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Leading Brands' Communication of Product Innovativeness to Generation Z: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

Despite extensive research on product innovation, comparatively little attention has been given to how product innovativeness is or ought to be communicated to young consumers. This study systematically analyzes 700 newly released videos from S&P 500 consumer brands to examine how innovativeness cues are incorporated into their communications for new products. Findings reveal that the majority of these videos focus on imitative or incremental innovations rather than radical ones. Among the innovativeness cues, "relative advantage" was most frequently featured, whereas "technological novelty" appeared least often. These cues also tend to align with specific advertising appeals. To gain deeper understanding into young audiences' perceptions, the video analysis was complemented by 18 focus group interviews with Generation Z consumers aged 18 to 28. The results suggest that the innovativeness cue "coolness" is more appropriately captured by the broader and more inclusive term "emotional arousal," while a new cue, "trendy/timely," emerged from the analysis. Informants recommended employing comparative advertising approach and emphasizing emotional arousal when communicating product innovativeness. These findings extend the literature on product innovativeness communication and offer valuable insights for practitioners seeking effective strategies to convey and enhance the perceived innovativeness of new products to younger consumer cohorts.

Keywords

Innovativeness cues, new products, content analysis, focus group interviews, advertising appeal.

Introduction

Marketing and innovation are the two fundamental functions of business (Drucker, 1973). Extensive research on consumer innovativeness has focused on the measurement of innovativeness, the relationship between innovativeness and product adoption, and the antecedents of innovativeness (Tellis, Yin & Bell, 2009). Several factors have been identified as influencing the rate at which consumers adopt innovative products (Davis, 1989; Rogers, 2003; Venkatesh & Bala, 2008), with advertising playing a particularly significant role. Lopez and Sicilia (2013) found that word-of-mouth communication is important in new product adoption while advertising remains the first communication tool to build awareness and contribute to the success of product innovation. Innovation usually comes with the risk of failure, and effective advertising can help to reduce that risk (Min, Kalwani & Robinson, 2006). It is believed that, besides quality production, rigorous testing, and supply chain efficiency (Alzoubi *et al.*, 2025), innovative design and effective communication (Shwedeh, 2024) are crucial for enhancing product consumption experiences that further build brand equity (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). Advertising has long been recognized as a powerful driver of stock performance, with research showing that promotional support for pioneering innovations can amplify stock returns by up to ninefold (Srinivasan *et al.*, 2009). Despite this striking correlation, contemporary literature offers limited clarity on how marketers currently convey product innovativeness, how these messages are interpreted by target markets, and critically how to tailor such communications to effectively engage digital natives (Paul *et al.*, 2024), although there is an increasing amount of work in the area of advertising new products (Jiang *et al.*, 2024). This gap underscores the urgent need for updated research that bridges strategic communication with evolving consumer expectations in a digitally saturated landscape (Belch & Belch, 2024).

The share of digital advertising in the global advertising landscape has surged in recent years and online videos have become a dominant force, reaching the majority of internet users. According to a forecast by Marketing-Interactive (2024), spending on promotional videos is expected to grow by 63% over the next four years. In 2023, YouTube's global advertising revenues reached approximately US$31.51 billion, an 8% increase from the previous year (Statista, 2024). It was found that viewers who

watch brand videos on YouTube for at least 30 seconds or complete the entire video are 23 times more likely to visit or subscribe to a brand channel or share the video (Smith, 2020). This study systematically analyzed recently released YouTube videos from leading consumer brands within the S&P 500 (Standard and Poor's) to examine how innovativeness manifest through existing communication practices. It assessed not only the frequency of these cues but also the strategic emphasis and execution styles employed in videos promoting new products or services. The content analysis aims to uncover how companies convey their innovative offerings. This is an important starting point in systematically understanding existing practices for communicating product innovativeness as it provides a snapshot of the status quo and serves as a reference point for benchmarking future work in the area (Paul, 2024).

While earlier research has explored communication strategies for conveying new product attributes and shaping consumer behavior primarily from the perspective of product managers (Lee & O'Connor, 2003; Zhang *et al.*, 2021), a notable gap remains in understanding these dynamics from the consumer's point of view, particularly among younger audiences. This cohort, distinguished by its heterogeneity and heightened skepticism toward marketing efforts, has received limited scholarly attention regarding its perception of product innovativeness (Belch & Belch, 2024). Generation Z, characterized by its tech-savviness and strong preference for novelty and distinctiveness, has emerged as a key target for innovative products (Innova Market Insights, 2024; Sharma, Payal & Paul 2025). Representing approximately one-third of the global population, this cohort is gaining significant purchasing power (Fu & Ren, 2023; Grénman *et al.*, 2024). Unlike previous generations, Generation Z actively seeks products that deliver novel experiences and reflect their individuality, setting higher standards for what they consider truly innovative (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). In light of the content analysis, a series of focus group interviews was subsequently conducted to investigate Generation Z's perceptions and interpretations of product innovativeness and the cues that signal it. The discussions also delved into their recent encounters with innovative products to identify the factors that resonate with this demographic and to map effective communication strategies for conveying product innovativeness. The integration of quantitative and qualitative analyses yields rich, multidimensional insights into the current strategies used to communicate product innovativeness and reveals how these approaches can be refined

to better align with the expectations and preferences of this highly influential consumer segment (Chan, 2015; Paul, 2024). These findings serve as a strategic compass for brand owners, deepening their understanding of diverse innovative offerings and equipping them to craft messaging that not only captures attention but also fosters meaningful engagement with younger audiences.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Product Innovativeness and Innovativeness Cues

The term "innovation" has become increasingly elusive, with numerous definitions in the literature reflecting a consumer-centric perspective. Sethi *et al.* (2001) characterized innovation as embodying both novelty and meaningfulness. Lee and O'Connor (2003) describe it in terms of perceived superiority and adoption difficulty by consumers, drawing parallels to Davis's (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Rogers (2003) defines innovation through the lenses of relative advantage, complexity, and perceived risk. Broadly, innovation is categorized as either product or process innovation, with Garcia and Calantone (2002) offering one of the most rigorous typologies. However, their framework does not fully address how consumers interpret product-based innovations. According to Gautam and Singh (2008), product innovation can be understood through three key dimensions: new features or functions, a new look or feel, and the integration of new technologies.

Building on these definitions, Lowe and Alpert (2015, p. 4) describe consumer perception of product innovativeness as "the perceived degree of newness and improvement over existing alternatives," essentially, something both "newer" and "better." They identify three key antecedents to this perception: perceived concept newness, perceived relative advantage, and perceived technological novelty. However, merely new alone does not suffice for a product to be considered innovative; it must also demonstrate superiority and evoke a distinct "wow" factor. This "wow" factor is often captured by the notion of "perceived coolness," which Warren, Batra, Loureiro, and Bagozzi (2019) define as the extent to which a product is perceived as good and allows for autonomy.

