News Influencers: The Role of Professional Expertise and Emotional Tone on Gen Z's News Consumption Intention

Student Name: Maureen Koudhoofd

Student Number: 512632

Supervisor: P.M.A. Tenbült, PhD

Master Media Studies - Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to conduct research on whether the presence or absence of the professional expertise of the news influencer, in the form possessing or not possessing a professional journalistic background, and the positive, negative or neutral emotional tone of the online news content, play a significant role in determining the news consumption intention for Gen Z. To measure this connection, a 2x3 between-subjects quasi factorial experimental research design was composed. By conducting this research, the potential effects of professional expertise and emotional tone on Gen Z's news consumption intentionwere unraveled. The aim was to use these results in order to gain a deeper understanding of Gen Z's digital news consumption and which factors would play an essential role in determining their intent to consume news. This thesis constructed the following research question to reveal the findings of the research: How does the professional expertise of the news influencer (professional vs. non-professional) and the emotional tone of the online news content (positive, neutral, or, negative) impact the news consumption intention of Gen Z? To answer the research question of this thesis, three main hypotheses were constructed. H1 (News influencers with a professional journalistic background will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to news influencers without a professional journalistic background), H2a (Emotional tone in news content will influence the level of news consumption intention), H2b (A negative emotional tone of news content created by news influencers will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to positive – and neutral news content), H2c (A positive emotional tone of news content created by news influencers will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to neutral news content), and H3 (The influence of a negative emotional tone of news content created by news influencers will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to positive – and neutral news content and this effect is greater when it concerns influencers with a professional background compared to a non-professional background). The hypotheses were tested by using a two-way ANOVA in SPSS. The results from the analysis indicated that H2a and H2c were accepted, and H1, H2b, and H3 were rejected. Thus, the findings of the research revealed that Gen Z's intention to consume news was not influenced by the professional expertise of the news influencer, but on the other hand, their news consumption intention was affected by the emotional tone of the news content. This was specifically the case when the headline of the news content was positively framed. This suggested that Gen Z had an overall preference for more positive content in order to positively influence their news consumption intention.

KEYWORDS: *news influencers, Gen Z, online news content, social media, news consumption intention*

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Preface

This thesis marks the final job for my MA Media & Business at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. The thesis trajectory has been demanding but also very fulfilling, and therefore resulted in a very valuable learning experience and process. I enjoyed learning more about a topic, which was before starting this thesis, relatively unknown to me and the insights I gained have allowed me to deepen my understanding of Gen Z's digital news consumption.

I also want to take a brief moment to acknowledge several people who were very important by helping me complete this thesis project. First, and above all, I want to thank my supervisor Dr. Petra Tenbült for her guidance, feedback, and overall support during the last few months. Her allocated time and insights were indispensable for creating this thesis and gave me confidence in my work throughout the process.

Additionally, I want to thank the people close to me who did their utmost best to spread the survey to as many people as possible. This support was fundamental for me to obtain a sufficient sample. Moreover, I would also like to express my gratitude to all the participants who took their time to complete the survey. This thesis relied enormously on their input.

Last but not least, I want to thank my parents for their supports in the past half year. I always could rely on them in case needed.

Maureen Koudhoofd
Rotterdam, June 2025

List of Abbreviations

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
DV	Dependent Variable
IV	Independent Variable
SMI	Social Media Influencers

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Imagine scrolling through TikTok. You are encountering some trending dance videos and other funny memes, but suddenly you see a video of Lisa Remillard, known for her account "The News Girl". In this video, she explained the latest news update on President Trump's decision to terminate of the emergency abortion requirements at hospitals in the United States (Remillard, 2025). This video has over 1.5 million views and more than 165,000 likes. Moreover, Lisa Remillard posts regularly the latest news updates, and she has more than 3.7 million followers on her TikTok account. On top of that, your knowledge about this topic is very limited and Lisa's video piques your interest, so you decide to watch the video to educate yourself on this topic.

This hypothetical situation explains how Gen Z has shifted its news consumption significantly since traditional news has become less important for them. Compared to previous generations, Gen Z frequently obtains news through social media and creates news content themselves (Ku et al., 2019, p. 6). Due to the rise of online platforms, traditional journalism has been disrupted (Lichtenstein et al., 2021, p. 1105). This has led to that traditional journalistic standards are blending in with new forms of online news content, causing the creation of and collaboration with other digital content creators to reach the younger audience. This results in the concept of news influencers (Muth & Peter, 2023, p. 164). Influencers traditionally focus on promoting products and online marketing. However, Muth and Peter (2023, p. 164) argued that online content also started to focus on more political engagement and social activism. These news influencers share information about current news events, thus combining news consumption with social media (Liedke et al., 2024).

1.2. Academic Relevance

Previous research had established that traditional influencers' characteristics and the post's characteristics, such as using emotional tones may impact follower engagement (Leung et al., 2022, pp. 98 & 101). The study by Ao et al. (2023, pp. 3-4) dived deeper into influencers' characteristics and concluded that higher levels of credibility expertise will positively influence customer engagement of their followers. However, news influencers often create content with different purposes by providing information instead of only promoting products (Suuronen et al., 2022, p. 302). Therefore, the characteristics of online news content are considerably different compared to promotional content, and it cannot be automatically assumed that the same characteristics and emotional tone used in promotional influencer marketing and communication will be equally successful for news content (Borchers, 2025, p. 3). Hence, successful traditional influencer traits and chosen emotional content cannot be applied to news influencers and has yet to be explored and researched. Moreover, the article of Beckett and Deuze (2016, p. 1) argued that the use of emotion should be more embraced in current

traditional journalistic practices in order to sustain the dynamic media landscape. According to the authors, it is therefore necessary to focus in future academic research on what role emotional content plays in the audience's engagement (Beckett & Deuze, 2016, p. 5). Additionally, the study of Martin and Sharma (2022, p. 295) focused on the general role of news content by news influencers, but stated that future research should focus on specific characteristics of the news influencers and their content.

Therefore, this study covers an academic gap by exploring the influencer's characteristics and the emotional tone of their post concerning news influencers, and how this may impact the news consumption intention of Gen Z. This means that this research will further explore academic knowledge on how digital news can be successfully constructed by focusing specifically on news influencers instead of only on academic findings related to traditional influencers. This displays academic relevance since no previous research has focused on the role of professional expertise and emotional tone related to the news influencer field.

1.3. Societal Relevance

The Digital News Report of the Netherlands, composed by the Commissariaat Voor De Media and Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2024, p. 3), stated that although news consumption becomes more prevalent on social media, overall news interest is still decreasing, especially among 18- to 34-year-olds, thus mainly Gen Z. However, this does not automatically imply that online news content does not have the potential to increase news consumption intention. Incidental online news exposure might still positively expand news engagement (Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018, p. 230). Moreover, over one third of adults under 30 stated that they frequently consume news from news influencers (Liedke et al., 2024). These findings exhibited that additional research into news influencers can result in societal relevance by making Gen Z more involved with news. This will be explained more in depth below.

Understanding how the news influencer's professional expertise and emotional tone used in the news content impact Gen Z's interest in news consumption intention on social media can provide relevant insights for both journalism and society at large. Specifically, the study of Min et al. (2022, p. 160) argued that there is a positive correlation between news consumption and political participation. This is an important aspect since the younger generation often feels disconnected from political institutions and parties, partly as the result of that traditional communication channels do not reach and engage them efficiently (Feio & Oliveira, 2025, p. 115). Since news consumption increases political knowledge, it is a crucial factor in political engagement, such as voting (Min et al., 2022, p. 161). Digital influencers are often more successful in engaging the younger generation with political news by simplifying the content and shortening the news video duration. In addition, creating content by using different forms of emotional tones can have a positive effect in capturing Gen Z's attention who normally do not consume news online (Feio & Oliveria, 2025, pp. 119-120). The study of Choi et al.

(2021, p. 1034) argued that it is very valuable for news organizations to comprehend the effect of different forms of emotional content since it might impact how the audience interpreters and engages with news.

Given that news consumption plays an essential role in various societal aspects, it is pivotal to identify the drivers behind Gen Z's news consumption intention on social media platforms. In addition, this could also help traditional news outlets' in understanding how to improve the overall news consumption intention of Gen Z by considering incorporating news influencers as an alternative tactic of spreading news. This is an important driver for traditional mass media outlets according to Feezell (2018, p. 482); media outlets are traditionally pivotal in setting a shared public agenda to facilitate agreement on the important issues in the society. However, since the use of traditional media is shrinking, social media has more impact on influencing the public agenda.

Therefore, this research can be societal relevant since it can be very valuable for traditional media outlets to identify which factors influence Gen Z's news consumption intention.

1.4. Research Question

This study aims to develop more understanding of how the professional expertise of news influencers and the emotional tone of news content will influence the news consumption intention of Gen Z. These are important factors to research since according to Bratina and Faganel (2024, p. 2) the expertise, which builds upon credibility, of the social media influencer is a critical factor in successfully distributing social media content. In order to determine the same effectiveness for news influencers, this study will investigate whether expertise, demonstrated by the presence or absence of a professional journalistic background, enhances the news consumption intention of Gen Z. Moreover, the study of Baum and Abdel Rahman (2021, p. 282) argued that emotional news content affects early and late stages of cognitive processing of news. This suggests that emotion used in news headlines, regardless of source credibility, might influence how people interact with news and how this will influence their intention to consume news. Taking this into account, the following research question which will be answered by conducting a 2x3 experiment:

How does the professional expertise of the news influencer (professional vs. non-professional) and the emotional tone of the online news content (positive, neutral, or, negative) impact the news consumption intention of Gen Z?

The experiment will measure whether different emotional tones (either positive, neutral, or negative) and the level of professional expertise of the news influencer (professional – or non-professional journalistic background) will affect Gen Z's level of news consumption intention. This results in that there will be six different experimental conditions: the expertise of the news influencer

will be measured in two levels, either the news influencer has a professional journalistic background or is a non-professional, and the emotional tone will be measured in three levels, the headline of the post will be framed either, positive, neutral, or negative. The results of this experiment illustrate whether a specific combination of emotional tone and the news influencer's professionality will lead to a higher level of news consumption among Gen Z, thus providing insights into which factors will most likely influence Gen Z's news consumption intention.

1.5. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis will contain five chapters. After this introductory chapter, the theoretical framework on which this study is based will be presented. This second chapter will focus on the existing literature related to news consumption among Gen Z, the rise of news influencers on social media, the impact of these news influencers' credibility and expertise, and the role of emotional tone in online news content. This framework will form the foundation for the hypotheses and methodological guide for this study. Chapter three will present the chosen method of this study and the motivation behind this choice. Moreover, an elaborate overview of the sampling method, materials, concept operationalization, procedure, pre-tests, and pilot-test will be described. Based on this chapter, the results for this study will be obtained by conducting an experimental survey. These results will be discussed in chapter four. Furthermore, chapter four will also analyze whether the hypotheses of this study will be accepted or rejected. Lastly, chapter five will discuss these findings more in depth, and will cover the managerial implications, limitations of this study, suggestions for future research, and the conclusion. The references used in this study will be presented in the end, as well as the different appendices.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter will discuss the current theories on influencers' engagement tactics, while examining the available literature focusing specifically on news influencers. A distinction will be made between the professional journalistic news influencers and non-professional journalistic news influencers (e.g., citizen journalists). Moreover, the role of emotional tone in news on users' news consumption will be elaborated. This framework will provide a foundation of the current knowledge on news influencers, emotional tone, and the effect on news consumption intention of Gen Z.

2.1. News Consumption and Gen Z

As mentioned earlier, Gen Z consumes news considerably less compared to older generations. In the past decade, the portion of the younger generation which is very interested in general news has declined significantly over the last decade. The research of the Commissariaat Voor De Media and Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2024, p. 13) stated that the share of Dutch people aged between 18 and 34 who have a strong interest in news decreased from 52% in 2018 to 33% in 2024, with a small spike of 61% during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contract, 54% of Dutch individuals aged 35 and above expressed a strong interest in news in 2024, demonstrating a substantially higher interest in news compared to the younger generation.

When Gen Z does consume news, they often access online sources as well instead of only traditional ones (Antunovic et al., 2018, p. 633). According to Battocchio et al. (2023, pp. 166-167) this manifests in that the consumption of traditional news, such as TV and print, drastically declines amongst Gen Z compared to the previous generations; instead, Gen Z relies more on the access of news through digital devices and social media platforms. Since news can be spread easily on social media and social media presence is incorporated in Gen Z's routine, it is more presumably that Gen Z discovers news unintentionally while being online for other purposes. Meaning they passively find news instead of actively searching for it (Hassoun et al., 2023, p. 12). Even though incidental exposure to news content on social media has a significant impact on enhanced involvement with news topics, this passive exposure may lead to insufficient comprehension of current events (Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018, p. 226). On the other hand, Feezell (2018, p. 491) argued that incidental news on social media reaches the otherwise uninterested users to new information they would normally actively avoid to consume. Moreover, research of Dvir-Gvirsman (2022, p. 1794) indicated that users who consume a significant amount of online news are often more engaged with online news as well.

