



Influence of Emotional and Rational Advertising Appeals on Gen Z Purchase Decisions: A Study on Smartwatch Buying Behaviour

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ABSTRACT:

Smartwatches have become a popular lifestyle and tech product among Generation Z, combining fitness tracking, connectivity, and self-expression in a single device. With intense competition between brands such as Apple, Fitbit, Boat, and Noise, the way these products are advertised matters as much as their features. This study examines how emotional and rational advertising appeals influence Gen Z's engagement, recall, and purchase intent for smartwatches. Primary data was collected through an online survey of 101 Gen Z respondents. The study adopts a quantitative research approach supported by a review of secondary literature. Primary data was collected using a structured online questionnaire, and responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis shows that emotional appeals are more effective in grabbing attention and building brand connection, while rational appeals have a stronger impact on final purchase decisions. The findings suggest that a hybrid strategy, which blends emotional storytelling with clear factual information, works best for smartwatch brands targeting Gen Z.

Keywords: Emotional appeal, Rational appeal, Gen Z, Smartwatch advertising, Consumer behaviour, Purchase intention

1. Introduction

Generation Z, born after 1995, is often described as the most connected and tech-immersed generation in history. They grew up surrounded by smartphones, high-speed internet, social networks, and real-time communication technologies, shaping their expectations for speed, convenience, and interactivity. They are skilled at navigating digital platforms, evaluating information rapidly, and adapting to new technology with ease (Jayatissa et al., 2023). Compared to previous generations, Gen Z spends significantly more time online and interacts with a wider range of media content, from short-form videos to influencer recommendations and brand storytelling (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

However, due to constant exposure to advertisements, Gen Z has developed a heightened ability to filter marketing content. They quickly distinguish between meaningful communication and purely promotional content. They prefer brands that are transparent, ethical, human-centred, and culturally relevant (Fromm & Read, 2018). Research shows that 82 percent of Gen Z consumers are more likely to trust brands that use real people in their campaigns, and 72 percent prefer ads that align with their personal identity and values (NielsenIQ, 2024). This shift in expectations has forced marketers to rethink traditional advertising approaches and design strategies that feel authentic and emotionally engaging rather than sales-driven.

Smartwatches as a Relevant Product Category

Smartwatches have rapidly evolved from basic step-tracking gadgets into powerful wearable devices integrated into everyday life. A smartwatch resembles a traditional wristwatch but offers advanced digital functionality such as internet browsing, calling, messaging, GPS navigation, and health and fitness tracking (Chandel et al., 2021). They allow users to monitor heart rate, track workouts, track sleep patterns, manage stress, and stay organized even without reaching for a smartphone.

For Gen Z, smartwatches go beyond function; they represent lifestyle, identity, productivity, and personal well-being. Many young individuals wear smartwatches as symbols of self-improvement and motivation. Influenced by wellness culture and social media fitness trends, Gen Z values devices that support active living, track goals, and encourage self-expression. Smartwatches also play a role in community belonging, such as participating in challenge groups or fitness competitions.

The smartwatch market is highly competitive, with brands targeting different consumer expectations. Apple focuses on emotional storytelling centred around empowerment, transformation, and life-saving experiences. Fitbit appeals emotionally through encouraging progress and healthier living. In contrast, Noise and Boat, popular among Indian youth, emphasize rational decision-making through affordability, strong battery performance, advanced

health sensors, and value-for-money positioning (Counterpoint Research, 2023). These contrasting strategies make the smartwatch category ideal for exploring how emotional and rational advertising styles influence Gen Z purchase decisions.

1.1 Emotional and Rational Appeals: Definitions

Advertising appeals are at the heart of persuasive communication and determine how a message attempts to influence potential buyers. Belch and Belch (2018) define emotional appeal as an advertising approach designed to influence consumers by eliciting feelings such as joy, excitement, nostalgia, empathy, or fear. Emotional messages attempt to establish personal relevance and psychological connection, making the brand feel relatable and memorable. Emotional advertising often uses storytelling, imagery, music, humour, social values, or real-life experiences to engage audiences at a deeper level.

Emotional appeals are particularly powerful for young consumers, who often evaluate brands based on alignment with identity, beliefs, and lifestyle choices (Pate & Adams, 2013). For example, a smartwatch advertisement showing a student overcoming anxiety and improving life through daily workout tracking can create a strong emotional bond even before the viewer considers features or price.

