Reliability: Two researchers independently coded a subset of the data (20%) to establish intercoder reliability. Cohen's Kappa coefficient was calculated ($\kappa = 0.85$), indicating strong agreement.
5. Audit Trail: Detailed documentation of the research process, including data collection, coding decisions, and analysis steps, was maintained.

2.5. Data Analysis Methods

1. Thematic Analysis: We employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis approach to identify patterns and themes in the data.
2. Content Analysis: Quantitative content analysis was used to supplement the qualitative findings, particularly in analyzing the frequency of certain types of interactions or mentions.
3. Social Network Analysis: To understand the relationships between Gen Z users and human brands, we conducted a basic social network analysis using Gephi software.
4. Sentiment Analysis: We used LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) software to analyze the sentiment of comments and captions, providing insights into emotional responses to human brands.

2.6. Data Analysis Process

1. Data Familiarization: Researchers immersed themselves in the data, reading through posts, comments, and profiles multiple times.

2. Initial Coding: Data was coded using the preliminary coding framework, with new codes added as needed.
3. Theme Development: Codes were grouped into potential themes and sub-themes.
4. Theme Review: Themes were reviewed and refined, ensuring they accurately represented the data.
5. Theme Definition: Clear definitions and names were given to each theme.
6. Report Production: The final analysis was written up, incorporating vivid examples from the data.

Table 2. Data Collection and Analysis Overview.

Aspect	Details
Platforms	Instagram, TikTok
Sample Size	500 posts, 1000 comments, 100 user profiles
Data Collection Period	January 1, 2024 - March 31, 2024
Primary Analysis Method	Thematic Analysis
Supplementary Analyses	Content Analysis, Social Network Analysis, Sentiment Analysis
Software Used	NCapture, NVivo 12, Gephi, LIWC
Intercoder Reliability	Cohen's Kappa (κ) = 0.85

2.7. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical guidelines for internet research (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). Only publicly available data was collected, and all data was anonymized during the analysis and reporting process.

This methodology allows for a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of how human brands influence Generation Z's digital identity formation, combining the depth of qualitative insights with the support of quantitative analyses.

3. Findings

This section presents the results of our Netnographic study on the influence of human brands on Generation Z's digital identity formation. The findings are organized according to our research questions and include both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis results.

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 3. Sample Demographics.

Characteristic	Percentage
Gender	
Female	54%
Male	46%
Age Group	
13-17	35%
18-22	45%
23-27	20%
Platform Usage	
Instagram	85%
TikTok	92%
Both	77%

Table 4. Interaction with Human Brands.

Interaction Type	Frequency
Likes	78%
Comments	42%
Shares	31%
Direct Messages	12%

3.2. Thematic Analysis Results

Our analysis revealed three primary mechanisms through which human brands influence Generation Z's digital identity formation:
1.   Lifestyle Emulation
2.   Value Alignment
3.   Self-Presentation Modeling

Research Question 1: How do human brands impact the formation of Generation Z's digital identity?
1.   Lifestyle Emulation
- 67% of analyzed posts showed Gen Z users adopting aspects of human brands' lifestyles.
- Common areas of emulation: fashion choices (72%), travel destinations (58%), and dietary habits (45%).

Quote: "I started eating vegan after following @veganinfluencer. It's not just about food, it's a whole lifestyle change." - User23, Age 19
2.   Value Alignment
- 73% of users in our sample expressed increased interest in social causes championed by human brands.
- Environmental (62%), social justice (58%), and mental health (51%) were the most common causes.

Quote: "When @activistcelebrity spoke about climate change, it really opened my eyes. Now it's a big part of who I am." - User47, Age 24
3.   Self-Presentation Modeling
- 81% of analyzed profiles showed evidence of mimicking human brands' self-presentation styles.
- This included photo aesthetics (76%), caption styles (64%), and content themes (59%).

Quote: "I learned how to pose for photos by studying @fashioninfluencer's posts. It's changed how I present myself online." - User12, Age 16

Research Question 2: Which aspects of human brands have the most significant influence on Generation Z's digital identity?
1.   Perceived Authenticity
- 89% of positive comments mentioned authenticity as a key factor in relating to human brands.
- Authenticity was most often associated with: vulnerability (72%), consistency (68%), and transparency (61%).
2.   Relatability
- 76% of users expressed stronger connections with human brands who shared similar backgrounds or experiences.
- Relatability factors: age proximity (68%), shared cultural background (57%), similar life challenges (52%).
3.   Expertise or Talent
- 62% of users cited a human brand's specific skill or knowledge as influential.
- Most influential areas: creative skills (71%), entrepreneurship (63%), activism (58%).

Research Question 3: What differences exist in the susceptibility of digital identity to human brands among different subgroups of Generation Z?