Although Gen Z primarily uses social media as their main source for information and news, Blandi et al. (2022, p. 2) argued in their article that Gen Z does express concern about the credibility of online information since detecting misinformation can be complex.

2.2. News Influencers

Advertising and marketing by social media influencers positively impacts product sales and influences consumer behavior (Fan et al., 2023, pp. 430-431). According to Mende et al. (2021, p. 326), traditional marketing principles are based on identifying and satisfying customers' needs better than your competitors. Moreover, the study of Constantinides (2014, p. 43) stated that these marketing principles are also extended to social media marketing, which aims to increase market exposure and customer traffic. Since the news media industry is facing significant shifts in how their audience consumes news, traditional news outlets are also utilizing marketing principles by becoming more market-oriented (e.g., satisfying and retaining their audience) based on what their audience prefers (Mende et al., 2021, pp. 326-327). Mende et al. (2021, p. 329) also argued that news anchors and news content creators therefore also function similar to marketeers and celebrity influencers. Thus, since the production and spreading of news content is guided by the same factors that influence other consumer decisions, it is presumable that the intent to consume news is a type of consumer goods behavior.

Social media influencers (SMIs) are characterized as content creators who gain fame and recognition by building a network of followers and using their influence to form audiences' attitudes (Ruiz-Gómez, 2019, pp. 14-15). SMIs can center their content around specific niche areas, such as fashion or travel, resulting in making them convincing marketing tools for companies due to their perceived authenticity and knowledge (Ao et al., 2023, p. 1).

However, in the last decade, SMIs do not solely create commercial content but have started to focus on journalistic practices on online platforms by spreading news themselves (Lichtenstein et al., 2021, p. 1104). These news influencers have the potential to spread news to a broad audience (Flamino et al., 2023, p. 904). Social media users either follow some of these news influencers intentionally in order to be informed about societal and political issues or encounter these influencers accidentally while being online. This unintended exposure to news content online can result in that followers can become interested in multiple different topics, making news influencers content creators in various news areas (Muth & Peter, 2023, pp. 167-168).

Mende et al. (2021, p. 327) stated that in order to maintain a loyal audience that trusts the news content, it is pivotal to identify which type of news, based on source, content, and format, results in a successful combination in meeting the audience's expectations and interests.

The authenticity of the SMI is an important factor in order for Gen Z to be interested in the SMI and the their produced content (Obreja, 2023, p. 747). Moreover, Gen Z will be more interested in news from news influencers if the content is easy and visually appealing and if they can personally relate to it . However, there is a pitfall to that, because it makes Gen Z more prone to belief fake news since this generation accepts information quicker (Andriany & Triwardhani, 2025, p. 48).

News influencers might have professional journalistic backgrounds, but since social media is accessible to everyone, they can also be non-professionals (Riedl et al., 2023, pp. 2&4). Hence, news influencers can have different professional backgrounds, resulting in two main groups: professional

journalists and citizen journalists (Acampa et al., 2022, p. 12). This leads to that users can encounter news influencers with varying levels of expertise across platforms (Zimmermann et al., 2023, p. 2).

2.2.1. Citizen Journalists as News Influencers

Citizen journalists become established (digital) celebrities on social media platforms by creating informative content while following the online trends among users, resulting in building a loyal follower base who are in line with the influencer's view (Cheng et al., 2024, p. 118). Traditionally, established journalism involved screening and selecting information before presenting the news to the audience. The audience has little to no input in this selection process. However, the rise of digital technologies and social media gave the general public the platform and the tools to capture and share news effortlessly. This allows news readers to also participate in the news-making process instead of only being a news consumer (Acampa et al., 2022, p.12). The former version of X, Twitter, has played a substantial role in shaping the role of citizen journalists by allowing that individuals can share real-time information before traditional media outlets can report it. This new journalism model empowers every mobile user to fulfill the role of a reporter by spreading information, photos, and videos without pending editorial approval (Segun, 2024, pp. 64-65). This leads to that journalists do not possess the ability to gatekeep access to news content (Balaban & Nedelcu, 2021, p. 45).

2.2.2. Professional Journalists as News Influencers

The second group are the professional journalists acting as news influencers. Acampa et al. (2022, p. 11) discussed that these news influencers use online media tools, without abandoning their traditional journalistic characteristics, to reach a broader public faster by distributing real-time information and allowing online viewers to engage on posts. Since these journalists are often connected to a traditional media outlet, it is pivotal that they remain objective and refrain themselves from making political statements (Walters, 2022, p. 1490). Nowadays, it is often very valuable for journalists to have an online presence since this facilitates the opportunity to have more interaction with readers and the growing trend that individuals rather obtain news from individual journalists instead of relying solely on the content of news organizations (Karhawi & Camargo, 2023, p. 123). This caused that there is a thin line between traditional media and new media on online platforms where traditional journalists compete with non-professional news influencers to attract and preserve an online audience (Peres-Neto, 2022, p. 30). According to Karhawi and Camargo (2023, p. 145), journalists acting as news influencers often mimic their online presence based on the communication tactics of established digital influencers in order to create content that appears relatable to online users. On top of that, these journalists aim to promote traditional media content to redirect their follower base to traditional news platforms, such as TV.

2.2.3. Source Credibility and Expertise

In traditional influencer marketing perceived expertise in influencers will result in that viewers trust these influencers more, resulting in more endorsement (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023, p. 83). The credibility of news sources plays an important role in how online users will engage with news (Balaban & Nedelcu, 2021, p. 44). Since spreading news content is possible for every individual user, the credibility of news influencers can be debatable. The article of Riedl et al. (2023, p. 2) mentions that it is difficult to regulate online misinformation due to the fundamental right of freedom of speech in many democratic countries. Moreover, citizen journalists, unlike (mostly independent) traditional mainstream media, have the privilege to report only news that captures their interests, resulting in biased content (Segun, 2024, p. 67). Although this can result in that platform users might perceive amateur news influencer as less credible compared to traditional media, Carr et al. (2014, p. 453) also argued that amateur news influencers have the potential to reengage people who distrust mainstream media. According to Carr et al. (2024, p. 456) skepticism in mainstream media can result in that people are prone to trust citizen journalists more. This is visible from the research of Cheng et al. (2024, p. 125) where the authors discussed that SMIs can positively impact political engagement among the younger generation. More specifically, this impact is even more significant if the influencer possesses certain source-related factors, such as level of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. The confirmation of this source credibility theory is based on the expertise scale of Ohanian (1990, p. 47), which demonstrated that these traits can positively influence the audience's engagement and enhance the acceptance of the content reporting (Cheng et al., 2024, p. 119).

However, Carr et al. (2024, p. 456) argued that on average mainstream media is still seen as more trustworthy since the overflow of online news content makes it complex to determine the level of expertise from non-traditional media sources. In general, traditional media is perceived more credible than amateur SMIs, making news influencers with a professional journalistic background presumably more trustworthy, compared to news influencers without a professional journalistic background, resulting in increased engagement with news (Zimmermann et al., 2023, p. 3). Taking this into account, hypothesis H1 is constructed:

H1: News influencers with a professional journalistic background will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to news influencers without a professional journalistic background.

2.3. Emotional tone

Sentiment in news content influences on what extent (potential) readers will consume news. The use of specific emotions can determine how people adsorb and interpret information (Choi et al., 2021, p. 1018). The article of Oh et al. (2023, p. 113) observed that positive news content resulted in

decreased page views on news outlets' websites, and Singh et al. (2014, p. 39) concluded that somewhat negative content in corporate blogs resulted in more readers. People often claim that they prefer more positive news, however, previous research indicated that people tend to be more engaged with negatively framed news due to negativity bias; the tendency to evaluate negative information with closer attention and more urgency (Trussler & Soroka, 2014, p. 363). The Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT) of Marcus et al. (2000) claimed that people feel more drawn to negative emotions since it demands more mental effort to process it (Choi et al., 2021, p. 1021).

Trussler and Soroka (2014, p. 368) tested the effect of different emotional (positive, negative, and neutral) stories on online news outlets, and concluded that negative stories were 26% more likely to be read compared to positive stories. Moreover, neutral stories are also more often selected than positive stories.

Furthermore, the emotional tone in traditional SMIs' content is an important aspect, both positive and negative, for creating a more loyal follower base (van der Harst & Angelopoulos, 2024, p. 3). The authors in this article argued that followers perceive a more personal connection with the influencer if content contains emotion. Research of Fischer et al. (2022, p. 268) also confirmed this theory for the content creation of political influencers on YouTube by elaborating that, even though neutral content is more authentic and informative, emotional content attracts more viewers. Taking this information into account, the following three hypothesis are constructed.

H2a: Emotional tone in news content will influence the level of news consumption intention.

H2b: A negative emotional tone of news content created by news influencers will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to positive – and neutral news content.

H2c: A positive emotional tone of news content created by news influencers will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to neutral news content.

2.4. Interaction

It is presumably that there is an interaction effect present, resulting in that the combination of the two main effects have a combined impact on news consumption intention that exceeds the effect of each individual main effect (Neuman, 2014, p. 296). The research of Peters (2011, pp. 310-311) indicated that delivering news with an emotional tone has a positive effect on audience engagement. Moreover, Van Der Meer and Brosius (2024, p. 65) argued that negative news is perceived as more credible

According to Wahl-Jorgensen (2020, p. 184), in the 20th century, professional journalists were expected to refrain from using emotionally charged storytelling and uphold the principles of objective

(e.g., neutral) journalism. However, Wahl-Jorgensen (2020, p. 184) expressed that nowadays it is more justifiable for professional journalists to use emotion in storytelling because it can strengthen audience engagement, making it a powerful and valuable tool for award-winning journalism. In addition, the use of emotion is for journalists especially more important with the rise of digital media and the additional hybrid form of storytelling in order to be more successful with capturing the audience's attention (Pajnik, 2024, p. 182). Based on these findings, Hypothesis 3 is determined:

H3: The influence of a negative emotional tone of news content created by news influencers will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to positive – and neutral news content and this effect is greater when it concerns influencers with a professional background compared to a non-professional background.

3. Methods

This chapter focuses on the research method used for this study. The first section will focus on the motivation behind the chosen, quantitative experimental, research method. This will be followed up by elaborating on the selected sample and the strategy to reach them. The third section will describe the materials and the conducted pre-tests for this study. After this, the operationalization of the concepts will be elaborated, followed by the pilot test and the results. The last part of this chapter will describe the design of the final survey, and the validity, reliability, and ethics of the research.

3.1. Motivation behind the Method

This research examines the causal relationship between the news influencer's level of professional expertise and emotional tone in news content on Gen Z's news consumption intention. Therefore, a quantitative experiment is of great value to test a potential causal relationship between two or more variables (Neuman, 2014, p. 282). Moreover, quantitative research provides the opportunity to use statistical measurement to test the strength and significance of the relationship found in the data (Apuke, 2017, p. 41). The hypotheses in this research were constructed on evidence-based previous research. Therefore, it is important to test whether the previous findings were also applicable for the effects of news influencers' professional expertise and the emotional tone used in news on Gen Z's news consumption intention created by news influencers. Even though these two main variables are related in other settings, it does not automatically mean that there is also a causal effect of news influencers and Gen Z's intention to consume news.

The study will focus on the different conditions between the different sub-groups on news consumption. The two independent variables (IV), the news influencer's professional journalistic expertise and the post's emotional tone, were split-up in different sub-groups to see the effect on the dependent variable (DV) news consumption intention (Vargas et al., 2017, p. 101). The first IV in this research, news influencer's professional journalistic background (e.g., expertise), consisted of two levels: news influencer with professional journalistic backgrounds and news influencers without professional journalistic backgrounds. The second IV, emotional tone, consisted of three levels: positive, neutral, and negative tones in news content. This resulted in a 2x3 between-subjects quasi factorial design. A quasi-experiment is an appropriate experimental design for this research since there is no control and comparison group (Vargas et. al., 2017, p. 108). Moreover, since there were two IVs, thus two separate factors, there were six experimental conditions, which will be compared between subjects (Rogers & Révész, 2019, p. 9). According to Charness et al. (2012, p. 4), between-subjects comparison is less susceptible to framing issues which participants might encounter. Therefore, future participants will not be influenced by previous scenarios (e.g., encountering a news influencer without a professional background after seeing a post of a news influencers with a professional background). Moreover, according to Rogers and Révész (2019, p. 9), a factorial experimental design also allows

the two IVs to interact to determine the effect on the DV news consumption intention, thus facilitating in determining the interaction effect.

