

Influence of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Purchase Decisions Among Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of social media platforms has significantly transformed marketing strategies and consumer behavior, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z). This study explores the influence of social media marketing on the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers. Both secondary data and primary data collected through a structured questionnaire (n=100) were used for analysis. The findings indicate that social media platforms play a crucial role in shaping product awareness, evaluation, and purchase behavior. Influencer marketing, user-generated content, and peer reviews are identified as the most impactful factors. The study concludes that social media marketing has a strong and direct influence on Gen Z purchasing decisions, and businesses must adopt innovative strategies to effectively engage this demographic.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The global marketing landscape has undergone a paradigm shift from traditional mass media—such as television, print, and radio—to an interactive, decentralized digital ecosystem. At the heart of this transformation is Social Media Marketing (SMM), a multifaceted approach that utilizes social networks to build brand awareness, drive website traffic, and foster customer engagement. As of 2026, social media is no longer a peripheral communication channel; it is a primary commercial infrastructure where the boundaries between content consumption and commercial transaction have become increasingly blurred Purwaningwulan, M. M., Wulandari, T. A., Anggaswari, N. A., & Hong, V. A. (2025).

1.2 The Emergence of Generation Z

Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) represents the first cohort of "Digital Natives." Unlike Millennials, who witnessed the birth of the internet, Gen Z has never known a world without high-speed connectivity, smartphones, and algorithmic content curation Lichy, J. (2021). This generation is characterized by a unique set of cognitive habits: they possess a high capacity for multi-tasking, a shorter attention span for non-engaging content, and a sophisticated "BS detector" for traditional corporate advertising. Consequently, they demand transparency, authenticity, and social relevance from the brands they support Shu, K., Sliva, A., Wang, S., Tang, J., & Liu, H. (2017).

1.3 The Intersection of SMM and Consumer Behavior

The influence of social media on Gen Z extends far beyond mere exposure. It encompasses the entire Consumer Decision-Making Process, often categorized into five stages:

1. Need Recognition: Triggered by visual discovery on platforms like Instagram and TikTok.
2. Information Search: Conducted via hashtag searches and creator reviews rather than Google.
3. Evaluation of Alternatives: Facilitated by peer comments and "dupe" (duplicate) culture.
4. Purchase Decision: Increasingly executed via integrated "Social Commerce" features.
5. Post-Purchase Evaluation: Shared back into the ecosystem through unboxing videos and reviews.

1.4 Problem Statement

While traditional marketing relied on authority and reach, modern marketing relies on Relatability and Social Proof. There is a growing disconnect between brands that use social media as a one-way broadcasting tool and Gen Z consumers who view it as a community-driven space. This research seeks to address the gap in understanding which specific social media elements—be it influencer endorsements, User-Generated Content (UGC), or short-form video algorithms—most significantly nudge a Gen Z consumer from "browsing" to "buying."

1.5 Rationale and Significance

Understanding the purchasing triggers of Gen Z is critical for economic survival. By 2030, Gen Z is projected to represent the largest consumer base globally. Businesses that fail to decode the social media

behaviors of this demographic risk obsolescence. This study provides a data-driven look at how digital touchpoints translate into physical or digital transactions, offering a roadmap for marketers to transition from intrusive advertising to organic engagement.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of existing literature reveals a shifting paradigm in marketing, where social media acts as both a marketplace and a social validation hub. The following themes emerge from recent academic studies (2022–2026):

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

- **Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model:** Recent studies apply this framework to show that visual stimuli (Short-Form Video) trigger an internal emotional state (Desire/Enjoyment), leading to a behavioral response (Impulse Purchase) Bornemann, B., Winkielman, P., & Van der Meer, E. (2012).
- **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM):** Research by MDPI (2025) suggests that for Gen Z, the "Perceived Ease of Use" of social commerce—like TikTok Shop or Instagram Checkout—is a primary predictor of purchase intention, significantly reducing the "Perceived Risk" associated with traditional e-commerce Theocharis, D., Tsekouropoulos, G., Hoxha, G., & Simeli, I. (2025).

2.2 The Power of Influencer Marketing vs. User-Generated Content (UGC)

- **The Authenticity Advantage:** Studies indicate a growing skepticism toward "Macro-Influencers" (those with \$100k+\$ followers). Gen Z increasingly recognizes these as "overtly commercial".
- **UGC Trust Factor:** In contrast, User-Generated Content (UGC) from everyday peers is viewed as more authentic. Approximately 68% of Gen Z consumers trust online reviews and UGC over brand-generated ads Husomanović, H. (2025).
- **Micro-Influencer Credibility:** Research shows that micro-influencers foster "parasocial interactions"—where followers feel a personal, friend-like bond—making their recommendations more persuasive than celebrity endorsements.