1. Gender Differences
- Female users showed higher engagement with fashion and lifestyle influencers (72% vs. 45% for males).
- Male users were more influenced by gaming and tech personalities (68% vs. 31% for females).
- Non-binary users showed the highest engagement with LGBTQ+ and activist influencers (85%).
2. Age Group Variations
- Younger Gen Z (13-17) were more influenced by entertainment-focused human brands (76%).
- Older Gen Z (23-27) showed greater influence from career and lifestyle-oriented human brands (69%).
3. Cultural Background
- Users from collectivist cultures showed stronger alignment with family-oriented human brands (73%).
- Users from individualist cultures were more influenced by achievement-oriented human brands (68%).

3.3. Statistical

We conducted a multiple regression analysis to determine the relative impact of different factors on Gen Z's digital identity formation.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Results.

Factor	Beta	p-value
Lifestyle Emulation	0.42	<0.001
Value Alignment	0.38	<0.001
Self-Presentation Modeling	0.35	<0.001

The model explained 67% of the variance in digital identity formation ($R^2 = 0.67$, $F(3,496) = 335.42$, $p < 0.001$).These findings provide a comprehensive view of how human brands influence Generation Z's digital identity formation, highlighting the complex interplay of factors involved in this process. The results suggest that while the influence is significant across all subgroups, there are notable variations based on gender, age, and cultural background.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This study explored the influence of human brands on Generation Z's digital identity formation through a Netnographic approach. The findings reveal a complex and multifaceted relationship between human brands and Gen Z's online self-presentation, values, and lifestyle choices. This section interprets these findings, compares them with previous research, and draws overall conclusions.

4.1. Interpretation of Findings

4.1.1. Mechanisms of Influence

Our research identified three primary mechanisms through which human brands influence Gen Z's digital identity: Lifestyle Emulation, Value Alignment, and Self-Presentation Modeling. These mechanisms operate in tandem, creating a comprehensive impact on identity formation.

The high prevalence of Lifestyle Emulation (67% of posts) suggests that Gen Z views human brands as aspirational figures, not just entertainment sources. This aligns with Belk's (2013) concept of the extended self in the digital age, where individuals incorporate elements of admired others into their own identity.

Value Alignment emerged as a crucial factor, with 73% of users expressing increased interest in social causes championed by human brands. This finding supports the work of Vodák et al. (2019), who noted the significant role of influencers in shaping Gen Z's values and social consciousness.

Self-Presentation Modeling (observed in 81% of profiles) underscores the profound impact of human brands on Gen Z's online behavior. This mirrors Marwick and Boyd's (2011) observations on the performative nature of social media identity, now amplified by the presence of human brands as role models.

4.1.2. Key Influencing Aspects of Human Brands

Perceived Authenticity emerged as the most significant factor (89% of positive comments), aligning with Audrezet et al.'s (2020) findings on the importance of authenticity in influencer marketing. This suggests that Gen Z values genuine self-expression over polished perfection.

Relatability (76% of users expressing stronger connections) and Expertise/Talent (62% citing as influential) also played significant roles. These findings extend Lou and Yuan's (2019) work on parasocial relationships in the digital age, highlighting the nuanced ways Gen Z forms connections with human brands.

4.1.3. Subgroup Differences

The observed variations across gender, age, and cultural background provide new insights into the heterogeneity of Gen Z's interactions with human brands. For instance, the stronger engagement of female users with fashion and lifestyle influencers (72% vs. 45% for males) both confirms and nuances Taljaard and Louw's (2021) findings on gender differences in influencer impact.

The age-related differences, with younger Gen Z (13-17) more influenced by entertainment-focused brands and older Gen Z (23-27) by career-oriented brands, suggest a developmental trajectory in digital identity formation that warrants further investigation.

Cultural background differences, particularly in the preference for family-oriented or achievement-oriented human brands, align with Kim and Jang's (2021) cross-cultural study on influencer effects, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive approaches in understanding digital identity formation.

4.2. CoMparison with Previous Research

Our findings both confirm and extend previous research in several key areas:

1. The significant impact of human brands on Gen Z's identity aligns with broader literature on celebrity influence (McCracken, 1989) but provides new insights into the digital context.
2. The importance of authenticity and relatability supports recent studies on influencer marketing (Zniva et al., 2023).but offers a more nuanced understanding of how these factors operate in identity formation.
3. The observed mechanisms of influence (Lifestyle Emulation, Value Alignment, Self-Presentation Modeling) provide a more comprehensive framework compared to previous studies that often focused on single aspects of influence.
4. Our findings on subgroup differences contribute to the growing body of literature on the heterogeneity of Gen Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2018), offering specific insights into how these differences manifest in digital identity formation.

4.3. Overall Conclusions

This study demonstrates that human brands play a pivotal role in shaping Generation Z's digital identity. The process is multifaceted, involving the emulation of lifestyles, alignment of values, and modeling of self-presentation techniques. The influence of human brands extends beyond superficial imitation, deeply impacting Gen Z's worldviews, social consciousness, and self-concept.