In contrast, rational appeal, also referred to as informational or logical appeal, focuses on factual benefits and logical arguments. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), rational appeals emphasize product specifications, performance, durability, reliability, and price—allowing the consumer to make decisions based on evidence. Rational ads typically highlight features such as battery life, display quality, warranty, water resistance, or cost comparison with competitor products. They are particularly influential for high-involvement purchases where consumers want reassurance that their money is being spent wisely.

Relevance in Smartwatch Advertising

Both emotional and rational appeals are highly relevant and interdependent when marketing smartwatches. Smartwatch consumers often begin their decision process emotionally, imagining how the device will improve their lifestyle or align with their aspirations before shifting to rational evaluation, such as comparing sensor accuracy or battery performance. Emotional appeals may drive interest and brand attachment, whereas rational appeals support purchase justification and commitment.

Because Gen Z values both meaning and practicality, combining emotional storytelling with strong functional proof creates a balanced strategy that resonates deeply. This study, therefore, examines how emotional and rational appeals operate individually and how they can be integrated to influence smartwatch purchasing behaviour among Gen Z consumers.

2. Objectives of the Study

Based on the literature and conceptual understanding, this research sets out the following objectives:

1. To examine the effectiveness of emotional advertising appeals in influencing Gen Z smartwatch purchase decisions.
2. To analyze the impact of rational advertising appeals on Gen Z's purchase intent for smartwatches.
3. To compare emotional and rational advertisements in terms of engagement, recall, and perceived trust among Gen Z consumers.
4. To identify the key factors influencing Gen Z's smartwatch purchasing decisions (e.g., features, price, brand image, reviews).
5. To recommend an optimal advertising appeal strategy for smartwatch brands targeting Gen Z.

These objectives are addressed in later sections through the data analysis, findings, and discussion.

3. Literature Review

Advertising appeals play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and buying intentions. Brands strategically use different messaging approaches to create impact, build trust, and differentiate themselves in competitive markets. This section reviews key concepts related to emotional and rational advertising appeals, persuasion theory, Gen Z consumer behaviour, and smartwatch industry advertising patterns. It also identifies gaps that justify the purpose of the present study.

3.1 Advertising Appeals in Marketing

Advertising appeals are the core persuasive elements embedded in a marketing message to influence customer attitudes, perceptions, and actions. Appeals determine how a message communicates value to the target audience. According to Arens, Weigold, and Arens (2013), appeals help marketers craft emotional connections or logical arguments that shape brand evaluations and motivate purchase behaviour. The choice of appeal depends on target audience needs, product type, and advertising objectives. Research suggests that well-designed advertising appeals improve brand recall, strengthen positioning, and enhance consumer engagement (Belch & Belch, 2018).

3.2 Emotional Appeal in Advertising

Emotional appeals focus on triggering feelings such as happiness, excitement, empathy, nostalgia, pride, or inspiration. They aim to build personal relevance and create strong memory associations. Belch and Belch (2018) define emotional appeal as the use of psychological elements that influence

behaviour by connecting with human emotions and values. Research suggests that ads built around emotions stick longer in memory, since people tend to hold on to experiences and feelings much more firmly than plain informational messages. (Micu & Plummer, 2010).

Kim and Min (2019) discovered that emotional storytelling significantly increases consumer engagement, positive attitude, and long-term brand loyalty, especially among younger audiences. Emotional appeals perform well in categories where identity, lifestyle, and self-expression matter — making them highly effective in wearable technology advertising. Emotional messaging also enhances persuasion when products are positioned around empowerment, transformation, or wellbeing (Phelps et al., 2020). For Gen Z consumers, emotional appeals resonate because they emphasize authenticity and meaning rather than sales-driven persuasion (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

3.3 Rational Appeal in Advertising

Unlike emotional messages, rational appeals rely on facts, data, and product information to support logical evaluation. Kotler and Keller (2016) explain that rational appeals emphasize functional performance, specifications, comparative advantage, and price-value assessment. Rational messaging is particularly impactful for high-involvement product categories such as technology and electronics, where consumers actively research before purchasing.