3.2. Sampling

There was a minimum requirement of 180 respondents in total, since every sub-category should have at least 30 respondents (Janssen & Verboord, 2024, p. 13). However, the aimed sample was larger than this (minimum of 200) in case participants need to be excluded from the data due to a failed attention check or incomplete responses. The study focused exclusively on Generation Z since news consumptions is declining the most for this group, accompanied with a shift in the sources where they obtain news from. The year brackets of Gen Z are classified somewhat different across multiple studies, but for the sake of ensuring a broader sample, Gen Z was classified as people born between 1995-2010, thus using the age cohort of 18-30 years old, since participants should be at least 18 years old. According to Wood et al. (2021, p. 17) is this classification an appropriate range for Gen Z in North-America.

3.2.1. Sampling Method

This research used a non-probability sampling method, thus respondents were not randomly selected (Hossan et al., 2023, p. 214). The reason to choose this method over a probability sampling method is because non-probability samples are usually faster to obtain and require lower financial investments. However, non-probability sampling does induce more selection bias, thus making it more complex generalize the results (Rahman, 2023, p. 48).

More specifically, a snowballing method was used to obtain participants for the survey. Hossan et al. (2023, p. 218) elaborated that snowball sampling is characterized by obtaining new participants through asking current participants to spread the survey. This resulted in that new participants can be obtained fast. Moreover, purposive sampling was also used to share the survey with every potential candidate between 18-30 years old within the researcher's own network, resulting in easily finding participants (Rahman, 2023, p. 49).

Lastly, halfway the survey the decision was made to also publish the survey on SurveySwap and SurveyCircle in order to obtain more respondents.

3.3. Materials

The participant encountered two manipulated images: they were shown an Instagram profile of either a professional news influencer (with journalistic background) or a non-professional news influencer (without journalistic background). The profile consisted of a profile picture, a profile description, and the latest three posts on the account (See Appendix E for the six different scenarios).

This layout of the profile was based on the research of Zimmermann et al. (2023, p. 6), where the participants were presented one Instagram profile. This was followed by a news post from the same influencer but varied in emotional tone (positive, negative, or neutral). The design of this news post was also inspired by the research of Zimmermann et al. (2023, p. 8). This study used the same set-up as the study with Zimmermann et al. (2023, pp. 7-8) by presenting the participant with two images: one of the Instagram profiles and one of the Instagram post. The post included the profile picture and username of the news influencer, the picture including the news headline, the symbols for comments, likes and, shares, and a short caption. Thus, this means that the participant was presented with two manipulated images. Section 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 explains the reasoning behind using two manipulated images in the survey. The second image (the influencer's Instagram post) was directly tied to the version of the news influencer shown in the first image (the profile of the news influencer) and contained a headline with either one of the three different emotions.

The visual materials used in the survey (main news post image, three posts on the influencer's Instagram profile, and profile picture) are AI-generated (see AI declarations statement) with ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025). The motivation for creating a news influencer with AI was to ensure consistency and control over the two different influencers and characteristics since they were basically the same person but with adapted features which could implicate their level of professionality. This resulted in that one fictional news influencer, named James Smith, was created. However, there were two different versions of James Smith: with and without a professional journalistic background. Section 3.4.1. will describe how the distinction will be made for the two different versions of the fictional news influencer James Smith.

The editing, such as the manipulated headlines, the posts' captions, and the description in the bios in the Instagram profiles of the news influencers, was done manually by the researcher in Canva. This ensured that the simulated Instagram environment would reflect a real Instagram content, resulting in making the experiment as realistic as possible for the participant.

Lastly, the image of the post resembled the beginning of a video, similar to how Instagram displays video content before it starts automatically playing. Normally in the real digital environment of Instagram the video would automatically start playing. However, in this study the focus is on the content (e.g., the headline) and the perception of the influencer's professionality. Therefore, it was not pivotal to create a complete video since the audiovisual content would not be used to measure the effect on news consumption intention. By using a still image, the effect of the headline's tone and news influencer's professionality would solely emphasize its effects on the DV news consumption intention.

3.3.1. Pre-test

Before the final survey was shared with potential participants, two pre-tests were conducted with respondents who will not take part in the official survey. These pre-tests were conducted in Qualtrics. A pre-test could help verifying whether the experimental manipulations were correctly interpreted by the participants as intended (Vargas et al., 2017, p. 106).

In the first pre-test, participants were only shown the manipulated Instagram news post of the news influencer. This means that all the manipulations for professionality and emotional tone were only done in the post. The participants were shown three different news posts; one of which had a neutral headline and a professional news influencer, one of which had a positive headline and a non-professional news influencer, and one of which had a negative headline and a professional news influencer. After seeing each post, the participant had to rate the professionality of the news influencer and the tone of the headline.

Moreover, a second pre-test was considered necessary due to concerns that the participants might not fully recognize the news influencer's professionality based on only seeing the presented news post. The second pre-test extended the first set-up by including the Instagram profile of the news influencer. Thus, the set-up of the second pre-test was the same, however, the participants had also seen a photo of the selected news influencer's Instagram profile before being exposed to the news post. This strategy was based on the research Karhawi and Camargo (2023, p. 132), where the authors emphasized that journalists professional as news influencer differentiated themselves by including their credentials in their Instagram bios.

Based on the results of the pre-test, some adjustments could be made for the experimental scenarios to ensure that the survey design and content is understandable. Participants of the pre-test had also been given the opportunity to give their feedback on the survey.

3.3.2. Results Pre-tests

Both pre-tests were completed by five ($N = 5$) participants. There was no goal for a specific (minimum) number of participants for both pre-tests beforehand. According to the study of Perneger et al. (2015, p. 150) smaller pre-tests risk having limited accuracy, and larger pre-test, ideally around 30 participants, are considered as more reliable. However, since the participants for the pre-tests are from the participant's own personal network, a smaller sample could only be obtained. Even though the final samples of the pre-tests were small, a small pre-test sample size can still identify easily detectable misunderstandings (Perneger et al., 2015, p. 150).

The results of the first pre-test are presented below, in Table 3.3.2a.

Table 3.3.2a

Results pre-test 1: Descriptive statistics of the average value on the expertise scale of Ohanian (1990, p. 47) by the news influencer's level of professionality

	M	SD
Non-professional	3.16[a]	1.01
Professional	3.44[a]	.59

(Means with a different superscript differ significantly, $p < .05$)

The difference between the two versions of the news influencers was very small and the effect was also not significant, $p = .263$, indicating that the participants did not reliably perceive a clear difference in professional background between the two versions of the news influencers.

Secondly, the second pre-test (thus, which included the Instagram profile of the news influencer followed up by the news post presented by the same news influencer) revealed a bigger, and statistically significant, $p = .008$, difference between the versions of the news influencers. This means that including the Instagram profile of the news influencer resulted in that the participants' ability to distinguish between a professional and non-professional influencer will be enhanced. The results are presented in Table 3.3.2b.

Table 3.3.2b

Results pre-test 2: Descriptive statistics of the average value on the expertise scale of Ohanian (1990, p. 47) by the news influencer's level of professionality

	M	SD
Non-professional	3.00[a]	.17
Professional	3.92[b]	.72

(Means with a different superscript differ significantly, $p < .05$)

The manipulation check for the level of professionality of the news influencer is based on the expertise scale of Ohanian (1990, p. 47) (see section 3.4.4). This scale consisted of five items (measured on a 5-point Likert scale), each measuring a single aspect of expertise. The average of these five items determined the participant's overall perceived expertise of the news influencer. For the manipulation check in the final version of the survey, the following cut-off criteria will be used: if the participant was shown a news influencer with a professional background, the participant's average score on the expertise scale of Ohanian (1990, p. 47) should be 3 or higher, and if the participant was shown a news influencer without a professional background, the participant's average score on the expertise scale of Ohanian (1990, p. 47) should be 3 or lower.

Lastly, the same three headlines (one positive headline, one neutral headline, and one negative headline) about the same topic was used for both versions of the pre-tests. This means that in total $N = 10$ responses were recorded for the measurements of the emotional tones of the headlines. The mean scores were (on a 5-point Likert scale; positive = 1, slightly positive = 2, neutral = 3, slightly negative = 4, negative = 5) for the positive headline 1.70 ($SD = .82$), for the neutral headline 2.40 ($SD = .70$), and for the negative headline 4.40 ($SD = .84$) (see Table C.1 in Appendix C). Paired samples t-tests revealed a statistically significant difference between the neutral – and negative headlines, $p < .001$. Additionally, this difference was also significant between the positive – and negative headlines, $p < .001$, and positive – and neutral headlines, $p = .025$ (see Table C.2 in Appendix C). This implied that the participants perceived the three different emotional tones significant differently.

Based on these findings it can be concluded that the participants of the pre-tests perceived the emotional tones of the three different headlines as statistically significantly different. This means that the final version used the three headlines which were also used in the pre-tests, and no further adjustments were be made on that part. Moreover, the results of the first pre-test (without the Instagram profile of the news influencer) showed that participants gave the news influencer without a professional background a score of higher than 3 (thus, not falling within the range of the cut-off criteria explained above here) and was not statistically significant. Since the results of the second pre-test (including the Instagram profile of the news influencer) showed that participants rated the news influencer with professional background above 3 and the news influencer without professional background at exactly 3, both versions are within their own threshold. Moreover, the differences are significantly different. Therefore, the final version of the survey used the set-up of the second survey: the participant will first see the Instagram profile of the randomly assigned news influencer (either with a professional journalistic background or without a professional journalistic background), followed by a news post (featuring one of the three different emotional tones) from that same news influencer.

Finally, participants also indicated in their feedback that the caption of the Instagram post was too detailed and long, which influenced their ability to remember the emotional tone of the headline. Additionally, since the caption contained more extensive details compared to the headline, participants also indicated that it influenced their perception of the emotional tone. This resulted in that the caption was shortened and simplified to facilitate a better understanding and recollection of the emotional framing of the headline.

3.4. Operationalization

The experiment consisted of two IVs, one IV (professional expertise) consisting of two levels and one IV (emotional tone) consisting of three levels, resulting in, the projected below, six different experimental conditions per sub-groups. The six conditions are presented in Appendix E.

Table 3.4

Overview of the different experimental sub-groups

	Positive tone	Neutral tone	Negative tone
Non-professional	Group 1	Group 3	Group 5
Professional	Group 2	Group 4	Group 6

Each condition had a distinctive news post, which was feasible to appear on Instagram. According to Liedke et al. (2024), most news influencers are present on X, however the Commissariaat Voor De Media and Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2024, p. 23) indicated that Instagram is the most popular platform for the younger generation. Therefore, the experiment will be executed in an imitated Instagram environment.

The same influencer was used for all the experimental conditions in order to ensure high internal validity (Vargas et al., 2017, p. 102). This implies that the only difference between the two influencers was the absence or presence of professional journalistic experience.

Lastly, all the experimental conditions were covering the exact same news topic in the Instagram post of the news influencer. This topic was based on an actual news item but the headline in the post will be framed slightly differently for the three different emotional tones (positive, negative, and neutral), thus having three different versions. So, the emotional tone of the headline was different for the three versions, but the main concept of the post was the same. This approach realized that any changes to the participant's response to news consumption intention was due to emotional framing or the difference in professional expertise of the news influencer and not as a result of differences in the presented topic.

3.4.1. News Influencer Expertise

The expertise of the news influencers is related to professionalism of the news influencer. The survey contained a fictional news influencer named James Smith. James Smith adopted specific characteristics based on the presence or absence of a professional journalistic background. The expertise was measured by presenting James Smith as either a news influencer with a professional journalistic background or as a news influencer without a professional journalistic background. This background in journalism referred to the experience of working for a recognized, traditional, news organization. According to the study of Karhawi and Camargo (2023, p. 132) news influencer

journalists aim to distinguish themselves from normal digital influencer (thus, news influencers without journalistic experience) by labeling themselves as a media professional in their Instagram bios in order to assert their ties to an institutional authority. Moreover, journalists also do not interact deeply with their followers, reflecting a "top-down distribution of content", which is similar to traditional media's communication style, instead of a more interactive model where traditional influencer abide by (Karhawi & Camargo, 2023, p. 133).

The professional background of the news influencer was manipulated in order to measure that the (perceived) expertise would affect the participant's news consumption intention. For the news influencer with a journalistic background, the participant was presented with a profile that includes a reference that the news influencer works at CNN, thus highlighting the news influencer's role in a professional news field. Moreover, the two different news influencers differed on various aspects in order to designate either a professional or a non-professional background. This was enforced by including different Instagram profile descriptions (e.g., the bios), the type of content the latest three posts entail, and the verified badge. The news influencer with a professional background was verified, while the non-professional influencer was not verified. On the other hand, the number of followers was the same for both influencers to prevent that any measured differences would be a result of the difference in follower count.