Resnik and Stern (1977, p. 51) identified various information cues in traditional advertisements, including "new ideas: new product concepts." Building on this notion of newness and drawing from

subsequent innovation research, cues that signal product innovativeness can be more broadly conceptualized as innovativeness cues. These cues may encompass concept newness, relative advantage, technological novelty, and coolness; each reflecting how marketers convey and signal innovative offerings to shape consumer perceptions. Although "technological novelty" may appear to associate with "concept newness," the former specifically focuses on the technological dimension while the latter focus on the newness of the product concept (Lowe & Alpert, 2015; Talke *et al.*, 2017). Various definitions of technological innovation have been proposed in previous research, and a shared understanding of which new products qualify as "technological advancements" is embedded within the broader innovation process (Garcia & Calantone, 2002). Importantly, this cue is not limited to purely technical products. Innovativeness cues are believed to be non-mutually exclusive and may coexist within promotional videos, with a particular cue (or multiple cues) appearing more prominently depending on the context. It is anticipated that newly released YouTube videos by leading consumer brands often incorporate multiple innovativeness cues to strengthen the perceived newness of the product or service. Among various innovativeness cues, the cue of "concept newness" may be featured more frequently, as it represents the most direct depiction of innovativeness. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Newly YouTube videos by leading consumer brands are more likely to feature multiple innovativeness cue simultaneously.

H2: "Concept newness" is more frequently employed in newly released YouTube videos by leading consumer brands than other innovativeness cues.

Innovativeness Cues and Innovation Types

According to Garcia and Calantone (2002), innovation can be categorized into five types: imitative, incremental, discontinuous, really new, and radical. Imitative innovation involves replicating successful products or services from others, with negligible technological or market novelty. Incremental innovation refers to small, continuous improvements to existing offerings, enhancing features, benefits, or performance. Discontinuous innovation typically denotes technological breakthroughs that introduce entirely new performance capabilities to the market. Really new innovation is based on technologies

previously unused within the industry and often leads to significant shifts across the sector. It represents a product or service that is entirely novel to the market. Radical innovation, the most transformative form, introduces groundbreaking technologies that create entirely new market infrastructures. These types of innovation vary in their degree of novelty and abstraction, reflecting different levels of psychological distance from individuals.

Construal Level Theory explores the concept of psychological distance and the extent to which individuals think in abstract versus concrete terms (Trope & Liberman, 2010). In general, when an object is perceived as proximal, individuals engage in more concrete and non-schematic processing (Calderon *et al.*, 2020). Conversely, perceiving an object as distant leads to more abstract thinking and schematic processing. From this perspective, innovative products may need to be perceived as substantially different from existing offerings to be recognized as truly novel. However, it can be challenging to realize ideas that are too distant or conceptually complex, they are difficult for general consumers to process. Supporting this, Garcia and Calantone (2002) found that radical innovations are relatively rare, comprising only about 10% of all new innovations. Consequently, it is expected that most newly released videos by leading consumer brands tend to focus on imitative or incremental innovations. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Newly released YouTube videos by leading consumer brands are more likely to feature imitative or incremental innovations, while radical innovations are least likely to be featured.

Innovativeness Cues and Advertising Appeals

Research indicates that digital video advertisements can more precisely target consumers and significantly boost sales (Shaikh *et al.*, 2019). However, simply stating that a product is new may not be sufficient to enhance consumers' affective evaluations or elicit positive responses (Lowe & Alpert, 2015), despite this being a common tactic in advertising. Innovativeness cues, as signals that communicate a product's novelty, may vary in their manifestation and emphasis depending on the product category. Products can generally be classified along utilitarian and hedonic dimensions (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Utilitarian products fulfil practical, functional needs, whereas hedonic products evoke emotional

responses and offer sensory enjoyment. It is anticipated that video advertisements for new utilitarian products are more likely to emphasize functional attributes such as benefits or technological advancements. In contrast, videos introducing new hedonic products are more likely to highlight emotional experiences and sensory pleasure, such as perceived coolness. Accordingly, videos that focus on product features, benefits, and technological novelty are likely to employ a functional appeal, while those emphasizing coolness are more inclined to adopt an emotional appeal designed to stimulate consumers' feelings and sensations. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Videos featuring different product categories are likely to emphasis specific innovativeness cues. Specifically, a) utilitarian products are more likely to highlight "relative advantage" or "technological novelty", whereas b) hedonic products are more likely to highlight "coolness."

H5: a) Videos highlighting "relative advantage" and "technological novelty" are more likely to adopt a functional/utilitarian appeal, whereas b) videos highlighting "coolness" are more likely to adopt an experiential/emotional appeal.

Consumer Perceptions of Communicating Product Innovativeness

According to Rogers (2003), an innovation is only considered new if perceived as such by consumers. Szymanski *et al.* (2007) emphasize that studies on product innovativeness often rely on managers' assumptions about consumer perceptions, reinforcing the relevance of consumer-based models like TAM (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Bala, 2008). Similarly, advertising strategies for innovative products are largely shaped by practitioners' expectations of how consumers interpret innovativeness. As Gatignon and Robertson (1985) note, advertising plays a key role in the diffusion of novel products. Advertising plays an important role in driving the success of new products and increasing shareholder value, which matters just as much as innovation itself (Borah *et al.*, 2021). In other words, innovation outcomes hinge not just on how innovativeness is communicated (Tellis, 2009), but on how consumers actually perceive those messages.

Despite a notable lack of research on younger generations' perceptions of product innovativeness, several studies offer valuable insights. Jürgensen and Guesalaga (2018) examined how young

consumers' innovativeness and self-confidence shape their apparel-related decision-making. Hetet *et al.* (2020) found that brand innovativeness significantly affects consumer evaluations of newly launched products, with this relationship mediated by perceived newness and moderated by functional, hedonic, and social dimensions of consumer innovativeness. More recently, Min (2023) emphasized the role of recency in shaping perceptions of product innovativeness and revealed that consumers with limited prior product knowledge viewed a new product as more innovative when its release date was more recent, whereas those with prior knowledge were unaffected by the timing of the product's introduction. Walten and Wiedmann (2023) investigated communication strategies for innovative food products to identify approaches that yield more favorable brand and product outcomes. They found that providing more information does not necessarily lead to better evaluations of innovative products. However, information from independent or scientific sources was perceived as more credible, resulting in higher product evaluations.

It appears that existing research primarily concentrates on brand characteristics, consumer traits, and the quantity and source of information conveyed, while paying comparatively less attention to the specific types of innovativeness cues and the strategies used to communicate innovativeness. Wagner, Baccarella, and Voigt (2017) investigated the role of technical complexity in advertising and found that low-involvement consumers preferred simple advertisements, whereas medium-involvement consumers, though not high-involvement ones, responded more favorably to technically complex messages. These findings appear counterintuitive, and the underlying reasons for such divergent preferences remain unclear. Accordingly, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: How does Generation Z interpret product innovativeness, and which innovativeness cues are most frequently referenced in their interpretations?

