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Impact of Social Media Marketing on Gen Z Consumer Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an important part of everyday life and has changed the way young consumers interact with businesses and brands. For Generation Z, social networking platforms are not limited to communication and entertainment. They are also used to discover products, read reviews, follow influencers, compare alternatives and make purchase decisions. This changing pattern of consumer behaviour has created new opportunities as well as challenges for marketers.

The present study examines the role of social media marketing in influencing the consumer behaviour of Generation Z. Particular attention is given to social media engagement, content quality, influencer credibility, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), promotional offers and interaction with brands. The study adopts a quantitative research approach and proposes the use of a structured questionnaire among Gen Z consumers. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation and multiple regression can be used to examine the relationship between social media marketing activities and purchase intention.

The study is based on the view that social media can influence different stages of the consumer decision-making process, beginning with product awareness and information search and extending to brand evaluation and purchase intention. Previous research suggests that factors such as authenticity, useful content, online reviews, influencer credibility and consumer engagement can shape the way Gen Z responds to social media marketing. The study therefore attempts to provide a better understanding of how businesses can communicate with Gen Z consumers in an increasingly digital marketplace.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Generation Z, Consumer Behaviour, Influencer Marketing, eWOM, Purchase Intention, Social Commerce, Digital Marketing

1. Introduction

The growth of the internet and social networking platforms has changed the relationship between businesses and consumers. In the past, marketing communication was largely controlled by businesses through newspapers, television, radio and other traditional media. Consumers generally received information from these sources and had limited opportunities to respond publicly. Social media has changed this situation considerably. Today, consumers can comment on advertisements, share their experiences, review products, recommend brands and communicate directly with companies.

This change is particularly significant among Generation Z. Young consumers have grown up in an environment where smartphones, internet connectivity and social networking platforms are part of everyday life. Social media therefore plays a role not only in their social interactions but also in the way they search for information and evaluate products.

A consumer may see a product on Instagram, watch a review on YouTube, check comments from other users, look at an influencer's experience and then compare prices before deciding whether to make a purchase. In this sense, the consumer journey is no longer a simple movement from advertising to purchase. It involves several digital interactions along the way.

Social media marketing refers to the use of social networking platforms to communicate with consumers, promote products, build brand relationships and encourage consumer engagement. Its effectiveness, however, depends on more than simply posting advertisements. Consumers may respond differently depending on the quality of the content, the credibility of the person promoting the product, the opinions of other consumers and the level of interaction offered by the brand.

India provides an interesting setting for studying these developments because of the rapid expansion of digital and social-media use. At the same time, the growing number of marketing messages on social platforms has made consumers more selective about the information they trust.

For Gen Z consumers, factors such as authenticity, relevance and peer opinion may therefore be as important as promotional messages. This study focuses on these aspects and examines how social media marketing influences the consumer behaviour of Gen Z.

2. Statement of the Problem

Social media provides businesses with an effective way to reach young consumers. However, simply reaching consumers through social-media platforms does not necessarily mean that they will purchase a product.

Gen Z consumers are exposed to advertisements, influencer recommendations, customer reviews, short-form videos, brand posts and promotional offers on a regular basis. While this information may influence their decisions, consumers may also question the credibility of advertisements and sponsored content.

The central issue addressed in this study is therefore the relationship between social media marketing and Gen Z consumer behaviour.

The study seeks to answer the following question:

How and to what extent does social media marketing influence the purchase-related behaviour of Generation Z consumers?

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

Social media has developed from a communication platform into an important marketing environment. It allows businesses to communicate directly with consumers while also giving consumers an opportunity to respond, share opinions and influence others.

Vinodh et al. (2024), in their systematic review of research on social media marketing and consumer behaviour, observed that social media marketing can contribute to consumer engagement, consumer-brand relationships and purchase intentions. Their review also points to challenges such as privacy concerns and the large volume of competing content.

This suggests that the effectiveness of social media marketing depends not only on how frequently consumers see a message but also on whether they find the message useful, credible and relevant.

3.2 Social Media Marketing and Generation Z

Generation Z has attracted considerable attention from researchers because of its strong connection with digital technology. Members of this generation frequently use social media to communicate, obtain information and discover new products.

Deepika and Massand (2024) examined the influence of social media marketing on Gen Z purchase intention and identified factors such as customer engagement and trendiness as relevant aspects of social-media marketing.

The findings of such studies indicate that Gen Z consumers may respond positively to content that is engaging, current and relevant to their interests.