Research by Lee and Cho (2020) found that rational appeal increases purchase intention by building credibility, reducing risk, and supporting informed decision-making. Rational messages help consumers justify the purchase to themselves or others by demonstrating functional value. Hoque and Das (2019) also note that rational appeals are more persuasive when consumers evaluate features such as durability, price, battery life, or user reviews — all key attributes in smartwatch purchase decisions.

3.4 Persuasion Theory: Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) is widely used to explain how advertising messages influence consumer cognition and behaviour. The model proposes two routes to persuasion:

Route	Influenced by	Cognitive Process	Outcome
Peripheral route	Emotional cues, visuals, music, storytelling	Low-involvement intuitive thinking	Short-term attitude shift
Central route	Logical arguments, reasoning, evidence	High-involvement evaluation	Stronger purchase commitment

Research indicates that emotional messages mostly trigger the peripheral route by sparking interest and positive emotions, whereas rational messages engage the central route, guiding people toward more deliberate and informed choices. (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). A study by Phelps et al. (2020) emphasises that combining both routes creates stronger persuasion than using either alone, suggesting that hybrid appeal strategies can improve conversion.

3.5 Gen Z Consumer Behaviour

Gen Z consumers are highly selective, value-driven, and socially aware. Unlike previous generations, they prioritize authenticity and real experiences over promotional hype. Francis and Hoefel (2018) highlight that Gen Z makes decisions based on individuality, freedom of expression, and belonging. NielsenIQ (2024) reports that Gen Z prefers brands that demonstrate transparency, honesty, and inclusivity. They actively research products online, read customer reviews, and rely heavily on peer recommendations rather than celebrity endorsements.

Studies point out that Gen Z is driven by emotion yet thinks critically; they enjoy uplifting stories, but they won't commit to buying until they check the product's real performance and whether it's worth the price. (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Their buying journey blends emotional personality fit with rational evaluation, making them an ideal audience to assess emotional vs rational advertising strategies.

3.6 Smartwatch Market and Advertising Strategy

Smartwatches have evolved into multi-purpose wearable devices used for communication, health monitoring, education, productivity, and personal identity expression (Chandel et al., 2021). The smartwatch industry has seen remarkable growth due to rising fitness awareness and digital lifestyle integration. India is one of the fastest-growing smartwatch markets, with brands like Noise and Boat dominating volume sales through affordability and rational appeal, while Apple and Fitbit lead aspirational and emotional positioning (Counterpoint Research, 2023).

Advertising strategies vary significantly across brands:

- Apple Watch uses emotional storytelling emphasizing empowerment, safety, achievement, and personal transformation.
- Fitbit links emotional well-being with lifestyle progress and mental health.

- Boat and Noise emphasize rational arguments such as pricing, battery strength, AMOLED display, and advanced sensors.
- Review-based influencer content plays a major role in shaping trust and comparison among Gen Z users (EY Consumer Tech Study, 2022).

Given these contrasting strategies, smartwatches provide the ideal context to examine how emotional and rational appeals work separately and jointly in shaping Gen Z purchase behaviour.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study follows a quantitative research design, supported by relevant secondary literature to establish conceptual grounding. The quantitative approach was chosen because the objective of the study is to measure patterns, preferences, and attitudes of Gen Z consumers toward emotional and rational advertising appeals in a structured and measurable way. Primary data was collected through an online structured questionnaire, allowing respondents to express their views based on real experiences with smartwatch advertisements. The responses collected were numeric and standardized, enabling statistical comparison and interpretation. Once the responses were gathered, they were processed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify overall trends, frequency distributions, and average ratings related to advertising influence and purchase behavior.

4.2 Sample and Sampling Method

The study focused on Generation Z consumers, specifically individuals between 18 and 26 years of age, as this group forms the largest user segment for wearable technology and consumes high volumes of digital advertising content. A total of 101 respondents participated in the survey, which provides a reasonable base for detecting meaningful patterns in consumer attitudes. The convenience sampling method was used to reach participants efficiently, primarily through online distribution channels such as social media and university networks. This approach was practical given that Gen Z is highly active online and comfortable with digital participation. The sample mainly consisted of respondents from urban and semi-urban regions of India, which aligns well with the demographics that engage with smartwatches, fitness wearables, and brands such as Apple, Fitbit, Noise, and Boat.