RQ2: What innovative products has Generation Z recently encountered or purchased, and how motivated are they to adopt new products across various categories?

RQ3: In what ways have new products communicated their innovativeness to Generation Z, and what strategies are most effective in doing so?

To address the research hypotheses and questions presented above, two complementary studies

were conducted: a content analysis and a series of focus group interviews. The following sections detail the methodology and findings of Study 1, followed by the methodology and results of Study 2.

Study 1

Methodology

YouTube is increasingly recognized as a platform for enhancing brand awareness and influencing purchase decisions. Research by Febriyantoro (2020) highlights the significance of YouTube marketing communication in strengthening brand image and shaping the consumer behavior of younger generations. Considering YouTube's widespread use as a medium for brands to disseminate timely information about their products and services, a content analysis was conducted on recently uploaded videos from YouTube channels of consumer brands listed in the S&P 500 index. This was done according to typical procedures for content analysis (Chan, 2016; Chan & Lowe, 2018).

Sampling frame. The S&P 500 index was selected due to its status as one of the largest and most influential stock indices globally. It comprises many of the United States' largest corporations and globally recognized brands (e.g., Nike, Apple, Amazon, and Tesla), spanning a diverse array of industries across 11 sectors. Although commonly referred to as the S&P 500, the index actually includes 503 stocks, owing to the presence of dual share classes from three constituent companies. These firms are notable for their substantial investments in advertising and research and development, positioning them at the forefront of innovation. As such, the index was used as the sampling frame for this study. An initial screening was conducted by a trained graduate student and the research team in Hong Kong to identify companies offering consumer products/services, while excluding those focused on business-to-business operations. HK's multicultural and globally oriented environment further aligns with the international scope of this study. Among the 503 U.S.-based companies, not all maintain global market operations. Therefore, subsequent screening was performed to identify companies with international market presence, resulting in a list of 159 companies. By focusing on companies with an international presence, the dataset achieved global relevance, as opposed to one limited to companies operating exclusively within a single domestic market. Following further analysis, 19 companies were excluded

from the sample due to the absence of a YouTube channel or a lack of newly released product- or service-related videos during the coding period.

A graduate student proficient in English and blinded to the study's hypotheses conducted a systematic review of the YouTube channels of 140 companies, including their respective sub-brands. The student was employed as a part-time Research Assistant for the duration of the project, selected through a rigorous and competitive recruitment process. The unit of analysis was each unique video, with a focus on newly released promotional videos for products or services. To ensure coding accuracy and consistency, videos that were difficult to interpret, duplicated, or unrelated to direct product/service promotion such as those focused on corporate initiatives, troubleshooting, competitions, charitable activities, or interviews, were excluded. The final sample consisted of 700 videos spanning a two-year period, enabling the inclusion of a broad and representative range of promotional materials while reflecting the dynamic nature of product launches.

Coding procedures. The coder conducted an initial screening to identify newly released videos featuring consumer products or services. These videos were then reviewed multiple times to extract detailed information. To ensure inter-coder reliability, four additional coders independently analyzed a randomly selected 25% subset of the sample, without access to each other's ratings. A structured coding protocol was developed with items adapted from earlier studies to guide the coding process (Chan, 2016; Warren *et al.*, 2019). The protocol focused on the five key aspects: 1) video characteristics; 2) product and brand characteristics; 3) type and degree of innovation; 4) manifestation and prominence of innovativeness cues; and 5) characteristics of characters and advertising appeal. A comprehensive coding manual was subsequently developed, outlining each variable alongside detailed coding criteria and illustrative examples. These were thoroughly explained to all coders during an intensive training session.

If the video did not explicitly mention the product or service as new, the coder conducted an online search to verify its novelty. When characters appeared in the videos as background or in rapid succession, they were not counted. If a character appeared multiple times in the videos, it was counted as one. The coding manual was refined during the pilot coding phase. Any discrepancies between coders were identified and re-examined by the researchers, with resolutions reached through further discussions. The

intercoder reliabilities, calculated using Perreault and Leigh's (1989) reliability formula, exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.85. Unlike Cohen's Kappa (Cohen, 1960), Perreault and Leigh's index also took into consideration the number of alternative coding categories within a variable.

Results

Of the 140 companies (comprising 272 brands) analyzed, the subscribers of their YouTube channels ranged from as few as 19 to as many as 27,600,000, with an average of approximately 1,700,000 subscribers. Among the 700 videos examined, the shortest lasted for only 5 seconds, while the longest product introduction video extended to 18 minutes, with an average of slightly over one minute. The majority of the analyzed videos fell into the servicing/retailing category (56%), followed by food and beverages (20%) and durables (17%). The majority of products were primarily utilitarian (51%) or hedonic (34%), while the remaining 15% exhibited a balanced combination of both attributes. Approximately 80% of the posted videos originated from the U.S., with the rest coming from southeast Asia, Australia, and some European countries. This analysis primarily focused on the largest companies in the US, which explains why the brands are often recognized: 26% are known by some, 19% are well-known, and 35% are very well-known.

It is notable that most of the examined videos focused on new versions of existing products and services (64%), with only about 8% introducing completely new products and services. These offerings predominantly showcased imitative (47%) or incremental innovations (52%), with just 1% representing discontinuous innovations. In terms of innovativeness cues, relative advantage (63%) was the most frequently highlighted, followed by concept newness (52%) and coolness (41%). Surprisingly, technological novelty (18%) was the least featured cue. Table 2 further illustrates how these innovativeness cues were presented. When included in the videos, innovativeness cues were typically conveyed through both audio and visual forms, followed by visual demonstrations alone, with a very small proportion relying solely on audio. On average, each video incorporated two innovativeness cues, with concept newness and relative advantage being the most frequently paired combination, followed by concept newness and coolness.

The majority of the videos predominantly featured real people in real-world settings, with 25% being animated. Approximately one-third of the videos did not include any characters, while 60% utilized real spokespersons and 6% employed imaginary spokespersons. A notable 37% of the videos showcased both female and male characters, whereas 19% featured only male characters and 12% only female characters. When characters interacted with the products, 20% were shown consuming the product, 6% mentioned it, and 2% were depicted holding or touching it, while 35% exhibited a combination of these actions. Unsurprisingly, nearly all the characters appearing in the videos had a strong fit with the products and services.