3.4.2. Emotional Tone

The three levels of emotional tone in the news post were reflected in the wording of the headline, such as was done in the study of Trussler and Soroka (2014, pp. 366 & 375). The positive headlines were optimistic, neutral headlines were without emotions and informational, and negative headlines were critical and pessimistic. The content of the post was for all six experimental conditions the same. This is the same strategy as was being used in the study of Baum and Abdel Rahman (2021, p. 282) where the headlines of news articles were manipulated by making them either positive, negative, or neutral.

The news post was based off an actual article presented by CNN on April 11, 2025, focusing on a recent update of a pig kidney transplant (McPhillips et al., 2025). For the selection of the news topic, it was important that the topic is relatively unbiased, thus not politically affiliated, in order to prevent that the participant would engage with the post based on personal beliefs. The same topic was used across all six news posts but was manipulated based on the three different emotional tones, thus, resulting in three distinct headlines. The neutral headline was factual and informative ("pig kidney transplant functioned for 130 days in patient"), the positive headline highlighted optimism and success ("groundbreaking pig kidney transplant gives patient four dialysis-free months"), and the negative headline emphasized on setbacks and problems ("pig kidney transplant fails: acute rejection after 130 days"). The headlines consisted of the same font and colors and the layout of the three posts was the

same for both news influencers. The only variation was that the news influencers wore different clothes: the professional influencer dressed more formal, while the non-professional dressed more informal. This would help with distinguishing between the professional and non-professional version without changing the core content of the post.

3.4.3.   News Consumption Intention

To measure the effect on the dependent variable news consumption intention, several statements based on research of Karnowski et al. (2017, p. 47) were asked after the participant saw the post by letting them answer it on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree). The statements were related to whether the participant would be willing to read more about this topic ("how likely are you to search for more information about this topic after seeing this post") and whether the participant was paying attention to the post and/or was willing to read the complete video ("how likely is it that you would watch the entire video"). The questions from the study of Karnowski et al. (2017, p. 47) were slightly adjusted to phrase them as statements instead of questions.

Furthermore, the potential continued future engagement with the news influencers were measured by adapting the 'continued engagement intention' scale of Högberg et al. (2019, p. 127). Participants answered the following three statements on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree): "I would gladly follow this news influencer", "I will visit this influencer's profile more frequently", and "I will actively search for posts related to news items from this influencer".

Moreover, the revised personal involvement scale of Zaichkowsky (1994, p. 70) was also used in order to measure to what extent the participant was involved with the news post. The participant would rate ten items on a 5-point Likert scale (important – unimportant, boring – interesting, relevant – irrelevant, exciting – unexciting, means nothing – means a lot to me, appealing – unappealing, fascinating – mundane (not fascinating), worthless – valuable, involving – uninvolving, and not needed – needed).

Lastly, the study would also measure how much time participants spend consuming news in general, and to what extent this occurs on social media. This would provide insights in their overall news consumption habits. To measure this, this survey used a similar approach as used in the study of Lee et al. (2017, p. 257) by asking participants "on average how many minutes do you consume news daily?" and "on average how many minutes do you consume news daily on social media?" Moreover, the participant indicated what their source of news is.

3.4.4.   Manipulation Checks

To guarantee that the participant did perceive the news influencer's professional background as was intended, a manipulation check was included to the survey. The participant was asked to assess

the news influencer based on the expertise scale of Ohanian (1990, p. 47). This scale is a subscale of Ohanian's Source Credibility Scale. The scale consisted of five-word pairs (not an expert – expert, inexperienced – experienced, unknowledgeable – knowledgably, unqualified – qualified, and unskilled – skilled). The pairs were rated on a 5-point Likert scale aiming that the participants who were presented with a non-professional version of the news influencer to get an overall score of 3 or lower, and the participants who will be presented with a professional version of the news influencer to get an overall score of 3 or higher.

A second manipulation check was included to verify that the participant did perceive the headline as the intended emotional tone by asking them to rate the perceived tone on a 5-point Likert scale (positive = 1, slightly positive = 2, neutral = 3, slightly negative = 4, negative = 5).

3.4.5. Control Questions

The survey included two control question in order to ensure that the participant paid adequate attention to the experimental materials while answering the survey. The first control question was asked immediately after the participant was exposed to the Instagram profile and post. The participant was asked to answer a question related to the topic presented in the Instagram news post ("what was the topic of the news post?") and had to choose between four different topics in order to determine whether they paid enough attention to the Instagram news post and the headline.

The second control question was asked when the participant was answering the statements on the 'continued engagement intention' scale. The participant was asked to select the 'strongly agree' option in order to assess whether they were still paying attention.

3.5. Pilot Test

A pilot test was conducted before the survey was distributed amongst participants. Neuman (2014, p. 304) argued that a pilot test will be helpful with locating some flaws and misunderstandings. The key distinction between the pilot test and the pre-test is that during the pre-test participants evaluate the manipulated conditions, whereas in the pilot test the participants evaluate the overall clarity of the survey. Participants of this pilot test were asked if the experimental condition was clear and whether the cover story was understandable and did prevent them from figuring out the real purpose of the study. Based on the results of the pilot study, some adjustments to the study could be made before it will be distributed. The participants of the pilot test were asked to provide their feedback. Since the participants of the pilot test were from the researcher's own personal network, their feedback will be provided verbally or text-based comments.

3.5.1. Results Pilot Test

The pilot test was conducted with five ($N = 5$) participants. Based on the feedback of the participants some changes had been made on the final version of the survey. First of all, almost all participants stated that it was not clear that they were not required to visit Instagram to look up the account of the news influencer James Smith. Therefore, the instructions were revised by clearly emphasizing that all the necessary information would be provided within the survey. Secondly, the personal involvement scale was considered too long and contained some several interchangeable items, which made it difficult to distinguish them. This results in that the personal involvement scale had been shortened to reduce redundancy by only including five items (important – unimportant, boring – interesting, relevant – irrelevant, means nothing – means a lot to me, not needed – needed) instead of the original ten. The selected five items were considered as the best fit to measure the personal involvement of the participant in relation to the news post. Finally, several spelling errors and confusing phrasings were noticed and were improved for the final version of the survey. Participants indicated in their feedback that the cover story was clear and did prevent them from figuring out the real purpose of the experiment, so the cover story was not adjusted, besides from some spelling errors, in the final version of the survey.

3.6. Procedure

The survey for this experiment was constructed with the online platform Qualtrics and an overview of the survey flow is presented in Appendix F. Before the actual survey started, the participant was informed and asked for their consent. The participant was reminded that their answers will remain anonymous and that they were able to terminate the survey at any given moment. Besides that, the researcher's contact details were displayed.

After the participant agreed with these conditions, the survey began with asking one demographic question first. Since this research only focused on Gen Z (aged between 18-30), the first was related to the age of the participant. If the participant was younger than 18 or older than 30 years old, the participant was redirected to the end of the survey since the participant was not part of the target group.

If the participant was suitable for the research age-wise, the participant first encountered a cover story before encountering the experiment and answering the next questions. A cover story would put the participant on the wrong track of the meaning behind the experiment by using a slightly false explanation about what the survey tries to measure (Neuman, 2014, p. 292). According to Neuman (2014, p. 303), a cover story will prevent the participant from figuring out the real hypotheses and being biased in answering the questions in the survey. The cover story in this survey elaborated that the purpose of the study is to measure how individuals engage with news content created by news influencers. Therefore, the participant assumed that the study tried to measure how they interact with

news content in general, instead of measuring how different content characteristics (professional expertise of the news influencer and emotional tone in the post) influenced their intention to consume news on social media.

When the participant was finished with reading the cover story, the layout of the experiment was described. The participant was informed that a mimicked Instagram environment will be shown and that the influencer James Smith is AI generated. Qualtrics randomly assigned one of the six experimental news content conditions. According to Rogers and Révész (2019, p. 11) random assignment will prevent that the results are subjected to selection bias. This means that every sub-group of participants has equal chance of having specific characteristics (Vargas et al., 2017, p. 108). The first image the participant encountered is the Instagram profile from either the professional – or the non-professional version of the news influencer James Smith. After this, the participant saw a brief explanation of the upcoming news post on the next page. When the participant was finished with observing the news post, several statements related to measure their news consumption intention were asked. This was followed up by the two manipulation checks of the perceived professionality and headline tone. The last part of the survey covered questions about the general news consumption of participants and their demographics. The survey did not include a question which asked the participant what the real purpose of the survey was but this was explained to the participants in the end. When the survey was completed, the participant got an explanation of the study's real purpose, and the contact details of the researcher were once again displayed in case the participant had question or comments (Neuman, 2014, p. 309).

3.7. Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

Validity is an indicator that determines whether the measured effects are effects what the research intends to measure, while reliability assesses if the measured effects can also be applied under different circumstances (Sürücü & Maslakçi, 2020, p. 2695). The manipulations were checked in a pre-test in order to ensure internal validity (Neuman, 2014, p. 304). Furthermore, according to Vargas et al. (2017, p. 105) a pretest is considered as a tactic which will improve validity and reliability. Secondly, a pilot test was conducted to determine if participants understood the questions and how they related to the experiment by asking participants questions to understand the desired effects of the manipulations, improving validity (Neuman, 2014, p. 304)

Moreover, the study of Cobern and Adams (2020, p. 412) stated that the clear format of the wording of items is pivotal for ensuring validity. It is preferred that items are simple and direct in order to prevent inaccurate responses. After feedback received from the pilot test, some words were framed differently and the personal involvement scale Zaichkowsky (1994, p. 70) was shortened to ensure more comprehension, thus improving validity.

An attention check as a control question can ensure that the measurement of items on the scale is valid. This attention check can identify if a respondent is inattentive while filling out the survey (Kung et al., 2018, p. 265). The survey in this study also included an attention check where the participant had to select "strongly agree" and another control question where the participant will be asked about the topic of the news post. If the participant failed either one or both of the control checks, the participant was removed from the data. Moreover, to realize that the items of the scale are considered reliable and provide consistent result, a reliability analysis is important to measure whether there is consistency present across all items on the scale (Taherdoost, 2016, p. 33). Therefore, section 4.2 of this thesis included a reliability analysis. Based on the results, individual items can be removed if that results in making the scale more consistent.

According to Neuman (2014, p. 304) several actions should be taken, while other actions should be prevented, to ensure an ethical study. These include that participants should not be deceived when not necessary, answers will remain anonymous, and participants will be informed of their rights before starting the survey and are given the possibility to terminate the survey at any given moment. Moreover, even though this experiment contained a slight form of deception, this deception did not harm the participants (Vargas et al., 2017, p. 111). In addition, the participants were informed of the true purpose of the study in the debrief.

4. Results

This fourth chapter will focus on the results of the conducted study. The survey was active on Qualtrics from May 3 till May 25, 2025. After the survey was completed, the data was downloaded from Qualtrics and inserted into IBM SPSS Statistics' version 30. Before any analysis were conducted, the dataset was cleaned by removing participants who did not complete the survey and did not answer the control questions correctly. After that, a reliability analysis was conducted, and the final sample is described. Lastly, an Analysis of Variance Analysis (ANOVA) analysis was ran to test the hypotheses of this study.

4.1. Data Preparation

The data had to be cleaned before the statistical analysis in SPSS could be executed. A total of $N = 310$ respondents was recorded for this study. Out of these 310 respondents, 35 respondents did not complete the survey or did not meet the age requirements and were automatically redirected to the end of the survey. These responses were removed from the dataset. Moreover, two respondents did not agree to participate with the survey at the start and were redirected to the end of the survey. These two participants were also excluded from the dataset. This results in that the survey had a total of $N = 273$ complete responses.

The next step involved assessing whether the participants paid sufficient attention to the Instagram post by checking if they answered the first control question correctly. Five participants did not correctly identify that the topic of the Instagram news post was concerning a pig kidney transplant. Therefore, these participants were excluded from the dataset. Secondly, a second control question was used to measure continued attention during the survey by instructing the participants that they had to select the option "strongly agree". In total 28 participants failed to follow this instruction, and they were also removed from the dataset.

4.1.1. Manipulation Checks

The study contained two manipulation checks: one which focused on verifying whether participants understood the intended professional background of the news influencer (either professional or non-professional), and another one that assessed whether participants recognized the intended emotional tone of the news post's headline.