3.3 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing has become a common feature of social-media marketing. Influencers can communicate product information through personal experiences, demonstrations, reviews and recommendations.

The effectiveness of influencer marketing may depend on the credibility and authenticity of the influencer. Consumers may be less interested in the number of followers an influencer has if they feel that the recommendation is overly commercial or unrelated to the influencer's usual content.

Sardar and Vijay (2025), in their review of research on social-media influencers and purchase intention, identified influencer characteristics, consumer perceptions and purchase intention as important areas of research.

For Gen Z consumers, therefore, trust and perceived authenticity may play an important role in determining whether an influencer recommendation is taken seriously.

3.4 User-Generated Content and Electronic Word-of-Mouth

One of the important features of social media is that consumers themselves can create and distribute content. Reviews, ratings, comments, photographs, videos and personal experiences can influence other consumers.

Unlike conventional advertising, user-generated content is often perceived as coming from someone who has actually used the product. This can make online reviews and recommendations an important part of the information-search process.

Recent studies of Gen Z consumers have reported that reviews and ratings can influence buying decisions, although consumers may remain cautious about influencer recommendations when they perceive them as promotional.

3.5 Short-Form Video Content

Short-form videos have become an important form of digital communication. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube provide businesses with opportunities to present products through demonstrations, storytelling, reviews and entertaining content.

Recent research has examined how short-form video content, algorithmic recommendations, influencer endorsements and consumer engagement may influence Gen Z decision-making.

For marketers, this means that social-media content is increasingly expected to attract attention quickly while also providing information or entertainment.

4. Research Gap

A considerable amount of research has examined social media marketing, influencer marketing, online reviews and purchase intention. However, these factors are often studied separately.

There is still scope for examining several social-media marketing dimensions together in the context of Gen Z consumers in India.

The present study attempts to address this gap by considering social-media engagement, content quality, influencer credibility, user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth, promotional offers and brand interaction within a common research framework.

The study also focuses on young consumers in an Indian educational and social environment, where social-media use has become an important part of everyday consumer activity.

5. Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the influence of social media marketing on the consumer behaviour of Gen Z.
2. To identify the major social-media marketing factors influencing Gen Z consumers.
3. To examine the relationship between social-media engagement and purchase intention.
4. To study the role of influencer credibility in the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers.
5. To examine the influence of online reviews, user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth.
6. To analyse the relationship between promotional content and purchase intention.
7. To suggest suitable social-media marketing approaches for businesses targeting Gen Z consumers.

6. Research Hypotheses

The study proposes the following null hypotheses:

H01: There is no significant relationship between social media marketing and the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers.

H02: There is no significant relationship between social-media engagement and Gen Z purchase intention.

H03: There is no significant relationship between influencer credibility and Gen Z purchase intention.

H04: There is no significant relationship between user-generated content/electronic word-of-mouth and Gen Z purchase intention.

H05: There is no significant relationship between promotional content and Gen Z purchase intention.

7. Conceptual Framework

The study considers social media marketing as a multidimensional construct.

Social Media Marketing

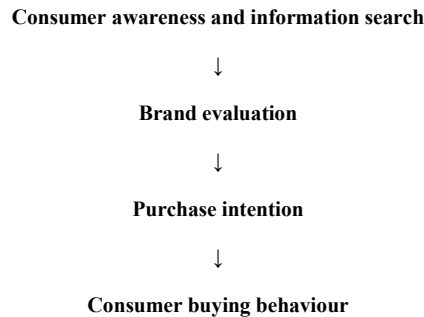
→ Social-media engagement

→ Content quality

→ Influencer credibility

- User-generated content and eWOM
- Promotional offers
- Brand interaction

These factors are expected to influence:



The framework recognises that consumers may move through several stages before making a purchase. Social media can influence more than one stage of this process.

8. Research Methodology

8.1 Research Design

The study follows a descriptive and analytical research design. A quantitative approach is proposed because the study seeks to measure consumer perceptions and examine relationships between social-media marketing variables and purchase intention.

8.2 Population of the Study

The population comprises Gen Z consumers who regularly use social-media platforms and are exposed to product- or brand-related content.

For a college-based study, the respondents may include undergraduate and postgraduate students who fall within the selected Gen Z age group.

8.3 Sample Size

A sample of approximately **250 respondents** may be selected for the study. The final sample size should be based on the actual responses received and the requirements of the selected journal.

8.4 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling may be used because the study requires respondents who actively use social media and belong to the selected Gen Z population.

8.5 Sources of Data

The study can use both primary and secondary data.