In terms of setting, half of the videos presented a relaxing or very relaxing environment, 36% featured a neutral setting, and only 7% were serious or very serious. The narrative approach was the most common at 58%, followed by a drama approach at 34%, with autobiography being the least employed at 8%. A similar pattern in the approach was observed across videos highlighting the four different innovativeness cues. Interestingly, the most popular advertising appeal was functional or utilitarian (53%), followed by experiential or emotional appeals (37%), and a combination of both (10%). When companies were divided into low and high revenue groups using a median split, it was found that low-revenue companies were more likely to have new versions of existing products and services (96.3% vs. 88%), while high-revenue companies were more likely to introduce totally new products and services (12% vs. 3.7%; $X^2(1, N = 700) = 16.78$, $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, low-revenue companies were slightly more likely to engage in incremental innovation (54.7% vs. 49%) and less likely to pursue imitative innovation compared to high-revenue companies (49.3% vs. 44.7%), although this difference was not statistically significant.

H1 predicts that videos on innovative products are more likely to feature multiple innovativeness cue simultaneously. A Chi-square analysis shows that more than half of the analyzed videos tended to feature more than one innovativeness cue (χ^2 (3, $N = 700$) = 244.23, $p < 0.001$). They usually featured two or three innovativeness cues, and a small proportion (5%) even featured as many as four innovativeness cues. Therefore, H1 is strongly supported. H2 predicts that videos on new products are more likely to highlight “concept newness”. Repeated measures ANOVA was conducted, revealing

significant differences in the featured cues (F (3, 700) = 121.081, $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, it was found that videos on new products or services were more likely to highlight "relative advantage" rather than "concept newness" (see Table 1). Surprisingly, "technological novelty" was the least featured. While relative advantage (48%) and coolness (23%) emerged as the most prominent cues for innovativeness, it is worth noting that concept newness also played a significant role. It was featured as the second most prominent innovativeness cue in 22.3% of the analyzed videos and ranked third in 10.4% of the videos examined. Therefore, H2 is partially supported.

H3 hypothesizes that videos on innovative products are more likely to feature imitative or incremental innovations, while radical innovations are least likely to be featured. Results show that about half of the videos analyzed were about incremental innovations (52%), slightly less than half were on imitative innovations (47%), while only 1% were on discontinuous innovations and none on really new or radical innovations. Therefore, H3 is strongly supported. Interestingly, it was found that utilitarian products were more likely to feature incremental innovations, while hedonic products were more likely to showcase imitative innovations (χ^2 (4, N = 700) = 121.53, $p < 0.001$; see Table 2).

Table 1 Innovativeness cues featured in videos on innovative products.

Innovativeness Cues	No	Audio illustration	Visual demonstration	Both
Relative Advantage	256 (36.6%)	22 (3.1%)	124 (17.7%)	298 (42.6%)
Concept Newness	334 (47.7%)	37 (5.3%)	94 (13.4%)	235 (33.6%)
Coolness	412 (58.9%)	32 (4.6%)	127 (18.1%)	129 (18.4%)
Technological Novelty	573 (81.9%)	8 (1.1%)	54 (7.7%)	65 (9.3%)

H4 proposes that videos featuring new products from different categories are likely to emphasize specific innovativeness cues. Specifically, utilitarian products are more likely to highlight "relative advantage" or "technological novelty", whereas hedonic products are more likely to emphasize

"coolness." Chi-square analyses indicate significant variations in the cues emphasized (see Table 3), with utilitarian products featuring more "relative advantage" (63.5%) and "technological novelty" (69.3%) cues, while hedonic products were more likely to highlight their "coolness" (50.7%). These findings strongly support H4.

Table 2 Product type by type of innovation.

Product Type	Imitative innovation	Incremental innovation	Discontinuous innovation
Mainly utilitarian	108 (32.8%)	241 (66.4%)	7 (87.5%)
Balanced utilitarian & hedonic	43 (13.1%)	65 (17.9%)	1 (12.5%)
Mainly hedonic	178 (54.1%)	57 (15.7%)	0 (0%)

Table 3 Product type by innovativeness cues featured in videos.

Product Type	Concept newness	Relative Advantage	Technological Novelty	Coolness
Mainly utilitarian	215 (58.7%)	282 (63.5%)	88 (69.3%)	95 (33%)
Balanced utilitarian & hedonic	64 (17.5%)	95 (21.4%)	33 (26%)	47 (16.3%)
Mainly hedonic	87 (23.8%)	67 (15.1%)	6 (4.7%)	146 (50.7%)
Chi-square analyses	X^2 (2, N = 700) = 33.13, p < 0.001	X^2 (2, N = 700) = 188.21, p < 0.001	X^2 (2, N = 700) = 33.13, p < 0.001	X^2 (2, N = 700) = 73.64, p < 0.001

H5 anticipates that videos highlighting the cues "relative advantage" and "technological novelty" are more likely to adopt a functional/utilitarian appeal whereas videos highlighting "coolness" are more

likely to adopt an experiential/emotional appeal. Results show that a majority of videos highlighting "technological novelty" (85%) and "relative advantage" (77.9%) adopted a functional/utilitarian appeal (see Table 4). Comparatively, fewer videos employed an experiential/emotional appeal, with the "coolness" cue being the most frequently highlighted (61.1%). Therefore, H5 is also strongly supported.

Table 4 Innovativeness cues by advertising appeal in videos on innovative products.

Innovativeness Cues	Functional/ Utilitarian	Experiential/ Emotional	Combine	Chi-square analyses
Concept Newness	236 (64.5%)	98 (26.8%)	32 (8.7%)	X^2 (2, N = 700) = 43.59, p < 0.001
Relative Advantage	346 (77.9%)	41 (9.2%)	57 (12.8 %)	X^2 (2, N = 700) = 407.07, p < 0.001
Technological Novelty	108 (85%)	6 (4.7%)	13 (10.2 %)	X^2 (2, N = 700) = 74.44, p < 0.001
Coolness	81 (28.1%)	176 (61.1%)	31 (10.8 %)	X^2 (2, N = 700) = 133.12, p < 0.001

The content analysis offers a snapshot of the current advertising practices employed by the world's leading consumer brands, providing insights into how innovations are communicated to target audiences. This analysis also raises important questions about how these communications are perceived and interpreted by viewers. The subsequent section outlines the qualitative research procedures and results, which explore consumer perceptions of product innovativeness and its communication practices.

Study 2

Methodology

Study 2 focused on Generation Z individuals recruited through email and social media platforms. A total of 18 focus group interviews were conducted, each comprising approximately five participants, with a balanced gender distribution (42 males and 53 females). The majority of participants were Hong Kong Chinese, with a smaller representation of mainland Chinese, all aged between 18 and 25. All

participants were heavy internet users, spending five or more hours online daily, and demonstrated high levels of digital literacy and tech-savviness. Traditional media sources such as radio, newspapers, and magazines were no longer part of their information consumption habits. While a few still watched television, most maintained Facebook accounts but used them far less frequently than Instagram. Focus group interviews were chosen to leverage group dynamics, enabling the collection of richer and more detailed insights efficiently (Babin *et al.*, 2020; Chan, 2022). All research procedures received approval from the University Research Committee, and informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the interviews.