The first manipulation check involved the expertise scale of Ohanian (1990, p. 47). A reliability analysis was conducted with the remaining $N = 240$ respondents to determine whether the five items measured the same concept. The scale exhibited high internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$), resulting in that the mean score of the five items was computed to measure the participant's overall perception of the news influencer's professionality. In total, $N = 78$ respondents failed the manipulation check related to

the professional expertise of the assigned news influencer. This means that these respondents either had an overall score on the expertise scale of Ohanian (1990, p. 47) of higher than 3 for the version of the non-professional news influencer or lower than 3 for the version of the professional news influencer, thus falling outside the pre-defined ranges. For this study, the decision had been made to not exclude the participants who failed the manipulation check in order to guarantee a broader sample. Moreover, the study of Kotzian et al. (2020, p. 473) argued that excluding participants based on not responding to the experimental treatment as aimed for would result in creating bias. This means that there is the risk of obtaining false positives since the likelihood of achieving significant effects is increased by removing participants for whom the manipulation check was ineffective, thus artificially trying to find a significant effect. In addition, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to measure the mean values of perceived expertise between respondents from the non-professional group and respondents from the professional group. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 4.1.1

Descriptive statistics of the average value on the expertise scale of Ohanian (1990, p. 47) by the news influencer's level of professionality

	M	SD
Non-professional	2.81[a]	.85
Professional	3.38[b]	.80

(Means with a different superscript differ significantly, $p < .001$)

The ANOVA indicated that there is a significant difference, $p < .001$, between the mean value of expertise between respondents who were presented a non-professional version of the news influencer and respondents who were presented a professional version of the news influencer. Furthermore, the average level of expertise was below 3 for the non-professional group and above 3 for the professional group. This suggested that, on average, there was a clear distinction between the two types of news influencers in terms of level of expertise.

The second manipulation check featured the participant's perception of the emotional tone of the headline on a 5-point Likert scale (positive – somewhat positive – neutral – somewhat negative – negative). However, a substantial number of participants perceived the emotional tone differently than what was originally intended. In total, $N = 101$ respondents failed the emotional tone manipulation check. Removing all these participants would result in a relatively small final sample size to realize generalizable results. Therefore, this study adopted the participants' own perception of the emotional tone. This approach was based on the research of Zhu et al. (2024, p. 225), where their participants had to rate their level of arousal and valence (positive – negative) based on pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral images. Nevertheless, individual ratings of each image were considerably different, resulting in that the authors opted to use the participant's own ratings of arousal and valence instead of filtering them

out if they failed the intended manipulation check. Given that, the participants in this study were not removed from the sample based on their response to the manipulation check of the emotional tone. Instead, the assigned experimental condition of the participants was regrouped according to their own perception of the post's headline emotional tone. This method resulted in that the statistical analysis focused on how the participants perceive the emotional tone and thereby focused on how the participants genuinely experienced the emotional tone. Taken this into account, participants who rated the headline as either 'positive' or 'somewhat positive' were regrouped into either group 1 or group 2 (see Table 3.4 for the overview of the different groups), depending on which version of the news influencer they got assigned to during the survey, participants who rated the headline as 'neutral' were regrouped into either group 3 or group 4, and participants who rated the headline as 'negative' or 'somewhat negative' were regrouped into either group 5 or group 6.

On the other hand, participants who responded with 'I don't know' to the rating of the emotional tone were removed from the dataset since they were not able to provide their perception of the headline's emotional tone. This occurred in eight responses, leading to that the final sample contained $N = 232$ respondents.

4.2. Reliability Analysis

A reliability analysis was conducted to measure whether the separate items from one scale measured the same concept. Tavakol and Dennick (2011, p. 54) argued that the acceptable value of the Cronbach's alpha ranges across different studies, but in general, values between .70 and .95 are considered acceptable.

The study used a shortened and revised version of the personal involvement scale of Zaichkowsky (1994, p. 70). Two items on this scale (item 1 and 3) were reverse-coded (positive to negative) compared to the other three items (negative to positive). Thus, before the reliability analysis could be conducted, these two items needed to be reversed in SPSS by creating two new variables. After these two reversed variables were created, the reliability analysis was executed for this scale. The scale was considered reliable ($\alpha = .85$); thus, it was not deemed necessary to exclude individual items.

The second scale, the adapted continued engagement intention scale of Högberg et al. (2019, p. 127), which aimed to measure the participant's engagement towards news consumption intention, consisted of three items. Furthermore, the two statements based on research of Karnowski et al. (2017, p. 47) also measured the participant's attitude towards news consumption intention. To determine whether these five items measured the same concept, a reliability analysis will find out if there is coherence present. The merged scale was found reliable ($\alpha = .81$), resulting in that all five items can be included. The overall score of these five items were used to measure the participants' overall score for news consumption intention.

Lastly, as explained in section 4.1.1., the expertise scale of Ohanian (1990, p. 47) consisted of five items and was also considered reliable ($\alpha = .91$).

Since the three scales were all considered reliable, the individual items all measured the same concept. This means that the data could be reduced by combining the mean of the individual items regarding their associated scale. This resulted in three new variables that captured the mean value on the scale.

4.3. Sample Description

An overview of the full demographic data can be found in Appendix A, but the following paragraph will highlight the most important findings. The final sample consisted of 232 respondents ($N = 232$) where 162 respondents identified as female (69.8%), 66 respondents identified as male (28.4%), and two respondents identified as non-binary/third gender (.9%), and one (.4%) respondent preferred not to tell this. One response was missing, since this participant only completed the survey up to the demographic questions. The complete overview sociodemographic characteristics of the participants is recorded in Table A.1.

Over half of the respondents had the Dutch nationality ($N = 140$) followed up by respondents with the German ($N = 17$) and Belgian ($N = 15$) nationality (see Table A.3 in Appendix A). Most respondents had completed a university bachelor's degree ($N = 98$), a master's degree ($N = 59$), or a university of applied sciences bachelor's degree ($N = 35$) (see Table A.1 in Appendix A). The average age of the respondents was 23.66 years old ($SD = 2.26$), with a minimum of 18.00 years old and a maximum of 30.00 years old (see Table A.2 in Appendix A).

As presented in Table A.1, most of the respondents obtained their news from social media; 136 respondents (58.6%) indicated that social media is their main news source. Next, 64 respondents (27.7%) indicated that they obtained their news from apps of traditional media outlets. Traditional sources of news, such as TV ($N = 13$), radio ($N = 2$) and the newspaper ($N = 0$) were less prevalent in this sample.

As stated in section 3.4, there were six experimental groups and Qualtrics assigned one of the conditions randomly to the respondents. However, as stated in paragraph 4.1.1, the respondents were regrouped based on their perception of the post's headline. After regrouping the respondents, the final distribution of the respondents amongst the six groups was the following: group 1 (positive + non-professional) had 49 respondents, group 2 (positive + professional) had 55 respondents, group 3 (neutral + non-professional) had 30 respondents, group 4 (neutral + professional) had 28 respondents, group 5 (negative + non-professional) had 35 respondents, and group 6 (negative + professional) had 35 respondents.

4.4. ANOVA Analysis

An ANOVA is an appropriate statistical method when a study aims to compare whether there are statistically significant differences between the means of different groups (Andrade, 2024, p. 175). This research examined the individual effect of two IVs, emotional tone and professional expertise, on the DV, news consumption intention, as well as the potential interaction effect between the two IVs on the DV. Therefore, there were two categorial factors included in this study. According to Kim (2014, pp. 143-144) a two-way ANOVA is considered an appropriate statistical test for this type of research.

To conduct a two-way ANOVA analysis, a univariate analysis was run in SPSS. This analysis was used to test the three hypotheses of this research. Hypotheses H1 and H2a, H2b, and H2c examined the individual effect of both IVs (professional expertise and emotional tone) on the DV news consumption intention, while H3 tested the interaction effect between emotional tone and professional expertise on the DV.

4.4.1.   Assumptions of Parametric Techniques

An ANOVA is a standard tool used for between-subject univariate designs, but it subjected to several key assumptions in order to assume that the ANOVA gives accurate and reliable results (Troncoso Skidmore & Thompson, 2013, p. 536). The study of Emerson (2022, p. 585) mentioned four main parametric assumptions: the independence of the observations, normality of the distribution, the homogeneity of the variance across groups, and the continuity of the dependent variable. These assumptions are often violated, which can lead to Type 1 errors; rejecting the null hypothesis while it was in fact significant, and reduced statistical power (Lix et al., 1996, p. 579).

These assumptions were tested in this thesis in order to determine whether the collected survey data did meet the necessary conditions for valid ANOVA test results. The first assumption is related to that the dependent variable should be measured on a continuous scale (Emerson, 2022, p. 585). The dependent variable in this study, news consumption intention, was measured on a Likert scale, thus making it an ordinal variable. This means that the variable for the news consumption intention was measured as a scale in SPSS. Therefore, this assumption was not violated in this study.

Secondly, unfortunately there was no equal distribution of the respondents across the six different groups in this study. To prevent that this assumption was violated, a Levene's test was conducted to test whether each group has a similar level of variability in the overall data (Emerson 2022, pp. 585-586). Emerson (2022, p. 586) stated that when the test is not significant it can be assumed that the variances of the different groups can be assumed to be equal. The results indicated that the homogeneity of the variance across the six group was satisfied, $F(5, 226) = 2.05$, $p = .073$. Thus, this assumption was also not violated.

Thirdly, the distribution of the different values of news consumptions was measured by using histograms in order to determine if there was a normal distribution present. SPSS generated five

histograms (see Appendix D) where the distribution of the data was shown based on the version of the news influencer to which the respondents were exposed to (figure D.1) and the perceived emotion tone the respondents were assigned to (figure D.2). There was a slight indication of normality present in the distribution, however, there were some deviations present which prevented the distribution from being perfectly normal. Therefore, the assumption of a normal distribution was approximately satisfied, but not fully. Nevertheless, the study of Lix et al. (1996, p. 608) revealed that only the combination of nonnormal distributions and unequal variances will result in Type 1 errors. When the variances are equal, the distribution shape will not influence the error rate. The variances were deemed to be equal in this study, thus the relatively unnormal distribution will probably not have significant consequences.

Lastly, the assumption of independence of the observations was also satisfied in this study. This means that the answers from one group were not influenced by the answers from another group (Emerson, 2022, p. 585). The respondents in this study filled out the survey independently from each other, therefore preventing the risk of being influenced by others.

4.4.2.   Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for the DV news consumption intention are summarized in Table 4.4.2 below. These values show the characteristics of the single variable of both the IVs professional expertise and emotional tone.

Table 4.4.2

Descriptive statistics for news consumption intention

Professionality	Emotional Tone	M	SD
Non-professional	Positive	2.73	.70
	Neutral	2.11	.85
	Negative	2.11	.91
Professional	Positive	2.61	.91
	Neutral	2.41	.63
	Negative	2.30	.84

4.4.3.   Hypotheses Testing

After conducting the univariate analysis in SPSS, the hypotheses were tested to determine whether they must be accepted or rejected. The complete tables are presented in Appendix B.

The results of the analysis indicated that there was no significant main effect for H1 (news influencers with a professional journalistic background will generate higher levels of news

consumption intention compared to news influencers without a professional journalistic background), $F(1, 226) = 1.24$, $p = .266$, partial η2 = .01 (see Table B.1 in Appendix B).

Secondly, the analysis indicated that there was a significant main effect for emotional tone on news consumption intention, $F(2, 226) = 8.24$, $p < .001$, partial η2 = .07 (see table B.1 in Appendix B). This means that the effect on news consumption intention differed significantly across the three different emotional tones, thus accepting H2a (emotional tone in news content will influence the level of news consumption intention). Pairwise comparisons (see Table B.2 in Appendix B) revealed that participants who perceived the headline as positive, reported significant higher effects on news consumption intention, compared to those who perceived the headline as negative, M Difference = .47, $p < .001$, and those who perceived the headline as neutral, M Difference = .41, $p = .003$. These results supported that there is a significant main effect for H2c (a positive emotional tone of news content created by news influencers will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to neutral news content). However, there was no significant main effect for H2b (a negative emotional tone of news content created by news influencers will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to positive – and neutral news content). The difference in news consumption intention between a perceived negative – and neutral headline was not statistically significant, M Difference = - .06, $p = .691$ (see Table B.2 in Appendix B). Moreover, as noted above, a perceived negative headline resulted in a lower value of news consumption intention compared to a perceived positive headline, thus not supporting H2b.

Lastly, there was no statistical significant interaction effect present regarding H3 (the influence of a negative emotional tone of news content created by news influencers will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to positive – and neutral news content and this effect is greater when it concerns influencers with a professional background compared to a non-professional background) , $F(2, 226) = 1.37$, $p = .257$, partial η2 = .01 (see Table B.1 in Appendix B).

4.4.4.   Outcomes of the Hypotheses

Considering the findings from the ANOVA, the hypotheses of this study can be either accepted or rejected. H1 was not supported, since there was not a significant effect present. This implied that participants who were exposed to a news influencer with a professional background did not have a higher level of news consumption intention compared to participants who were exposed to a news influencer with a non-professional background.

Next, H2a was accepted since there was a significant effect visible between emotional tone and level of news consumption intention, meaning that emotional tone had the ability to significantly influence Gen Z's intention to consume news.