4.3 Data Collection Instrument

To gather primary data, a structured questionnaire was designed using Google Forms, which was circulated digitally through WhatsApp, Instagram, email, and student peer networks. The questionnaire was divided into logical sections to ensure clarity and smooth flow for participants. It included:

- Demographic details such as age, gender, and current occupation (student or working professional), to understand respondent profiles.
- Exposure to smartwatch advertising, including where respondents see most ads (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, OTT).
- Preference between emotional and rational advertising styles, asking respondents to select the type of ad they connect with most.
- Multiple Likert-scale statements (1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree) designed to measure perceptions about:
 - Emotional appeals such as storytelling, emotions, lifestyle association, and personal relevance.
 - Rational appeals such as technical specifications, price, battery life, reviews, and offer-based details.
 - Purchase intention and willingness to recommend a smartwatch brand to others.
- Additional questions on preferred advertisement duration, influences affecting buying decisions, and factors that shape brand trust.

The structure enabled respondents to express their perceptions meaningfully while providing quantifiable data to support objective analysis.

4.4 Data Analysis

Once the survey responses were collected, the data was downloaded into a spreadsheet for processing and analysis. Descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies, percentages, and average scores were used to interpret the results. This helped identify patterns in respondent preferences and evaluate how strongly emotional and rational appeals influenced purchasing decisions. Charts and tables were created to visually represent key findings, making it easier to compare consumer responses across different dimensions. The analysis directly supports the research objectives by examining how each advertising appeal type affects engagement, recall, and purchase intent among Gen Z consumers who own smartwatches.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Profile of Respondents

About 61% of respondents fell in the 18–24 age bracket, representing core Gen Z. There was a mix of genders, with a slight majority of students. A significant portion of respondents either owned a smartwatch or were actively considering purchasing one in the near future, making their opinions relevant to this study.

5.2 Media Habits and Ad Exposure

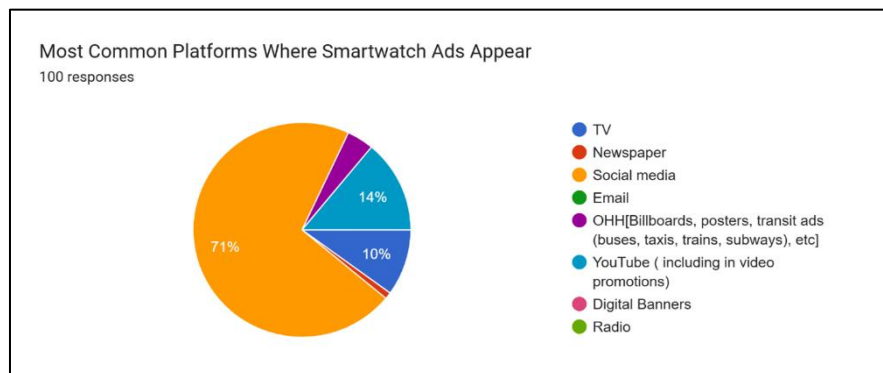


Fig. 1

The responses show that:

- Social media is the most dominant advertising medium with 71 percent of responses, indicating strong exposure to smart watch promotions on digital platforms.
- YouTube follows with 14 percent, showing that video content significantly influences awareness and purchase consideration for smart watches.
- Television accounts for 10 percent, reflecting reduced visibility compared to online channels for smart watch advertising.
- Traditional media like newspapers, OOH, radio, email, and digital banners show minimal impact on smart watch awareness.

Overall, advertising reach for smart watches is shifting strongly toward interactive and visually engaging online platforms. This confirms that any smartwatch advertising strategy for Gen Z must prioritize digital and especially short-form video platforms.