Interview questions and procedures. To facilitate the interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to provide a clear framework while allowing for conversational flexibility. The guide was organized into four core sections: (a) participants' perceptions of product innovativeness; (b) their willingness to purchase new products and services across different categories; (c) the most innovative product they had recently encountered or purchased; and (d) their views on how product innovativeness should be communicated. As the interviews progressed, the guide was iteratively refined, with the sequence of questions adjusted in response to participants' input to enhance the natural flow of discussion (Lindlof, 2011). All face-to-face interviews were conducted in Cantonese by an interviewer fluent in both Cantonese and English. To build rapport, participants were first invited to introduce themselves, share their interests and media consumption habits, and discuss the frequency of their overnight travel. This warm-up was followed by the main interview questions. Throughout the discussions, a range of floating prompts and probing techniques were used to facilitate open dialogue and elicit rich, contextual insights (Miller & Crabtree, 2004). Participation was entirely voluntary, with no monetary or material incentives provided.

Transcription and analysis. All 18 focus group interviews were transcribed and cross-checked for accuracy against the audio recordings by a full-time research assistant, followed by a secondary review by the lead researcher. Data analysis was guided by methodologies from comparable qualitative studies in marketing (Morgan-Thomas *et al.*, 2020; Tong & Chan, 2023). The transcripts were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) alongside thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, &

Namey, 2012). Initially, the research assistant and the researcher conducted open coding by identifying content relevant to the research questions. During a second reading, they collaboratively developed categories and extracted key recurring themes until thematic saturation was reached (Berg, 2007). To reduce subjectivity, alternative interpretations were considered throughout the analysis process (Weber, 2004). These themes were subsequently reviewed and validated by two independent academic experts in marketing and communications to ensure interpretive accuracy and clarity. The experts cross-referenced all identified themes with the original transcripts and minor revisions were made based on their feedback. Representative quotes were selected to illustrate each theme (Berg, 2007), and any discrepancies were resolved through team discussion. The audio recordings were permanently deleted following the verification of transcripts and completion of coding and data analysis.

Results

Product innovativeness and innovativeness cues. RQ 1 examined informants' views on product innovativeness and explored which innovativeness cues are most frequently referenced in their interpretations. Informants generally believed that product innovativeness extends beyond the product itself, with several highlighting aesthetic elements like new packaging and design [AF5, BB4, BE1]. Some pointed to novel production or promotional methods, such as "promoting something with a new approach" [BE5] or "using different techniques to produce existing products" [AG3]. A few informants qualified entirely new products or significant breakthroughs as newness, as AC2 stated, "it shouldn't just be an improvement; a smaller or faster CPU with the same performance is an enhancement, not true innovation." Others saw both entirely new and improved products as valid forms of newness [AE4,BC3, DB4], while some linked it to delivering new feeling and fresh experiences [AE1, BE3, DB4]. Some informants also associated product innovativeness with emerging technologies like AI [AA1, CB1, DB4].

Interestingly, consistent with the content analysis, concept newness and technological novelty were not dominant themes. Instead, informants prioritized the relative advantages of innovations, such as multifunctionality and enhanced features that address consumer needs [AF2, CD4, DA5, BE3, CB6], and ultimately benefit humanity and society [AC5, CB5, CC5]. Informants believe that product

innovativeness involves creating something relevant to the current era, with growing emphasis on being "timely and trendy." They suggest it "should align with current trends and present them in a novel way" [AD4, BC2, CB5, DA2]. Affective dimensions were also discussed prominently, with informants expressed a desire for amusement, surprise, and emotional resonance (BA4, BB1, BC3, CC4). It appears that few informants explicitly mentioned "coolness;" which could be more appropriately captured by the broader and more inclusive term "emotional arousal."

Experience with innovative products and eagerness to adopt. While Generation Z did not emphasize technological newness, most of the innovative products they recently encountered or purchased (RQ2) were tech-related such as smartphones, computers and household electronics, or entertainment-focused (see Table 5). AA2 noted, "Technical systems were not seen before; the pixel has significantly improved (iPhone 16)." AC2 described Vision Pro glasses as "like being in your office," highlighting their use of augmented reality. BE2 called the new Xiaomi car "a mini Porsche that is cheaper and offers better performance." Enhanced functionality, better user experience, lower cost, and superior performance, were frequently highlighted. A few cited food and beverages with unique flavors as innovative, like BA6's "rice with strawberry sauce" and BD3's "Oreo Coca-Cola". Others mentioned accessories such as iPad cases and glasses. Most discoveries came via social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, with some through retail stores or personal recommendations.

This cohort showed strong interest in purchasing smartphones and computing devices, ranking just behind food and groceries in their spending priorities (see Table 5). This reflects Generation Z's growing inclination to invest in technology that enhances daily life. There was also notable interest in cosmetics and skincare, pointing to a desire for self-expression and personal care among this demographic. While some expressed enthusiasm for automobiles, they acknowledged financial limitations, revealing a pragmatic approach to spending as they weigh their aspirations against their economic realities. Surprisingly, sports-related products drew the least interest, suggesting a shift in how younger consumers engage with sports and fitness, potentially favoring digital or alternative entertainment over traditional sports goods.

Table 5 Innovative products recently encountered or purchased and eagerness to adopt.

Product categories	Eagerness Mean	Eagerness S.D.	Encountered/ Purchased
Food & groceries	8.82	1.321	Oreo Coca-Cola, Ovaltine egg tart, cleaning products
Phones & computing products	7.07	2.540	iPhone, Samsung, Huawei folding phones, Vision Pro, Nintendo sound clock
Cosmetics & skincare products	6.16	2.980	VT Reedle Shot
Financial services	5.75	2.539	
Automobiles	5.35	3.073	Tesla Model 2, Xiaomi car
Home appliances	5.22	1.840	Butter spreader, Dyson hair dryer, Robot vacuum, Service robot, Infant stroller
Sporting goods	4.40	2.746	Sports glasses, Nintendo Ring Fit
Others			Crocs shoes, DIY book, Chat GPT; Instant translation services, Water Taxi, Rocket Recovery Technology
ANOVA analysis	**$F(6, 658) = 32.09, p < 0.001$**		

Communicating product innovativeness. RQ3 explored how the above products conveyed their innovativeness and identified effective communication strategies. Consistent with previous discussions that Generation Z values the relative advantages of innovation, informants stressed the importance of showcasing utilitarian benefits and specific new features. AC6 noted that "the infant stroller showcased the tested new features to demonstrate its effectiveness," while CB6 highlighted that "functionality is key; the new shoes combine the advantages of two separate products." Others emphasized demonstrating functional effectiveness to signal newness [CC1, CC4], with CA4 pointing to the appeal of "before-and-after pictures." Highlighting problem-solving capabilities was also seen as essential, such as a cleaning robot that "recalled owners' preferences to address their needs" [CB6].