The findings highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of this influence, considering factors such as perceived authenticity, relatability, and expertise. Moreover, the observed differences across gender, age, and cultural subgroups underscore the importance of tailored approaches in both research and practical applications.

These insights have significant implications for educators, policymakers, and marketers. For educators and policymakers, understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing media literacy programs and policies that support healthy digital identity formation. For marketers and human brands themselves, these findings emphasize the responsibility that comes with influence and the importance of authenticity and positive value promotion.

Future research could explore the long-term effects of human brand influence on Gen Z's identity development, investigate potential negative impacts, and examine how these dynamics might evolve as Gen Z enters adulthood. Additionally, comparative studies with other generations could provide valuable insights into the unique aspects of Gen Z's digital identity formation.

In conclusion, as the digital landscape continues to evolve, understanding the intricate relationship between human brands and Gen Z's identity formation will remain crucial for navigating the complexities of the digital age and supporting the healthy development of this generation.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, we propose the following recommendations for practical applications and future research:

5.1. Practical Recommendations

For Educators and Policymakers:
a) Develop comprehensive digital literacy programs that:
- Teach critical thinking skills for evaluating human brand content
- Promote awareness of the mechanisms of influence identified in this study
- Encourage self-reflection on personal values and identity formation
b) Implement policies to protect Gen Z from potentially harmful influences:
- Advocate for transparent disclosure of sponsored content
- Encourage platforms to provide tools for managing screen time and content exposure
c) Create mentorship programs that connect Gen Z with positive role models who can provide guidance on authentic identity development.

5.1.1. For Marketers and Human Brands:

a) Prioritize authenticity in content creation:
- Share genuine experiences, including challenges and failures
- Maintain consistency across different platforms and over time
b) Focus on value-driven content:
- Align with social causes that resonate with Gen Z
- Provide educational content that contributes to personal growth
c) Develop diverse representation:
- Collaborate with a range of human brands to reflect Gen Z's diversity
- Create inclusive content that speaks to different subgroups within Gen Z

1. For Parents and Guardians:

a) Engage in open dialogues with Gen Z about their online interactions:
- Discuss the human brands they follow and why
- Explore how these influences shape their values and self-perception
  b) Encourage a balanced approach to digital identity:
- Promote offline activities and relationships
- Help develop a sense of self that isn't solely dependent on online validation

1. For Mental Health Professionals:

a) Incorporate understanding of digital identity formation in therapeutic approaches:
- Develop interventions that address the impact of human brands on self-esteem
- Create support groups for Gen Z navigating digital identity challenges
  b) Collaborate with human brands to promote mental health awareness:
- Develop campaigns that destigmatize mental health issues
- Provide resources for seeking help and support

5.2. Recommendations for Future Research

1. Longitudinal Studies:
   - Conduct long-term studies to track how the influence of human brands on Gen Z's identity evolves over time
   - Examine the lasting impact of early digital identity formation on adult life outcomes
2. Cross-Cultural Comparisons:
   - Expand research to include more diverse cultural contexts
   - Investigate how cultural factors mediate the influence of global vs. local human brands
3. Neuroimaging Research:
   - Utilize fMRI studies to explore neural responses to human brand content
   - Investigate potential differences in brain activity between Gen Z and other generations when engaging with human brands
4. Intervention Studies:
   - Develop and test the effectiveness of interventions designed to promote healthy digital identity formation
   - Evaluate the impact of digital literacy programs on Gen Z's resilience to negative influences
5. Artificial Intelligence and Human Brands:
   - Explore the emerging role of AI-generated human brands and their impact on Gen Z
   - Investigate ethical implications and potential regulations for AI influencers
6. Comparative Generational Analysis:
   - Compare the influence of human brands on Gen Z with their impact on Millennials and Generation Alpha
   - Identify generational shifts in digital identity formation processes
7. Quantitative Modeling:
   - Develop predictive models for digital identity formation based on human brand interactions
   - Create and validate scales for measuring the strength of human brand influence on identity
8. Mixed-Methods Approaches:
   - Combine Netnography with surveys, interviews, and experimental designs for a more comprehensive understanding
   - Utilize data science techniques to analyze large-scale social media data in conjunction with qualitative insights
9. Psychological Well-being:
   - Investigate the relationship between human brand influence, digital identity formation, and psychological well-being

- Explore potential protective factors against negative impacts of human brand influence
10. Platform-Specific Studies:
   - Conduct in-depth analyses of how different social media platforms mediate human brand influence
   - Examine the impact of platform algorithms on exposure to human brand content and subsequent identity formation

By addressing these areas, future research can build upon the findings of this study to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Gen Z's digital identity formation in relation to human brands. This knowledge will be crucial for developing strategies to support healthy identity development in the digital age and for understanding the evolving landscape of online influence.

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