Secondly, H2b was rejected. There was no statistically significant effect present between a perceived negative and – neutral tone, and contrary to what the hypothesis expected, a perceived

negative tone actually resulted in a significant lower level of news consumption intention compared to a perceived positive tone. This meant that a perceived negative headline in the news post did not result in a higher level of news consumption.

On the other hand, H2c was supported. This indicated that participants who perceived the tone of the news post's headline as positive demonstrated a higher level of news consumption intention compared to participants who perceived the tone as neutral.

Finally, H3 was rejected. This demonstrated that the combined effect of emotional tone and professionality of the news influencer did not significantly impact news consumption intention.

4.4.5. Additional Analyses

An additional ANOVA test was conducted in SPSS for the data sample where the respondents who failed the manipulation checks were removed and the respondents were not regrouped based on their perception of the assigned emotional tone. Even though the hypotheses testing was done based on the previous data analyses from section 4.4.3. and retained the full sample of $N = 232$ respondents, this additional analysis was carried out in order to measure whether there were similar results present when the respondents who did not pass the manipulation check were not present in the sample.

The sample without the respondents who failed the manipulation check consisted of $N = 79$ respondents. This resulted in that group 1 contained 14 respondents, group 2 contained 20 respondents, group 3 contained 6 respondents, group 4 contained 5 respondents, group 5 contained 17 respondents, and group 6 contained 17 respondents.

The results of the univariate analyses indicated that there was no significant main effect present for that news influencers with a professional journalistic background will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to news influencers without a professional journalistic background; $F(1, 73) = 1.41$, $p = .239$, partial η2 = .02 (see Table B.3 in Appendix B).

Secondly, the results of this additional analysis indicated that there was also no significant main effect present for emotional tone on news consumption intention, $F(2, 73) = 1.52$, $p = .225$, partial η2 = .04 (see Table B.3 in Appendix B). This is different compared to the primary analysis in section 4.3.3. However, pairwise comparisons indicated that there was a marginal effect present between the positive and negative emotional tone conditions, M Difference = .35, $p = .087$ (see Table B.4 in Appendix B). This result explained that respondents who were assigned a headline with a positive emotional tone reported slightly higher values for news consumption intention compared to respondents who were assigned a negative emotional tone.

Lastly, comparable to the original analysis, there was also no significant interaction effect present between emotional tone and professional expertise on news consumption intention, $F(2, 73) = .57$, $p = .570$, partial η2 = .02 (see Table B.3 in Appendix B).

These additional findings largely reflected the findings of the original analysis, aside from the main effect of emotional tone on news consumption intention. Therefore, the overall conclusion would not drastically change. A more thorough discussion will be addressed in section 5.1 in the final chapter of this thesis.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The last chapter of this thesis will elaborate on the results of this study in depth. First of all, the findings will be discussed while taking into account the theories of previous research discussed in chapter two. After this, the managerial implications and limitations will be described. Based on this information, the recommendations for future research will be presented. Lastly, a general conclusion of this study will be outlined, and the research question of this study will be answered.

5.1. Discussion of the Results

The aim of this study was to research the effects of the news influencer's professional background and emotional tone used in their content on the intention to consume news, while focusing on this effect on Gen Z's news consumption behavior. To answer the research question of this study, the three hypotheses will be discussed to get an overall overview.

First of all, hypothesis H1, news influencers with a professional journalistic background will generate higher levels of news consumption compared to news influencers without a professional journalistic background, was rejected, meaning that Gen Z's news consumption intention is not significantly influenced by whether the news influencer has a professional journalistic background or the absence of it. This is an interesting finding since it contrasts the established assumption that credibility and expertise, often affiliated with traditional media outlets, are often factors for endorsing interest in and engagement with news (Zimmermann et al., 2023, p. 3; Cheng et al., 2024, p. 119). A potential explanation for this result is related to the fact that expertise is different in the context of digital media and Gen Z. Gen Z is the first generation where social media is imbedded in their daily life and the creation of (news) content is not gatekept to journalists or other professionals, allowing Gen Z to produce news themselves and access it at any given time (Acampa et al., 2022, p. 12; Balaban & Nedelcu, 2021, p. 45). This might result in that the distinction between professional journalists and citizen journalists (e.g., news influencers with no professional journalistic background) is less relevant to Gen Z. Moreover, Gen Z prefers authenticity (Obreja, 2023, p. 747) and relatability (Andriany & Triwardhani, 2025, p. 48) in influencer content. Therefore, formal qualifications and professional expertise may have less impact for Gen Z to intent to consume news. A news influencer could be perceived as more personal and relatable to Gen Z, therefore making the professional journalistic credentials less relevant to consider.

Additionally, another reason level of professionality does not significantly influence Gen Z's news consumption intention can be related to that it can be difficult in distinguishing the differences between professional journalists and citizen journalists online. Professional journalists as news influencers often adopt communication tactics of SMIs (Karhawi & Camargo, 2023, p. 145). This might result in that social media users do not perceive these professional journalists as more credible or experienced than citizen journalists. On top of that, Gen Z is often incidentally exposed to news

content while scrolling through social media (Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018, p. 230). This might mean that they are less likely to pay attention to the professional background of the news influencer and base their intention to consume news on easily identifiable aspects, such as visuals or alignment with their interests.

Overall, the rejection of hypothesis H1 throws light on general transformation of the news media landscape. Gen Z becomes more involved in the process of making news content themselves due to the more decentralized media landscape. This development may diminish the need for the traditional media values such as professional journalistic credentials. Thus, professional journalistic backgrounds may no longer be essential when this generation consumes news from news influencers.

Secondly, hypothesis H2, consisting of H2a, H2b, and H2c, was partly accepted and partly rejected. These findings demonstrate a more complex overview of Gen Z's attitude towards emotional tone used in online news content. Hypotheses H2a, emotional tone in news content will influence the level of news consumption intention, was supported. This indicates that, regardless of which tone, emotional tone has the ability to influence the news consumption intention of Gen Z. More specifically, hypothesis H2c, a positive emotional tone of news content created by news influencers will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to neutral news content, was also supported. This implies that when the tone of the news content is positive, Gen Z's intention to consume news will be positively affected compared to when the tone of the news content is neutral. Besides that, this effect was also significant for the difference in news consumption intention between a positive tone and a negative tone, indicating that a positive emotional tone will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to a negative emotional tone. Thus, hypothesis H2b was rejected.

The outcomes are partially in line with previous research, however, also illustrate different trends. The significant effect of emotional tone on news consumption intention is in line with the research of Choi et al. (2021, p. 1018) where the authors stated that sentiment used in news content will positively influence readers' news consumption. However, the findings are in contrast with the predefined assumptions that negative content is more likely to be consumed compared to positive and neutral tones (Choi et al., 2021, p. 1021; Trussler & Sorokoa, 2014, p. 368). These results might reveal the change of attitude of Gen Z regarding certain forms of content. Choi et al. (2021, p. 1021) stated that negatively framed content requires more mental effort to process, and according to Andriany and Triwardhani (2025, p. 48) does Gen Z prefer news content that is easy to understand. Moreover, negative news often dominates the news nowadays, and Gen Z is the generation that often prioritizes mental well-being. This might result in that they feel less connected to negative news and less inclined to consume it. Additionally, the study of Trussler and Soroka (2014, p. 363) argued that people often claim to consume more positive news, but that previous research indicated that this is not reflected in their actual news consumption behavior. However, the findings of this thesis may suggest that this theory may no longer be applicable for the younger generations, such as Gen Z.

Thus, in general, emotional tone plays an important role in in shaping the intention for Gen Z to consume news. The preference of positively framed news over neutrally and negatively framed news emphasizes a generational shift to how emotional tone influences the intention to consume news.

Finally, the third and last hypothesis H3, the influence of a negative emotional tone of news content created by news influencers will generate higher levels of news consumption intention compared to positive – and neutral news content and this effect is greater when it concerns influencers with a professional background compared to a non-professional background, was rejected. This result suggests that the emotional tone of the news content influences Gen Z's news consumption intention regardless of whether the online news post is created by a news influencer with a professional journalistic background or a news influencer without a professional journalistic background (e.g., citizen journalists). More detailed, this means that emotional tone does not interact with the news influencer's level of professionality to strengthen the effect of Gen Z's news consumption intention.

The absence of an interaction effect in this study could be related to the shift in how Gen Z interprets and responds to online news content created by news influencers. As discussed before, Gen Z prioritizes authenticity (Obreja, 2023, p. 747) and relatability (Andriany & Triwardhani, 2025, p. 48) as important characteristics for news influencers. This implies, for this study, that the emotional tone of the headline functioned as the primary variable for Gen Z's news consumption intention. Therefore, the findings can suggest that the emotional appeal in the headline of the news post is powerful on its own to drive news consumption intention.

The additional analysis from section 4.4.5 indicated that excluding the respondents who failed the manipulation checks, resulted in almost the same conclusions as was confirmed while testing the hypotheses with the actual sample. However, the previous significant main effect of emotional tone on news consumption became non-significant. This suggested that excluding participants who failed the manipulation checks might influence the effect of the emotional tone. A possible explanation could be related to the fact that in this sample size the effect of the participants' perception of the headline was not taken into account, making it plausible that the perception of the respondents played a crucial role in how respondents interpreted specific details and how this impacted their intention to consume news.

Nonetheless, there was a marginal effect present between positively and negatively framed headlines, which demonstrated that a positive headline would result in a higher intention to consume news amongst Gen Z compared to a negative headline. This is in line with the findings of the original analysis and demonstrates the consistency of the enhanced effect of a positive emotional tone in the news content/headline on news consumption intention.

5.2. Managerial Implications

Based on the discussed results of this study, several implications can be identified for traditional news outlets and content creators. First of all, professional journalistic credentials are not a decisive factor for Gen Z's news consumption intention. This suggests that traditional news outlets that produce news content on social media and news influencers with professional journalistic backgrounds should focus more on creating content which is authentic and relatable. Moreover, focusing more on positive news stories and framing news headlines more positively can result in making Gen Z more interested to consume online news from a news influencer. This can be achieved by actively searching for hopeful and positive topics but that does not mean that news organization and news influencers should avoid addressing negative topics but should also offer insights which focus on empowerment or solutions, instead of focusing only on the negative aspects.

Secondly, since a positive emotional tone has a significant independent effect on the news consumption intention of Gen Z, emotionally framing of content can be seen as a strategic news communication tool. News influencers (either with professional expertise or without professional expertise) should carefully consider the framing of their words since mainly positive language can significantly enhance Gen Z's news consumption intention.

5.3. Limitations and Recommendation for Future Research

The findings of this research provide valuable insights into which factors drive Gen Z's news consumption intention, however, several limitations of this research should be acknowledged.

First of all, the generalizability of the findings can be debated. The sample mainly consisted of highly educated (the majority of the participants is in possession of either a bachelor's degree or a master's degree) participants. Additionally, the sample contained mostly Dutch and female participants. This means that the characteristics and demographics of the respondents in the survey sample do not reflect the distribution of people in the actual population since the sample in this study over-represents certain groups in the population over other groups. This limits the generalizability of the findings across the whole Gen Z population, such as the less educated, male, and non-European part of Gen Z. For example, individuals with a lower level of completed education might interpret emotions differently or give more of less value to the level of professional expertise of the news influencer. Future research should aim for making the population more diverse and a more accurate representation of the society in order to understand how different sub-groups within Gen Z respond to emotional framing and professional expertise. However, the findings of the study can to a certain extend be applied to a broader Gen Z population within the Western-European area since the news consumption behavior was relatively consistent among the Gen Z respondents, with the majority being dependent on social media for obtaining their news.

Furthermore, the study did not take the different levels of freedom of press and overall trust in media across different countries into account. These sociopolitical factors might significantly influence Gen Z's attitude towards obtaining news from additional sources such as news influencers. More than half of the participants were Dutch and the trust in the Dutch news media outlets is relatively high and stable (Commissariaat Voor De Media & Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2024, p. 6). For countries with relatively low trust in the media and restircted freedom of press, the role of professional expertise and emotional tone used for news influencers can have different implications for Gen Z's news consumption intention. This can be resolved by conducting cross-cultural future research or by including country-specific news media features in order to measure if these external factors might influence different populations of Gen Z differently.

Thirdly, the study intentionally included a randomized design by making Qualtrics randomly assign one of the six experimental conditions to the participants. However, due to the misalignment between intended and perceived emotional tones there was a need to regroup participants based on their subjective perception of the emotional tone. This could have resulted in creating bias. Even though the strategy was based on previous research, the misalignment between the manipulated conditions and the participants' own perception could result in a lower internal validity. Moreover, participants who did not pass the professional expertise manipulation check were not removed from the sample. Keeping these participants in the final sample could have resulted in some inconsistencies in the data. This means that hypothesis H1 could have been accepted in case the participants in the different sub-groups perceived the manipulation as intended. Future resarch should run a more extensive pre-test where several options of emotional tones and professional levels of news influencers. Besides that, the same approach used for regrouping participants based on their perception of the emotional tone could also be applied to the participants' perception of professional expertise of the news influencer. By regrouping the participants it can be measured how perceived expertise influences Gen Z's news consumption intention.