Interestingly, many informants found product comparisons, whether with previous versions or competitors, effective in highlighting uniqueness [AE5]. BC2 cited Huawei's triple-fold phone as "far ahead," noting its comparison with rival brands. BD1 suggested contrasting the iPhone 16 with earlier models, while BD3 pointed to Coca-Cola-flavored Oreos versus the original. CC5 emphasized the convenience of automatic translation glasses by comparing them to traditional devices. CB2 noted that a virtual try-on app effectively showcases innovation by contrasting it with conventional fitting methods and illustrating AI's impact. AF4 and CC4 further added that comparisons help clarify a product's relative advantages, uniqueness, and problem-solving capabilities.

Informants found it compelling to emphasize counter-intuitive or unexpected aspects of innovative products, such as unconventional applications. BE5 cited Nintendo's Ring Fit as a bold move into a new market, aiming to lead in fitness gaming. Some suggested using popularity cues such as "It's so popular you need to reserve in advance" [BE2] to signal innovation. Others emphasized the value of professional evidence or data to boost credibility [CC5, DB3, DB4]. Several informants also noted that withholding specific product details can spark consumer curiosity, as BA4 observed: "They didn't mention specifics, which makes consumers more curious."

It is worth noting that some informants felt it's not always necessary to explicitly emphasize "new" or "innovative" when communicating product innovativeness. AB1 remarked, "If it's truly innovative, it might not need much explanation," while BB1 added, "A quick glance should reveal it's something not yet on the market and further explanation is unnecessary." AG1 echoed this, noting that newness is evident "if the product information differs from what you've seen before." Others suggested a more playful and humorous approach in communicating "new", using exaggerated captions to highlight novelty. AF6 recalled an ad claiming the product was "very high-tech or futuristic," and BA2 described it as "a one-of-a-kind product in Hong Kong—the most innovative in the region."

It appears that emotional arousal plays a key role in communicating product innovativeness. Some informants recommended using humor, through playful contexts or captions, to boost engagement. BA5 noted, "It's really funny, which is why people are sharing that video," while BC2 described an ad featuring a lot of housewives as "deeply ingrained and very effective… almost brainwashing in how it

presents things." Others emphasized storytelling to foster emotional connection. BB1 remarked, "The story is well-told… it resonates with the audience," and CC4 highlighted themes like family, friendship, and love as powerful emotional triggers. In addition, the influence of celebrities and key opinion leaders (KOLs) was noted, particularly through unboxing videos by social media influencers [BB5, BE6].

Discussion and Conclusion

Many companies have failed in competitive markets due to a lack of innovation (Sethi, Smith, & Park, 2001). However, the capacity to innovate does not automatically guarantee success. While there is growing interest in exploring consumer involvement in the development of innovative products and its influence on product performance, comparatively less attention has been paid to how such products are communicated to consumers and how this communication can be made more effective (Cui & Wu, 2016). To address this gap, a content analysis was conducted to examine the prevalence and manifestation of innovativeness cues in newly released promotional videos by leading consumer brands. This was followed by a series of focus group interviews to tap into Generation Z's perceptions of product innovativeness. Findings from Study 1 and Study 2 reveal both alignment and divergence in how innovativeness cues are constructed by brands and interpreted by consumers. Table 6 presents a comparative analysis of the types of innovation and innovativeness cues featured in brand communications alongside Generation Z's interpretations and perceived relevance. This table facilitates integration across the two studies and underscores areas of convergence and divergence between brand messaging and consumer perception. Overall, these findings enhance our understanding of how innovativeness is conveyed and offer insights into more effective strategies for communicating product innovativeness to Generation Z.

Product Innovativeness and Innovation Types

The content analysis revealed that most of the analyzed videos predominantly showcased imitative or incremental innovations, with discontinuous innovations appearing less frequently and no instances of really new or radical innovations were observed. Coincidentally, Generation Z does not appear to

prioritize groundbreaking novelty in their perception of product innovativeness. Many informants regarded incremental improvements as valid indicators of innovation, suggesting that even minor modifications to existing products can evoke a sense of novelty and freshness. Rather than holding a high threshold for "newness," Generation Z seems to embrace a more nuanced understanding of innovation, one that values refinement and evolution alongside radical transformation. This broader perspective implies that both entirely new products and enhanced versions of existing offerings can be perceived as innovative, expanding the scope of what constitutes meaningful innovation in the eyes of younger consumers.

These observations align with literature which consistently highlights the rarity of radical innovations (Garcia & Calantone, 2002). Drawing on construal level theory, products that exhibit high psychological distance from existing offerings may face greater challenges in market acceptance, as they tend to appear more abstract and less relatable to consumers compared to the more concrete and familiar nature of imitative and incremental innovations (Trope & Liberman, 2010). This scarcity of really new and radical innovations may also explain the notable gap in empirical research focused on radical innovations. Yet, it remains striking that even the world's leading companies have not showcased any really new or radical innovations on their YouTube channels over the past two years. Further analysis reveals that companies with comparatively lower revenues were more inclined to release updated versions of existing products and services (imitative innovations), while higher-revenue firms were more likely to launch entirely new offerings (discontinuous innovations). In fact, low-revenue companies demonstrated a slightly stronger tendency toward incremental innovation than their high-revenue counterparts. This pattern suggests that incremental innovation may not necessarily offer greater economic advantages than imitative innovations. It is plausible that firms with substantial financial resources are better equipped to pursue discontinuous innovations. Alternatively, some companies may possess really new and radical innovations but choose not to communicate them via platforms like YouTube. Such innovations often involve complex technologies, advanced production processes, or specialized components, which may be better communicated through targeted marketing approaches such as personal selling, press events, or experiential campaigns. Nonetheless, the analysis indicates that

Generation Z adopts a pragmatic view of product innovativeness, prioritizing functionality and usability over the appeal of radical novelty. For this cohort, innovation is often defined not by how unprecedented a product is, but by how effectively it enhances everyday experiences.

Table 6 Convergence and divergence between brand messaging and consumer perception.

	Content Analysis	Focus Group Interviews	Practical insights
Media platforms	YouTube channel	YouTube is Generation Z's most-cited source for discovering innovative products.	Leveraging the YouTube channel.
Innovation Types	Featuring mainly imitative and incremental innovations	A more nuanced understanding of innovation, one that values refinement and evolution alongside radical transformation	Considering strategies to reduce the psychological distance often linked to really new or radical innovations
Innovativeness cues—Relative advantage	Most frequently featured	Values the relative advantages of innovation, stressed the importance of showcasing utilitarian benefits and specific new features.	Prioritizing portraying relative advantages and emotional connections in marketing communications for new offerings.
Innovativeness cues—Concept Newness	Second most frequently featured	Holds a more flexible interpretation of "newness," highlighting concept newness alone may not be sufficient to be perceived as innovative.	Adopting comparative advertising and incorporating professional evidence or data to concretely highlight innovation.
Innovativeness cues—Coolness	Highlighted in slightly more than one-third of the videos	Notably absent from discussions, might be more appropriately reworded as the broader and more inclusive term of "emotional arousal"	Communication strategies should evoke a range of emotions aligned with the value of the new product.
Innovativeness cues—Technology Novelty	Least frequently featured	Did not frequently highlight technological novelty, many of the innovative products they had recently encountered or purchased were, in fact, technology-based.	Should not only focus on showcasing technological novelty but also emphasize relatable and trend-driven aspects of innovation.
Innovativeness cues—Timely/Trendy		Frequently emerged in discussions and increasingly acknowledged in recent literature, could be considered an additional cue for product innovativeness.	Utilizing a broader set of innovativeness cues may enhance marketing effectiveness.