5.3 Preference: Emotional vs Rational Smartwatch Ads

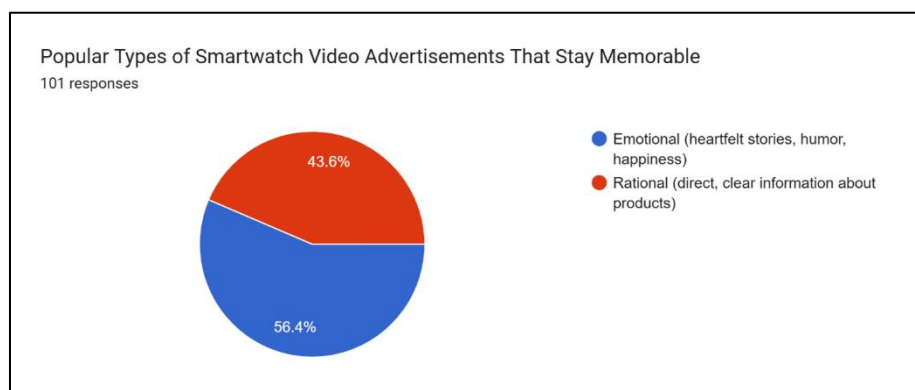


Fig. 2

The pie chart shows the preference of 101 respondents regarding memorable smartwatch video advertisements. Emotional ads are preferred by 56.4 percent, indicating that storytelling, humor, and relatable themes create stronger recall. Rational ads account for 43.6 percent, suggesting that clear product information still holds value but is less impactful than emotional connections.

The interpretation is that emotional appeal plays a more influential role in forming lasting impressions and brand recall for smartwatch advertising. Therefore, brands may benefit from blending emotional storytelling with factual product details for stronger audience engagement.

5.4 Influence of Emotional Appeal

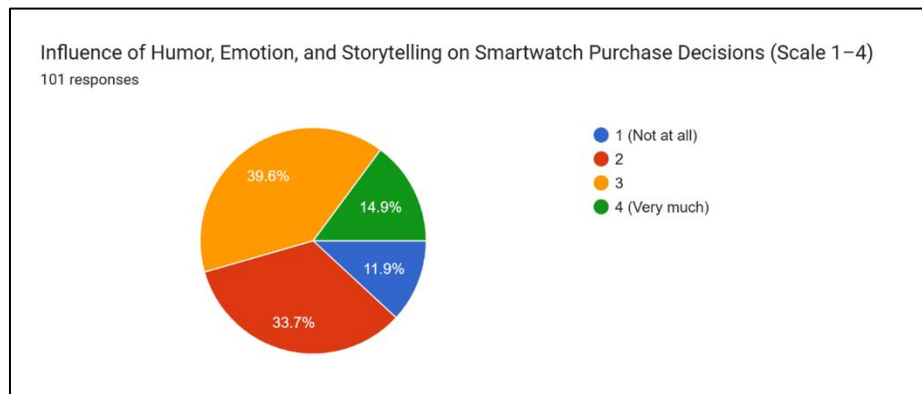


Fig. 3

The chart represents the perceived influence of humor, emotion, and storytelling on smartwatch purchase decisions, based on 101 respondents using a scale of 1 to 4. A majority of participants rated the influence at level 3 (39.6 percent), indicating a strong perceived impact of emotional and narrative elements on their decision-making. Additionally, 33.7 percent selected level 2, suggesting a moderate yet noticeable influence.

Only 11.9 percent chose level 1, meaning they felt no influence, while 14.9 percent rated it at the highest level, showing that for a smaller segment, these elements are highly persuasive.

The results imply that emotional and creative storytelling plays an important role in shaping purchase decisions for smartwatches. While not universally decisive, it significantly affects consumer perception and recall, reinforcing the value of emotionally driven advertising strategies.

5.5 Influence of Rational Appeal

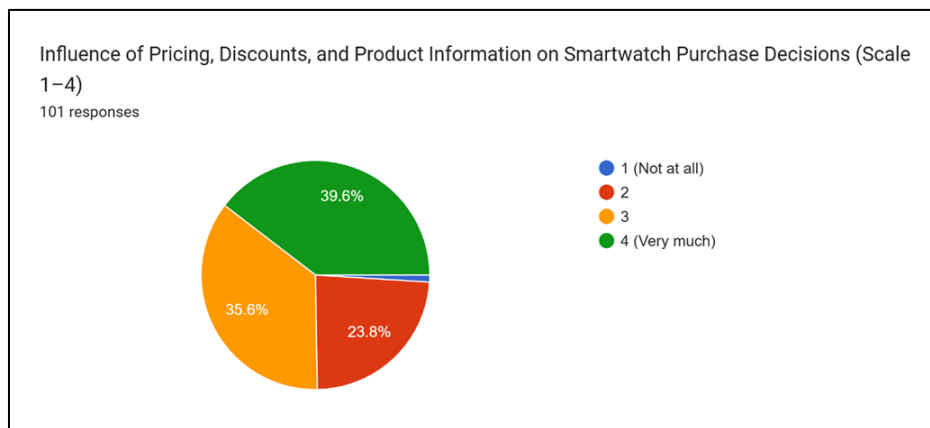


Fig. 4

The pie chart reflects the impact of pricing, discounts, and product information on smartwatch purchase decisions based on 101 responses, rated on a scale of 1 to 4. A large portion, 39.6 percent, selected level 4, indicating that these factors strongly influence their decision to buy a smartwatch. Additionally, 35.6 percent rated level 3, showing that for most respondents, cost-related elements play an important role in shaping purchase intentions.