Furthermore, the news topic used in the experiment, pig kidney transplant, may not have been equally interesting for all participants since it is a very niche topic. Gen Z might not feel personally connected to the topic, resulting in lower levels of news consumption intention, regardless of emotional tone or professional expertise. However, the survey did include the personal involvement scale of Zaichkowsky (1994, p.70) but was ultimately not included in the main analysis because the aim of the study was to measure specifically only the individual and interactive effect of emotional tone and professional expertise on news consumption intention. Future research could include the use of the personal involvement scale as a covariate into the analysis or could measure the effect of news consumption intention across different topics.

Lastly, this study classified emotional tone only for three main domains: positive, negative, and neutral. However, there are considerably more specific emotions such as humor, sadness, or anger.

Including more specific types of emotions into future research could be valuable for identifying which forms of emotions are most successful to enhance Gen Z's news consumption intention.

5.4. Conclusion

Based on the discussed results of this research, the research question of this thesis can be answered:

How does the professional expertise of the news influencer (professional vs. non-professional) and the emotional tone of the online news content (positive, neutral, or, negative) impact the news consumption intention of Gen Z?

The findings revealed that the emotional tone of the headline plays a more significant role than the professional expertise of the news influencer in affecting Gen Z's intention to consume news on social media platforms. More specifically, this effect is mainly significant if the headline of the news post is framed positively compared to neutral and negative headlines. The absence of an internation effect between emotional tone and professional expertise might indicate that Gen Z's news consumption intention is not related to the news influencer's professional expertise but on different characteristics which results in more personal connection and relatability between the news influencer and Gen Z.

From an academic perspective, the findings of this study provided important academic insights into the shifting dynamics of digital news consumption, particularly while focusing on Gen Z. The outcomes strove to address the research gap between traditional social media influencer communications and successful news content creation, as well as the exploration of the applicability of traditional media assumptions on news influencers. News influencers are considerably less researched in academics compared to traditional news influencers and traditional journalism. The results of this research disputed the predefined presumptions, from for example Zimmermann et al. (2023, p. 3) and Okonkwo and Namkoisse (2023, p. 83), about traditional journalism and influencer marketing studies by illustrating that professional expertise does not significantly affect the intention to consume news, specifically for Gen Z. Furthermore, the presence of a significant effect of emotional tone on news consumption revealed that the findings were in line with the assumptions from traditional influencer studies, such as from Leung et al. (2022, pp. 98 & 101), that indicated that an emotional tone used in content will result in more follower engagement. This thesis extended previous academic work by specifically focusing on news influencers on social media and the presence of emotional tones and professional expertise. This offers a theoretical foundation for future research into how different generations might prefer different characteristics related to online news content.

The answer to the research question reflects the shift of traditional media assumptions to a new news media landscape which is more in line with the behavior and preferences of Gen Z. The formal

qualifications of the news influencer and/or journalist is a less effective driver compared to emotional loaded, especially positive, headlines and content in predicting the news consumption intention of Gen Z. These insights are crucial in understanding Gen Z's media habits but are also pivotal for understanding how news should be produced and framed in order to captivate Gen Z with news content. In the end, this research does not only give insights into more academic understanding of Gen Z's (online) news consumption behavior and intention but also offers practical guidance for news media outlets and individual news content creators to create and produce news that will also be relevant and suitable to Gen Z.

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Appendix A: SPSS Output – Sample Description

Table A.1

Sociodemographic characteristics of participants

Variable		*N*	%	*M*	*SD*
Gender		232		1.73	.49
	Male	66	28.4%		
	Female	162	70.1%		
	Non-binary / Third gender	2	.9%		
	Prefer not to say	1	.4		
	Missing	1	.4%		
Education		232		3.64	1.27
	High school	30	12.9%		
	Vocational training (MBO)	9	3.9%		
	University of Applied Sciences bachelor's degree (HBO)	35	15.1%		
	University bachelor's degree (WO)	98	42.2%		
	Master's degree (HBO/WO)	59	25.4%		
	Missing	1	.4%		
Main news source		232		4.55	1.07
	TV	13	5.6%		
	Radio	2	.9%		
	News app	64	27.6%		
	Social media	136	58.6%		
	Other	14	6.0%		
	I do not consume news	2	.9%		
	Missing	1	.4%		

Table A.2

The ages of the participants

Age	Amount
18	1
19	5
20	6
21	20
22	35

23	52
24	46
25	32
26	14
27	5
28	4
29	5
30	7

Table A.3

The nationalities of the participants

Nationality	Amount
Austria	1
Belgium	15
Brazil	1
Bulgaria	1
China	3
Croatia	1
Cyprus	1
Czech Republic	1
Egypt	1
Finland	2
France	2
Germany	17
Greece	2
Hong Kong (S.A.R)	1
Indonesia	5
Ireland	2
Italy	4
Japan	2
Latvia	1
Luxembourg	2
Mauritius	1
Nepal	1
Netherlands	140
Norway	2

Poland	2
Romania	2
South Korea	2
Spain	3
Suriname	1
Sweden	1
Switzerland	1
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	2
United States of America	6
Do not want to answer	1
Total	232
Missing	1

Appendix B: SPSS Output – Analyses

Table B.1

Two-Way ANOVA: Effects of Perceived Emotional Tone and Professionality on News Consumption

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	p-value	ηp^2
Corrected Model	13.30	5	2.66	3.94	.002	.08
Intercept	1237.54	1	1237.54	1833.44	< .001	.89
Professionality	.84	1	.84	1.24	.266	.01
Emotional Tone	11.12	2	5.56	8.23	< .001	.07
Emotional Tone * Professionality	1.85	2	.92	1.37	.257	.01
Error	152.55	226	.68			
Total	1531.12	232				
Corrected Total	165.85	231				

Table B.2

Outcome of the Pairwise Comparisons of the Three Different Emotional Tones for the Dependent Variable News Consumption

Emotional Tone	Emotional Tone	Mean Difference (I-J)	SD	p-value	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Positive	Neutral	.41*	.14	.003	.14	.67
	Negative	.47*	.13	< .001	.21	.72
Neutral	Positive	-.41*	.14	.003	-.67	-.14
	Negative	.06	.15	.691	-.23	.35
Negative	Positive	-.47*	.13	< .001	-.72	-.21
	Neutral	-.06	.15	.691	-.35	.23

*Note: * p < .050*

Table B.3

Additional Two-Way ANOVA: Effects of Perceived Emotional Tone and Professionality on News Consumption

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	p-value	ηp^2
Corrected Model	3.477	5	.695	1.015	.415	.065
Intercept	384.490	1	384.490	561.281	<.001	.885
Professionality	.966	1	.966	1.409	.239	.019
Emotional Tone	2.087	2	1.043	1.523	.225	.040
Emotional Tone * Professionality	.777	2	.388	.567	.570	.015
Error	50.007	73	.685			
Total	561.840	79				
Corrected Total	53.484	78				

Table B.4

Additional Outcome of the Pairwise Comparisons of the Three Different Emotional Tones for the Dependent Variable News Consumption

Emotional Tone	Emotional Tone	Mean Difference (I-J)	SD	p-value	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Positive	Neutral	.13	.29	.652	-.45	.71
	Negative	.35	.20	.087	-.05	.76
Neutral	Positive	-.13	.29	.652	-.71	.45
	Negative	.22	.29	.447	-.35	.79
Negative	Positive	-.35	.20	.087	-.76	.05
	Neutral	-.22	.29	.447	-.79	.35

Appendix C: SPSS Output – The Pre-test

Table C.1

Descriptive statistics for the emotional tone from the pre-test

	Positive tone perception	Neutral tone perception	Negative tone perception
Mean	1.70	2.40	4.40
N	10	10	10
Std. Deviation	.82	.70	.84

Table C.2

Paired differences for the emotional tone from the pre-test

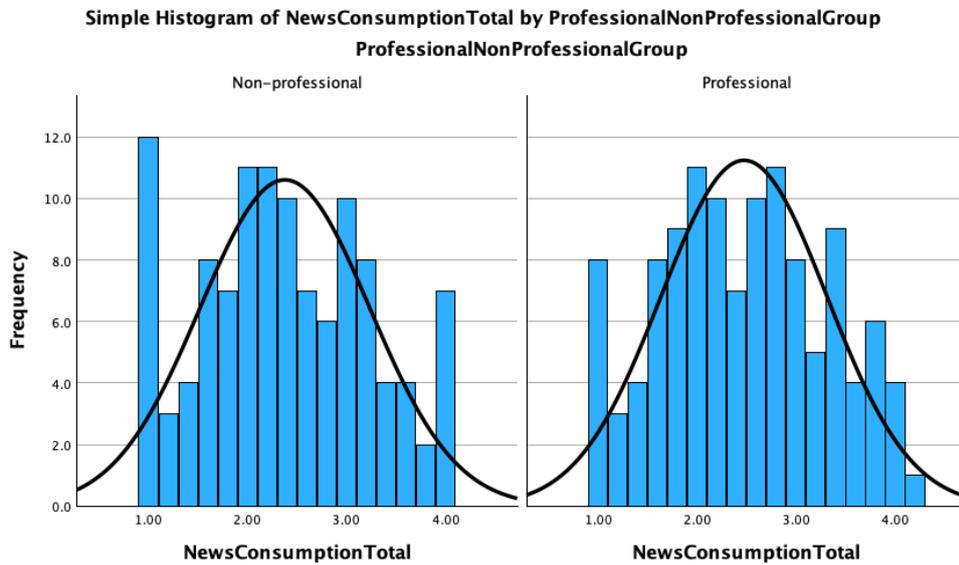|		Paired Differences							Significance	
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	Neutral tone - Positive tone	.70	.82	.26	.11	1.30	2.70	9	.012	.025
Pair 2	Neutral tone - Negative tone	-2.00	1.05	.33	-2.75	-1.25	-6.00	9	<.001	<.001
Pair 3	Positive tone - Negative tone	-2.70	1.34	.42	-3.66	-1.74	-6.38	9	<.001	<.001

Appendix D: Histograms

Figure D.1.

Simple histogram of news consumption and the professionality level version of the news influencer (where NewsConsumptionTotal = news consumption and ProfessionalNonProfessionalGroup = professionality level)
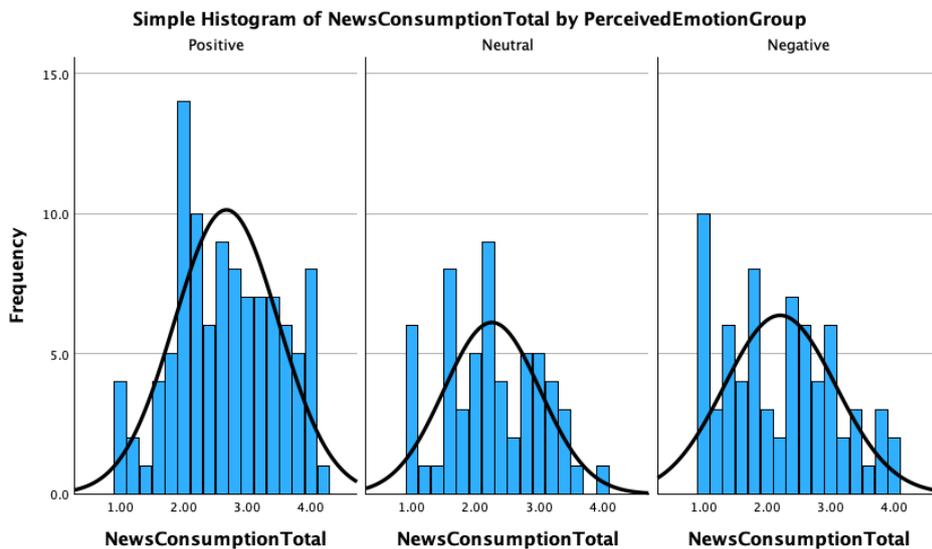

Figure D.2

Simple histogram of news consumption and the perceived emotional tone of the post's headline (where NewsConsumptionTotal = news consumption and PerceivedEmotionGroup = the perceived emotional tone of the headline)

Appendix E: The Six Experimental Conditions

1. Positive and Non-professional

First photo (profile):   Second photo (Instagram news post):

2. Positive and Professional

First photo (profile):   Second photo (Instagram news post):

3.   Neutral and Non-professional

First photo (profile):   Second photo (Instagram news post):

4.   Neutral and Professional

First photo (profile):   Second photo (Instagram news post):

5. Negative and Non-professional

First photo (profile):

Second photo (Instagram news post):

6. Negative and Professional

First photo (profile):

Second photo (Instagram news post):

Appendix F: Qualtrics Survey

Link to the online experiment in Qualtrics:

https://erasmusuniversity.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_et8oRT3H43rhoN0

The Qualtrics Experiment:

1. **Introduction**

Welcome!