Manifestation and Interpretation of Innovativeness Cues

The content analysis revealed that most of the analyzed videos incorporated multiple innovativeness cues simultaneously. Contrary to our initial expectations, advertisers appeared to place greater emphasis on highlighting the relative advantages and "coolness" of products, rather than focusing on concept newness or technological novelty. Consistent with these findings, it is noteworthy that Generation Z participants did not regard concept newness as the most important aspect of product innovativeness, nor did they frequently mention technological novelty. Many seemed to believe that true innovation speaks for itself and requires no elaborate explanation. Their interpretation of product innovativeness extended beyond concept newness to include aspects such as new packaging, design, and novel production or promotional methods. Ultimately, the emphasis on labeling a product as "new" or "innovative" may not resonate uniformly with audiences. As scholars of innovation diffusion have noted, an innovation is only "new" if it is perceived as such (Rogers, 2003). While innovation itself may initiate the adoption life cycle, advertising plays a crucial role in appealing to a broader customer base (Yohn, 2019). These findings suggest that Generation Z holds a more flexible interpretation of "newness." For them, highlighting concept newness alone may not be sufficient for a product to be perceived as innovative. In this regard, marketers may be taking the right approach by not placing excessive emphasis on the "concept newness" cue.

In contrast to existing knowledge (Innova Market Insights, 2024), neither the content analysis nor Generation Z participants placed strong emphasis on the technological novelty aspect of product innovativeness. However, insights from the focus group interviews revealed that, although young consumers did not frequently highlight technological novelty, many of the innovative products they had recently encountered or purchased were, in fact, technology-based. This reflects the deep integration of technology and artificial intelligence into daily life, making them a ubiquitous and almost invisible part of their experiences. For Generation Z, the value of innovation lies not merely in being "new" or "high-tech," but in its capacity to drive positive change and enhance everyday life. This perspective may help explain Wagner, Baccarella, and Voigt's (2017) finding that high-involvement consumers did not necessarily appreciate technically complex communications. Given that technology is embedded in their

daily routines, highlighting technological novelty alone may not convey a sense of "newness" to them. Instead, they tend to prioritize the relative advantages that innovations deliver to users and society at large. They believe that product innovativeness should enhance customer experience, making products more useful, efficient, and impactful. As discussed earlier, this generation demonstrates a clear understanding that the ultimate goal of introducing new products is to enhance quality of life and address pressing societal needs. In this regard, advertisers' strategies that emphasize relative advantage over concept newness appear well-aligned with the values and expectations of this young audience.

Although "coolness" was highlighted in slightly more than one-third of the videos featuring new products, it was notably absent from Generation Z's discussions of what makes a product feel innovative. While informants did not explicitly critique or reject the concept of "coolness," they tended to focus on the broader emotional resonance of product innovativeness rather than associating it solely with the "wow" factor or coolness (Warren *et al.*, 2019). They emphasized emotions such as amusement, surprise, and overall emotional engagement as more meaningful indicators of innovativeness. Previous studies have similarly identified a range of emotions linked to perceptions of product innovativeness, including consumer excitement (Nguyen & Chaudhuri, 2019), hope, and anxiety (Lin, MacInnis, & Eisingerich, 2020). Notably, strong anxiety can enhance new product adoption when accompanied by strong hope. These findings suggest that the innovativeness cue "coolness" might be more appropriately reworded as the broader and more inclusive term of "emotional arousal", which encompasses diverse emotions and serves as an antecedent to perceptions of innovativeness (Warren *et al.*, 2019). Supporting this view, prior research has shown that simply incorporating the word "new" in an advertisement can increase behavioral (e.g., viewing duration) and psychophysiological (e.g., cardiac activity) indicators of interest, though the term itself did not evoke liking and emotional arousal (Sung, Hartley, Vanman, & Phau, 2016). This underscores the importance of emotional arousal as a critical dimension in perceiving and processing product innovativeness. Moreover, adopting this broader term may also facilitate the coding process in content analysis, particularly when coders in Study 1, who were themselves members of Generation Z find "coolness" rather abstract and subjective to identify consistently.

Interestingly, the term "timely/trendy" frequently emerged in Generation Z's discussions of

product innovativeness. They believe that innovation should align with the current moment and respond to prevailing trends. Although the existing literature rarely discusses "timely/trendy" explicitly or examines the relationship between innovation and popularity (Henard & Szymanski, 2001), prior studies have acknowledged the importance of capturing consumer trends in new product design (Pallant, Sands, & Karpen, 2020). For example, Andreassen, Lervik-Olsen, and Calabretta (2015), using trend-spotting methods, emphasized the necessity of understanding consumer trends throughout the innovation development process and during new product launches. Similarly, Min (2023) suggests that innovativeness is mentally represented through the conceptual link between novelty and recency. Here, recency may refer both to temporal recency, recent developments in time, and to trend recency, which reflects alignment with current cultural or market trends. While "timely/trendy" may conceptually overlap with relative advantage to some extent, it captures a distinct dimension of temporal and cultural relevance, reflecting consumers' heightened sensitivity to what is current. This aspect, increasingly acknowledged in recent literature, could be considered an additional cue for product innovativeness. Overall, the key dimensions of product innovativeness discussed by Generation Z generally align with both the existing literature and the results of the content analysis. However, their emphasis and focus tend to diverge from established findings, suggesting a generational shift in how innovativeness is perceived and valued.

Effective Communication Strategies for Product Innovativeness

The content analysis shows innovativeness cues featured in marketing communications also correspond to the type of product being promoted. Utilitarian products, which emphasize practical and functional value, often highlight cues such as relative advantage or technological novelty. In contrast, hedonic products, which appeal to emotions and sensory enjoyment, more frequently emphasize coolness. As expected, videos focusing on relative advantage or technological novelty tended to adopt a functional appeal, whereas those emphasizing coolness generally employed an experiential or emotional appeal. Notably, the autobiographical approach was the least used in the analyzed videos, likely because advertisers perceive first-person perspective as less persuasive for introducing new products as

perception of innovativeness could be rather subjective.