Primary data may be collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to Gen Z respondents.

Secondary data may be collected from peer-reviewed journals, books, research reports, institutional publications and reliable digital sources.

8.6 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire may be divided into two sections.

Section A: Demographic and social-media usage information.

Section B: Statements measuring social-media marketing perceptions and purchase intention.

A five-point Likert scale may be used:

1 – Strongly Disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree

4 – Agree

5 – Strongly Agree

8.7 Variables of the Study

The major independent variables are:

- Social-media engagement
- Content quality
- Influencer credibility
- UGC/eWOM
- Promotional offers

The dependent variable is:

- Purchase intention/consumer buying behaviour

9. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected through the questionnaire can be analysed using statistical software such as SPSS.

The following statistical techniques are appropriate:

- Frequency and percentage analysis
- Mean and standard deviation
- Cronbach's alpha
- Pearson correlation
- Multiple regression
- Chi-square test, where appropriate
- Hypothesis testing at the 5% level of significance

Note: Numerical results should be inserted only after collecting and analysing the actual questionnaire responses. The study should not report assumed values as if they were collected from respondents.

10. Demographic Analysis

The demographic section may include:

- Gender
- Age
- Educational qualification
- Occupation
- Monthly personal income/allowance, where relevant
- Daily social-media usage
- Preferred social-media platform

The analysis will help describe the characteristics of the respondents and provide context for interpreting the results.

For example, social-media usage can be grouped into:

- Less than 2 hours
- 2–4 hours

- 4–6 hours
- More than 6 hours per day

The final percentages should be calculated from the actual responses.

11. Social-Media Platform Usage

The questionnaire may ask respondents which platforms they use regularly.

Possible categories include:

- Instagram
- YouTube
- WhatsApp
- Snapchat
- Facebook
- Other platforms

The purpose of this analysis is not simply to identify the most popular platform but to understand where Gen Z consumers are most likely to encounter marketing content.

12. Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha can be used to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire items.

Separate reliability tests may be conducted for:

- Social-media engagement
- Content quality
- Influencer credibility
- UGC/eWOM
- Promotional offers
- Purchase intention

The actual Cronbach's alpha values should be calculated from the collected data.

A reliability coefficient of approximately 0.70 or above is commonly considered acceptable for many exploratory social-science studies, although interpretation should consider the number of items and the nature of the construct.

13. Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation can be used to examine the direction and strength of the relationship between the independent variables and purchase intention.

The analysis can answer questions such as:

- Does greater social-media engagement correspond with stronger purchase intention?
- Is content quality associated with purchase intention?
- Does influencer credibility have a significant relationship with purchase intention?
- Are online reviews and UGC associated with purchase intention?
- Are promotional offers related to purchase intention?

Correlation indicates association and should not be interpreted by itself as proof of causation.

14. Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression can be used to examine the combined contribution of the selected social-media marketing factors to purchase intention.

The proposed model is:

$$\text{Purchase Intention} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{SE}) + \beta_2(\text{CQ}) + \beta_3(\text{IC}) + \beta_4(\text{UGC/eWOM}) + \beta_5(\text{PO}) + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- SE = Social-media engagement
- CQ = Content quality
- IC = Influencer credibility
- UGC/eWOM = User-generated content/electronic word-of-mouth
- PO = Promotional offers
- ε = Error term

The regression analysis can show which factors have statistically significant relationships with purchase intention after considering the other variables in the model.

15. Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses will be tested using the appropriate statistical techniques.

If the significance value is below the selected level of significance, normally **0.05**, the corresponding null hypothesis may be rejected.

The final research paper should report the actual test statistic, significance value, coefficient and interpretation rather than simply stating that a hypothesis has been accepted or rejected.

16. Expected Findings and Interpretation

The study is expected to provide a clearer picture of the way Gen Z consumers respond to social-media marketing.

Based on previous research, several factors are likely to be relevant.

First, the quality of content may influence whether consumers stop scrolling and pay attention to a product or brand. Content that is informative, visually appealing and relevant to consumers' interests may have greater potential to generate engagement.

Second, online reviews and user-generated content may influence product evaluation. Consumers often look beyond the information provided by the brand and consider the experiences of other users before making a decision.

Third, influencer marketing may have an impact when the influencer is perceived as credible and authentic. However, sponsored content that appears excessively promotional may not generate the same level of trust.

Fourth, promotional offers can attract attention and encourage consumers to consider a purchase. However, discounts alone may not be sufficient to establish long-term relationships between consumers and brands.