Thank you for taking time to participate in my thesis research! I am a Media & Business Master's student at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, and I am currently conducting a study on how people consume and interact with news on social media. The survey will only take around **5 minutes** to complete and your input will be very valuable.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any moment. All responses will remain anonymous and confidential and are only for academic purposes. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, feel free to contact me at: 512632mk@student.eur.nl (Maureen Koudhoofd)

P.s.: this survey contains a completion code for SurveySwap.io and SurveyCircle

I agree to participate in this study:
- Yes
- No (redirected to the end of the survey)

2. **Filter Question – Age**

This study focuses on individuals within a specific age range, please indicate your age (in numbers) below.

(Redirected in case the participant is younger than 18 or older than 30)

3. Cover story

Thank you for participating in this study! This study will measure how individuals engage with news content created by news influencers on social media. These days, online platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, are playing an important role for staying updated on the latest news stories. As a result, individuals interact with news content differently than they do with traditional media outlets.

On the next page, you will see the Instagram profile of James Smith*. Take a thorough look at the complete profile (you do not need to visit this account on Instagram, everything you need to see is shown in the image).

*James Smith is a fictional AI-generated character created for research purposes.

4. Photo profile

Either one of the two versions of the two profiles is shown to the participant (see Appendix D)

5. Explanation about the Instagram post

On the next page you will see one of James' posts on your Instagram feed. The image you will see is a still photo that represents the **first frame of a video**. <u>Please note</u>: the video will not actually play; just imagine that the photo is the start of the video, similar to how a paused video preview looks while you are scrolling through your feed.

Please pretend like you came across the post on your Instagram feed.

6. Photo Instagram post

Either one of the six versions of the Instagram is shown to the participant (see Appendix D).
(*Note*: the news influencer in the Instagram post is the same version of the news influencer the participant saw in the first photo)

7. Control Question

What was the topic of the news post?
- Climate Change
- Weather Updates

- Pig kidney transplant
- Soccer

8. Personal Involvement Scale

Please rate the content of the post based on the following aspects:

Important		Unimportant
Boring		Interesting
Relevant		Irrelevant
Means nothing		Means a lot to me
Not needed		Needed

(*Note*: 5-point Likert Scale)

9. News consumption intentions

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I would watch the entire video					
I would search for more information about this topic after seeing the post.					

10. Continued engagement intention scale

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I would gladly follow this news influencer					
I will visit this influencer's profile more frequently					
Please select 'Strongly agree'					
I will actively search for posts related to news items from this influencer					

11. Manipulation Check professionality

Please indicate your impression of the news influencer James Smith.

Not an expert			Expert
Inexperienced			Experienced
Unknowledgeable			Knowledgeable
Unqualified			Qualified
Unskilled			Skilled

(*Note*: 5-point Likert Scale)

12. Manipulation Check emotional tone

Please indicate how you perceived the tone of the news post's **headline** (e.g. the title used in the still photo of the video)

| Positive | Somewhat positive | Neutral | Somewhat negative | Negative | I don't know |

13. Update

Almost there! The following questions are about your daily news consumption.

14. Current news consumption

On average, how many minutes do you consume news daily? Please indicate in <u>numbers</u>.
(If you do not consume news, write 0)

On average, how many minutes do you consume news daily **from social media?** Please indicate in <u>numbers</u>.
(If you do not consume news on social media, write 0)

What is your main source of news?
- TV
- Radio
- News paper
- News app (e.g. CNN -, New York Times - , NOS-app, etc.)
- Social Media (e.g. Instagram, Tiktok, X, etc.)
- Other (please specify)
- I do not consume news

On which social media platforms do you consume news? (multiple answers possible)
- Instagram
- TikTok
- Facebook
- X

- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Other (please specify)
- I do not consume news on social media

15. Demographic questions

What is your gender?
- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

What is your nationality?
(*Note*: list of nationalities is presented)

What is your highest completed level of education?
- High school
- Vocational training (MBO)
- University of Applied Sciences Bachelor's degree (HBO)
- University Bachelor's degree (WO)
- Master's degree (HBO/WO)
- Doctorate / PhD
- Other (please specify)

16. End of survey

Thank you for taking your time to complete this survey!

The real purpose of this study was withheld in the beginning to ensure accurate results. The actual goal was to examine whether the news influencer's level of professionality (professional vs. non-professional) and emotional tone (positive, negative, or neutral) play a role in (future) news consumption of Gen Z.

You were randomly assigned to view the profile and post of either a news influencer with a professional journalistic background or a news influencer without a professional background. Depending on which post you got assigned to, you saw a post that varied on emotional tone (either

positive, negative, or neutral).

If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact me at: 512632mk@student.eur.nl

Redeem the following Survey Code at https://www.surveycircle.com and get free survey participants through SurveyCircle. The Survey Code is: S278-PZ1M-HH5K-8JGG

The following code gives you Karma that can be used to get free research participants at SurveySwap.io.

Go to: surveyswap.io/sr/46O9-5Q7N-MFRW

Or, alternatively, enter the code manually: 46O9-5Q7N-MFRW

Appendix G – Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information

Name: Maureen Koudhoofd

Student ID: 512632

Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000

Supervisor Name: Petra Tenbült

Date: June 26th, 2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically ChatGPT, in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: [digital signature]

Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]

Extent of AI Usage

☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual

effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. <u>I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix. (see Appendix H)</u>

Ethical and Academic Integrity

☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature:

Date of Signature: June 26, 2025

Appendix H – ChatGPT Prompts

This thesis used ChatGPT in order to create the fictional news influencer James Smith and the presented news post photo, the profile pictures of both versions of James Smith, and the first three news posts which were visible on the Instagram profiles of James Smith (see Appendix E how these photos were used in the Qualtrics survey). ChatGPT only generated the photos; the headlines in the news posts, the caption of the news post, and the set-up of the Instagram profile and news post were done by the researcher herself in Canva and Instagram since ChatGPT did not provide an accurate representation of the reality. The prompts below display the researcher's input to ChatGPT and the output which ChatGPT generated (*note*: since this is the actual text used by the researcher in the prompts; spelling mistakes and interpunction errors have not been corrected for this appendix).

Creation of the Instagram news posts and the profile pictures of both versions of the news influencers (see Appendix E)

Researcher's Prompt

"can you make an instagram post where a news influencer is telling a story (beginning of a video) in selfie mode to the camera. Make sure that the influencer is floating in the screen (like a sort of greenscreen) and is standing in front of this stock photo. Moreover, make the caption with the following text: A genetically engineered pig kidney supported 53-year-old Towana Looney for 130 days without dialysis. This is the longest anyone has every lived with a pig kidney. However, the kidney was removed due to medical complications #medicalnews #pigkidney #medicalinnovation Make sure the post has 12,873 likes (but not liking the post) moreover, can you make the username @paulsmith"

(*Note:* the name of the news influencer and the two usernames were later manually changed to James Smith instead of Paul Smith)

ChatGPT's Output

(*Note:* this photo, the number of likes, and icons were used in the final version of the survey (see outlined square). The caption of the post was cut off from the photo and was manually written and added by the researcher later on)

Researcher's Prompt

"can you make him more professional by letting him wear a shirt? keep everything exactly the same" (*failed*)

"can you try again ?" (*second attempt*)

ChatGPT's Output

(*Note:* this photo was not used in the final version of the survey. However, the shirt of the news influencer was cut out of this photo (for the professional version of the news influencer) and edited on the previous photo on Canva)

Researcher's Prompt

"can you make a profile photo of this person" (*failed*)

"can you make a profile picture for this influencer? make the setting different than this photo but make it a headshot style" (*second attempt*)

(*Note*: added photo in the prompt was a screenshot from the previous generated photo)

ChatGPT's Output

Researcher's Prompt

"can you make him more professional with a suit?"

ChatGPT's Output

Creation of the first three Instagram posts on the profile of the non-professional influencer (see Appendix E)

Researcher's Prompt

"can you make an instagram profile for him (6 posts) where he explains random news events. Imprtant is that he wears different clothes each time and is not positioned in the same place in each photo"
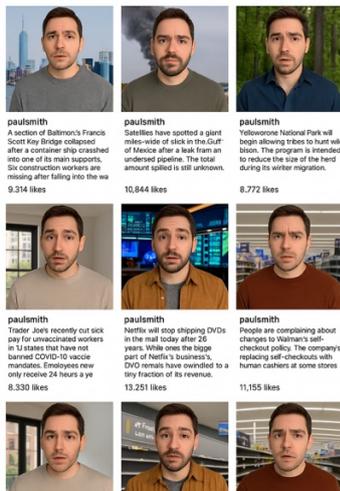
ChatGPT's Output

(*Note:* not used in final survey)

Researcher's Prompt

"can you make sure that he looks different in every photo (different expression) + different background"

ChatGPT's Output

(*Note:* not used in final survey)

Researcher's Prompt

"can you make him look more like him (but in different clothes) and make sure that he hold the camera like he is talking in selfie mode and floating a bit over the screen (like greenscreen style)"

"but can you make 6 posts where he is telling the news to us? make sure he is not too big"

ChatGPT's Output

(*Note:* see outlined square for the photo used on the Instagram profile of the non-professional version of the news influencer)

Researcher's Prompt

"but can you make sure that he is not standing behind a real greenscreen but in front of images which are related to the news? make him smaller in relation to the whole photo"

ChatGPT's Output

(*Note:* see outlined square for the photo used on the Instagram profile of the non-professional version of the news influencer)

Researcher's Prompt

"can you create one where he is explaing the weather of today?"

ChatGPT's Output

(*Note:* used on the Instagram profile of the non-professional version of the news influencer)

Creation of the first three Instagram posts on the profile of the professional influencer (see Appendix E)

Researcher's Prompt

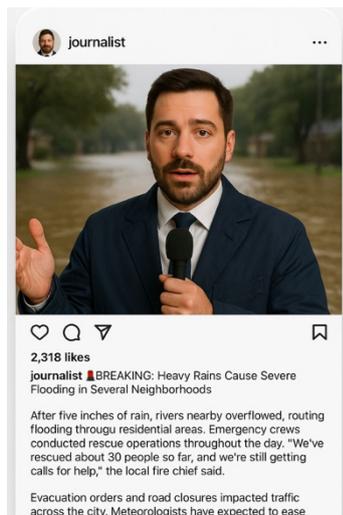"can you make an instagram post by a journalist telling us a news story?"

"but can you make an actual photo of the instagram post"

"can you make a different post but with an actual image and the journalist included in the photo"

"can you make the journalist look like him"

ChatGPT's Output

(*Note:* not used in final survey)

Researcher's Prompt

"can you make a different post where he is sitting behind the desk in his television study but make him not that big"

ChatGPT's Output

(*Note:* not used in final survey)

Researcher's Prompt

"can you make more natural posts"

ChatGPT's Output

(*Note:* see outlined square for the part of the photo used on the Instagram profile of the professional version of the news influencer)

Researcher's Prompt

"can you make a news posts? that he explains a news topic (him floating in the screen) while holding the phone?"

"can you make it more like he is holding the phone in selfie mode and explains it to the social media user?"
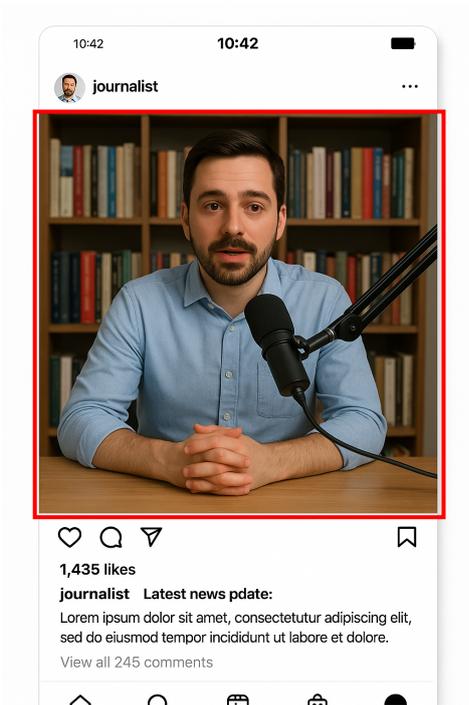
ChatGPT's Output

(*Note:* see outlined square for the part of the photo used on the Instagram profile of the professional version of the news influencer)

Researcher's Prompt

"can you make one last post where he is sitting behind a desk and talking into a microphone (like a podcast) and explaining the latest news update. also make sure that he is not wearing a suit but still a shirt (light blue)"

"more from a far and when he sits behind a bookshelf"

ChatGPT's Output

(*Note:* see outlined square for the part of the photo used on the Instagram profile of the professional version of the news influencer)