Meanwhile, 23.8 percent chose level 2, suggesting a moderate influence, and only a very small fraction selected level 1, meaning they are not significantly affected by these aspects.

The results clearly point to the importance of competitive pricing, appealing discount offers, and transparent product details in driving smartwatch purchases. For marketers and brands, emphasizing value-for-money messaging and clear feature explanations is likely to enhance consumer conversion and preference.

5.6 Ad Format and Duration Preferences

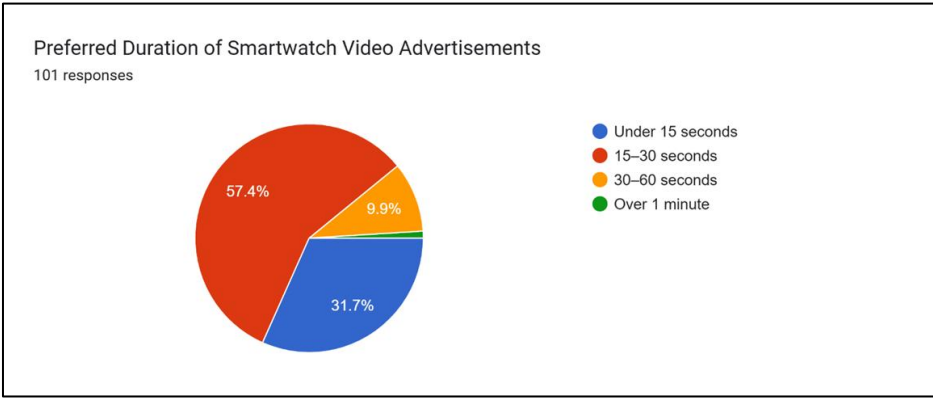


Fig. 5

The chart shows respondents preferences regarding the duration of smartwatch video advertisements. A majority, 57.4 percent, prefer ads lasting 15–30 seconds, indicating that audiences want concise and engaging content that communicates value quickly. 31.7 percent favor ads under 15 seconds, reinforcing that shorter formats are effective in maintaining attention and avoiding viewer fatigue.

Only 9.9 percent prefer ads 30–60 seconds, and an extremely small portion support ads over one minute, suggesting that longer formats may be less suitable for smartwatch promotions.

Overall, the results highlight the need for brands to focus on short, fast-paced, and impactful storytelling to capture interest within a brief time window. Short-duration ads are more aligned with current viewing behavior and digital media consumption patterns.

5.7 Key Decision Factors

The chart highlights the key factors influencing smartwatch purchase decisions among 101 respondents. The most influential factor is clear product information and comparison, selected by 72.3 percent, showing that consumers prioritize transparent details and feature clarity before making a purchase. User reviews (67.3 percent) and discounts and offers (62.4 percent) also rank highly, indicating that peer feedback and price benefits significantly shape purchase confidence.