Finally, active interaction between consumers and brands may contribute to stronger engagement. Consumers increasingly expect brands to respond to comments, questions and feedback rather than simply publish advertisements.

These relationships should ultimately be established through the statistical analysis of actual survey responses.

17. Discussion

The changing behaviour of Gen Z demonstrates that social media is more than another advertising channel. It has become part of the consumer decision-making environment.

A young consumer may discover a product through a short video, visit the brand's profile, read comments, watch an independent review and then compare the product with alternatives. The decision is therefore influenced by a combination of brand-created and consumer-created information.

This is particularly important because Gen Z consumers are simultaneously consumers and content creators. After purchasing a product, they may post their own review, share photographs, create videos or recommend the product to friends. Their experiences can then become information for other potential consumers.

This creates a continuous cycle:

Brand Content → Consumer Engagement → Information Search → Reviews and Social Proof → Brand Evaluation → Purchase Intention → Consumer-Generated Content

Authenticity is an important consideration within this process. Influencer recommendations, advertisements and sponsored content may receive different responses depending on whether consumers consider them genuine and relevant.

For marketers, the implication is that social-media communication cannot be viewed simply as a process of sending promotional messages to consumers. It increasingly involves creating opportunities for consumers to interact with, respond to and contribute to the brand.

18. Managerial Implications

The findings of the study can provide several practical implications for businesses.

18.1 Create Relevant and Useful Content

Businesses should focus on content that answers consumer questions, demonstrates products and provides useful information rather than relying entirely on promotional messages.

18.2 Encourage Consumer Reviews

Reviews, ratings and customer experiences can help potential buyers evaluate products. Businesses can therefore create appropriate channels for customers to share genuine experiences.

18.3 Give Importance to Influencer Credibility

The selection of influencers should consider relevance, credibility and authenticity rather than follower numbers alone.

18.4 Increase Consumer Interaction

Brands can use polls, live sessions, question-and-answer activities, comments and interactive content to encourage participation.

18.5 Use Short-Form Video Effectively

Short-form videos can be used for product demonstrations, educational content, storytelling and customer experiences.

18.6 Maintain Transparency

Clear disclosure of sponsored content and responsible handling of consumer information can help businesses maintain trust.

19. Limitations of the Study

The study has certain limitations.

First, if purposive sampling is used, the findings may not be generalisable to all Gen Z consumers in India.

Second, the study depends on self-reported responses. Respondents may not always accurately recall their social-media behaviour or purchasing decisions.

Third, social-media platforms and algorithms change rapidly. Consumer behaviour observed at one point may therefore change over time.

Fourth, Gen Z is a diverse group. Differences in income, education, location, gender, lifestyle and product category may lead to different responses.

Finally, purchase intention is not necessarily the same as actual purchase behaviour. A consumer may express an intention to purchase but later decide not to complete the transaction.

20. Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies can extend this research in several directions.

Research can compare Gen Z consumers from rural, semi-urban and urban areas to identify differences in social-media behaviour.

Studies can also compare different platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and other short-form video applications.

Another useful area is the relationship between artificial intelligence and social-media marketing. Personalised recommendations, AI-generated advertisements and algorithm-driven content may increasingly influence consumer choices.

Future researchers can also examine privacy concerns, consumer trust, impulse buying, social commerce and the influence of regional-language content.

A comparison between Gen Z and Millennials could further explain how different generations respond to digital marketing.

Longitudinal research would also be useful because social-media trends and consumer preferences change rapidly.

21. Conclusion

Social media has changed the way consumers discover information, communicate with brands and evaluate products. This change is particularly visible among Generation Z, for whom social networking platforms are closely connected with everyday communication, entertainment and information search.

The present study focuses on several dimensions of social media marketing, including engagement, content quality, influencer credibility, user-generated content, electronic word-of-mouth and promotional offers. Together, these factors provide a broader understanding of the environment in which Gen Z consumers make purchase-related decisions.

The existing literature suggests that consumers are increasingly influenced not only by what brands say about their products but also by what other consumers, reviewers and influencers say about them. At the same time, consumers may question content that appears exaggerated, overly promotional or lacking in authenticity.

For businesses, the challenge is therefore not simply to increase their presence on social media. They need to create content that consumers find useful, credible and relevant and provide opportunities for meaningful interaction.

The future of social-media marketing among Gen Z is likely to depend on the ability of businesses to move beyond one-way advertising and develop genuine digital relationships with consumers. The final conclusions of the present study, however, should be based on the statistical analysis of actual responses collected from the selected respondents.

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