Consistently, Generation Z similarly recognized the importance of communicating the utilitarian value of innovative products, while also valuing emotional arousal as a means of engagement. This suggests that placing innovative products in humorous contexts or employing storytelling techniques can foster stronger emotional connections with audiences (Chan, 2011; Chan & Lowe, 2021). Although informants did not explicitly distinguish between utilitarian and hedonic products when discussing communication strategies for product innovativeness, they generally viewed comparative advertising as effective approach (del Barrio-Garcia, Munoz-Leiva, & Golden, 2020). This approach involves highlighting differences between a new product and competitors' offerings or a brand's own existing products, making relative advantages and uniqueness of the product more apparent through objective comparison. Informants also valued the inclusion of professional evidence or data to enhance credibility (Walten & Wiedmann, 2023). This preference may further explain the limited use of autobiographical approaches, which can be perceived as subjective. In conclusion, while consumer adoption of innovative products faces barriers related to knowledge, cost, time, and the uncertainty inherent in novelty (Alexander, Lynch, & Wang, 2008), the way these products are portrayed in marketing communications can significantly influence trial and adoption. The qualitative feedback from Generation Z enriches the content analysis findings by providing nuanced insights into effective strategies for communicating product innovativeness.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Despite extensive research into consumer-perceived product innovativeness including its conceptualization, antecedents, and outcomes (Boisvert & Khan, 2022), further investigation is needed into the cues that signal innovativeness and the strategies that effectively communicate it. This study addresses that gap by integrating content analysis with qualitative feedback, offering a richer understanding of the complexities within contemporary digital marketing and shifting consumer perceptions. By building on established frameworks (Lowe & Alpert, 2015), the study advances theoretical discourse and refines communication strategies surrounding product innovativeness. It also

challenges the conventional notion that newness alone drives consumer engagement, emphasizing instead the critical roles of relevance, perceived benefits, and emotional resonance.

By identifying how innovativeness cues should be represented in marketing communications, this study highlights the multifaceted nature of perceived innovativeness and proposes an updated set of four key innovativeness cues: newness, relative advantage, timely/trendy, and emotional arousal. The findings underscore Generation Z's appreciation for emotional resonance and practical utility, indicating a shift from a sole focus on groundbreaking technological novelty toward a broader, more inclusive interpretation of newness. Incremental improvements are also recognized as meaningful progress, providing new avenues for conceptualizing and communicating product innovativeness. The emergence of cues such as "timely/trendy" and emotional arousal expands traditional metrics of product innovativeness, offering a more nuanced framework for studying its representation and perception. By examining differences across various product categories, the study enables brands to tailor their messaging strategies to better align with specific audiences and product types, thereby enhancing marketing effectiveness. The results invite further inquiry into existing theoretical models and the evolving roles of emotional engagement and societal trends in shaping the perception of product innovativeness.

For practitioners, the findings provide actionable strategies for marketing and communicating innovative products. Analyzing innovativeness cues in online videos offers valuable insights into how brands position and communicate their innovative products globally, aligning with international marketing strategies and practices. Focus group interviews complement the content analysis by providing direct insights into how Generation Z perceives and responds to such communication. This qualitative feedback is crucial for understanding the nuances of consumer behavior and preferences within this demographic. The study suggests that marketers and advertisers should not only focus on showcasing technological novelty but also emphasize relatable and trend-driven aspects of innovation to effectively engage Generation Z. Companies should prioritize portraying relative advantages and emotional connections in their marketing communications for new offerings, particularly through storytelling and humor, to foster a stronger resonance with this segment.

Companies should consider strategies to reduce the psychological distance often linked to really new or radical innovations. This would enable them to pursue discontinuous innovation while simultaneously leveraging incremental improvements to sustain consumer engagement without overextending resources (Trope & Liberman, 2010). When introducing product innovativeness, adopting comparative advertising and incorporating professional evidence or data can help enhance product credibility and adoption rates (Walten & Wiedmann, 2023). Furthermore, the study's identification of emotional arousal as a critical dimension suggests that communication strategies should evoke a range of emotions aligned with the value of the new product, rather than relying solely on technological or conceptual newness. Utilizing a broader set of innovativeness cues, such as "timely/trendy" and "emotional arousal", may enhance marketing effectiveness. By tailoring their video advertising strategies, brands can better align with consumer expectations and perceptions, thereby connecting more effectively with consumer values, particularly those of Generation Z, whose practical and emotional needs shape their perception of innovation (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). Advertisers should also strive to balance functional/utilitarian and emotional/experiential appeals in their communications, depending on the product type and the innovativeness cues to be highlighted.

Limitations and Future Research

This study represents one of the pioneering efforts to explore the effective communication of product innovativeness, albeit with limitations due to its exploratory nature (Paul, 2024). Future research could benefit from employing more rigorous testing methods, such as experimental designs, to systematically investigate how the portrayal of innovativeness cues affects downstream marketing communication effects, including brand memory, preferences, and product adoption. In addition, the current study found that most analyzed videos utilized more than one innovativeness cue at a time. However, research by Walten and Wiedmann (2023) suggests that presenting more information does not necessarily lead to better evaluations of innovative products, implying that using multiple cues simultaneously may not be beneficial. Future studies could focus on determining the optimal level of innovativeness cues for effective communication of new products. Studies have shown that user-brand

interactions on platforms like YouTube involve both cognitive and emotional processes (Sashittal & Jassawalla, 2021). Future research may examine which innovativeness cues and advertising appeals are more likely to elicit cognitive or emotional processing, and how this further impact communication effectiveness.

This study concentrates on the communication strategies of leading consumer brands on the YouTube platform and the perceptions of Generation Z from a single geographic location. The analysis of YouTube videos may introduce a bias toward digitally dominant brands, which tend to have stronger online presences and more robust digital marketing strategies. This limitation may affect the generalizability of our findings to brands with less digital visibility. In addition, the selection of brands from the S&P 500 index may skew the sample toward larger, more established firms that often adopt more conservative approaches to innovation and promotion. This sampling choice may limit the representation of start-ups or more innovative brands that appeal differently to younger audiences. It is fully acknowledged that the importance of cross-cultural considerations, especially in studies involving global brand communication and consumer perceptions. Interpretations of innovativeness and emotional responses can differ across cultures. Future research could expand its scope by examining a broader array of brands across multiple channels and demographic groups, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. This broader approach would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the multichannel marketing strategies employed by brands at different levels and provide insights from a diverse range of consumer segments. Moreover, future studies could also benefit from integrating established theoretical frameworks on consumer perceptions of product innovativeness and cross-cultural communication. This integration would allow researchers to examine the effectiveness of communicating different innovativeness cues across diverse markets. Such an approach would yield clearer implications for global advertising strategies and international branding tactics, enabling brands to create more impactful and culturally relevant campaigns. By understanding how various markets interpret and value innovativeness, brands can enhance their creative strategies and strengthen their competitive positioning on a global scale.

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