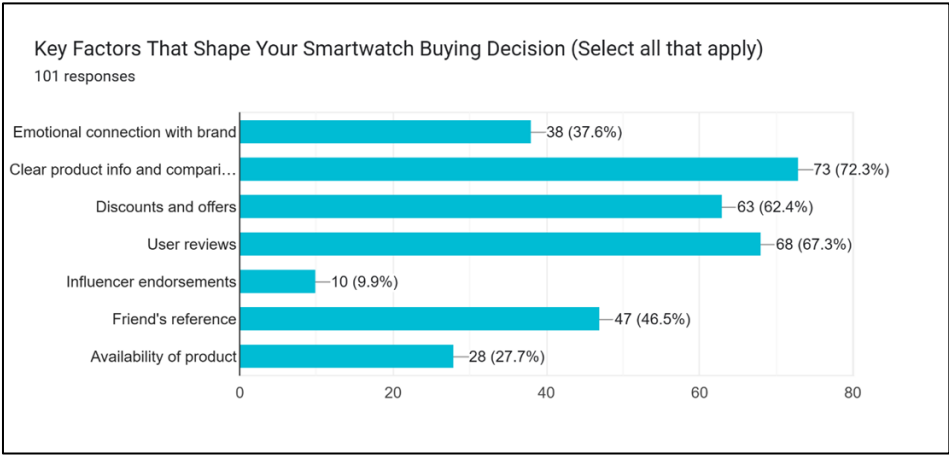


Fig. 6

Friend's reference influences 46.5 percent, suggesting that personal recommendations remain relevant. Emotional connection with the brand impacts 37.6 percent, showing that emotional branding has value but is secondary to rational evaluation. Meanwhile, the availability of the product affects 27.7 percent, and influencer endorsements are the least impactful at 9.9 percent, indicating limited trust in paid promotions.

Overall, the insights show that smartwatch buyers are driven primarily by factual product knowledge, real user experience, and value-based pricing, while emotional appeal and influencer marketing play smaller roles in final decision-making.

6. Findings

Linking back to the objectives:

1. Effectiveness of emotional appeals:
 - Emotional smartwatch ads are more memorable and engaging for Gen Z.
 - They work especially well when they show real-life scenarios, fitness journeys, or emotional benefits such as confidence and motivation.
2. Impact of rational appeals:
 - Rational appeals strongly influence purchase intent.
 - Gen Z users rely heavily on specifications, user reviews, and value-for-money assessments before buying.
3. Comparison of emotional vs rational appeals:
 - Emotional ads dominate at the attention and recall stage.
 - Rational ads dominate at the evaluation and decision stage.
 - Both appeal types are therefore important, but at different points in the decision journey.
4. Key decision factors for smartwatch buying:
 - Functional performance, price, and trust (reviews, brand image) are major drivers.
 - Emotional “fit” with their lifestyle plays a supporting yet meaningful role.
5. Optimal appeal strategy for brands:
 - A hybrid approach works best: start with an emotional hook, then quickly support it with strong rational information.

7. Discussion

The results of this study are consistent with the Elaboration Likelihood Model. Emotional appeals appear to work primarily through the peripheral route, drawing Gen Z into the ad, making it feel relevant, and creating a positive attitude toward the brand. Rational appeals then work through the central route, helping them justify and finalize the purchase.

For smartwatches, this makes perfect sense. A smartwatch is both a lifestyle accessory and a technical device. Gen Z expects it to look good and feel aspirational, but also to perform well and offer good value.

In practical terms:

- An Apple Watch ad might show a student completing a run, tracking sleep, and staying on top of classes, which builds emotional attraction. But the decision to actually buy will still depend on whether the features justify the high price.
- A Boat or Noise ad may emphasize affordability and features, which supports rational decision-making, but still benefits when wrapped in a relatable story or energetic lifestyle portrayal.

The study also reinforces previous findings that Gen Z is wary of traditional, over-polished advertising. They value real experiences and honest information more than big celebrities. Short, emotionally engaging, and factually clear content appears to be the best combination.

8. Conclusion

This research set out to study how emotional and rational advertising appeals affect Gen Z’s smartwatch purchase decisions. The findings show that:

- Emotional appeals are powerful for attracting attention, building interest, and creating positive associations with a smartwatch brand.
- Rational appeals are crucial for building trust and driving the final purchase decision.
- Gen Z consumers move from emotional engagement to rational justification as they progress from awareness to purchase.

For marketers and brands, the implication is clear: they should not choose between emotional and rational appeals. Instead, they should design campaigns that use both emotional storytelling at the front and credible, concise information as support.

9. Limitations

- The sample size was limited to 101 respondents, mostly from student and young professional segments, which may not represent all Gen Z consumers.
- Convenience sampling can introduce bias.
- Data was collected through self-reported surveys, which may not always match actual behaviour.
- The study focused only on the smartwatch category; results may differ for other product categories.

10. Scope for Future Research

Future studies can build on this work by:

- Using a larger and more diverse sample, including different regions and income levels.
- Conducting experiments where respondents watch actual emotional and rational smartwatch ads and their responses are tracked in real time.
- Comparing appeal effectiveness across different tech products such as earbuds, laptops, or fitness apps.
- Investigating the role of user-generated content and micro-influencers in combining emotional and rational messaging.

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