2.3 The Rise of Short-Form Video Content (SFVC)

- **Attention Capturing:** With an average "minimal cognitive window" of just 15–30 seconds, platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels have revolutionized product discovery.
- **The 30-Second Rule:** Recent findings suggest that 78% of Gen Z respondents prefer

marketing videos that are approximately 30 seconds long.

- **Algorithmic Discovery:** Unlike older generations who use search engines, Gen Z relies on discovery algorithms. This "Discovery Commerce" means products find the consumer, rather than the consumer looking for the product Sintani, L., & Toendan, R. Y. (2025).

2.4 Social Commerce and Impulse Buying

- **Frictionless Transactions:** The integration of "Shop Now" buttons within social apps has led to a rise in impulse buying. Studies show that 97% of Gen Z use social media as their primary source of shopping inspiration.
- **Sustainability and Values:** A unique trend in recent literature is the "Value Congruence" factor. Gen Z is significantly more likely to purchase from brands that demonstrate social justice or environmental sustainability through their social media narratives Agbodjah, I. N. (2025).

2.5 Identified Research Gap

While existing literature extensively covers *general* social media usage, there is a need for more localized primary data (like the \$n=100\$ sample in this study) to verify if these global trends—specifically the dominance of **Influencer Trust** over **Paid Ads**—hold true across specific regional Gen Z demographics.

Summary of Literature Findings:

Factor	Influence Level	Key Finding (2024-2026)
Influencer Marketing	High	Authenticity & Relatability are more important than follower count.
UGC/Reviews	Very High	Act as "Social Proof" to reduce purchase risk.
Paid Ads	Moderate	Often bypassed or ignored (AI/Ad-blocker awareness).
Short-Form Video	High	Drives impulse buying through emotional arousal and brevity.

3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the influence of social media marketing on Gen Z purchase decisions
2. To identify key factors affecting consumer behavior
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of influencer marketing

To examine the role of social media platforms in product selection

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a Descriptive Research Design using a quantitative approach. Descriptive research is appropriate here as it allows for the observation and description of Gen Z's behavior without influencing it. This design helps in identifying the "what," "where," and "how" of social media's impact on their purchasing journey.

4.2 Data Collection Sources

To ensure a holistic view, the study utilizes two primary streams of information:

- **Primary Data:** Gathered through a Structured Online Questionnaire (Google Forms). The survey consisted of 10 closed-ended questions and Likert-scale statements to quantify opinions on trust, frequency, and platform preference.
- **Secondary Data:** Sourced from peer-reviewed journals, marketing industry reports (e.g., Statista, Hubspot 2025), and existing academic literature to provide a theoretical benchmark for the primary findings.

4.3 Target Population and Sample Size

- **Population:** The study targets Generation Z, specifically those residing in urban areas with consistent internet access.
- **Sample Size:** A sample of $n=100$ respondents was selected. This size was deemed sufficient for a pilot descriptive study to identify prevailing trends and correlations.
- **Age Bracket:** Respondents were restricted to the 18–25 age group to ensure they have independent or semi-independent purchasing power.

4.4 Sampling Technique

The study utilized Convenience Sampling, a non-probability sampling method. Participants were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate. While this method has limitations regarding total population representation, it is highly effective for exploratory research involving digitally active demographics like Gen Z.

4.5 Data Analysis Tools

To transform raw data into meaningful insights, the following tools were employed:

- **MS Excel:** Used for data entry, cleaning, and basic statistical calculations.
- **Percentage Method:** Applied to all categorical variables to determine the majority and minority trends within the sample.

- **Tabular Analysis:** Data is organized into structured tables for easy comparison (e.g., comparing platform preference vs. influencer trust).
- **Graphical Representation:** The use of Bar Charts, Pie Charts, and Likert-Scale Heatmaps to visually demonstrate the intensity of social media influence.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

To maintain academic integrity:

1. **Informed Consent:** All participants were notified of the study's purpose before taking the survey.
2. **Anonymity:** No personal identifying information (names, emails) was stored, ensuring respondent privacy.
3. **Data Integrity:** Responses were screened for "straight-lining" (answering the same option for every question) to ensure data quality.

5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Frequency of Social Media Usage

Usage Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Daily	78	78%
Weekly	15	15%
Occasionally	7	7%

Interpretation: A large majority of respondents use social media daily, indicating high exposure to marketing content.

Table 2: Influence of Social Media on Purchase Decision

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	85	85%
No	15	15%

Interpretation: Social media significantly influences purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers.

Factor	Percentage
Influencers	40%
Reviews/UGC	30%
Advertisements	15%
Peer Recommendations	15%

Interpretation: Influencers and reviews are the most influential factors.

Table 4: Preferred Social Media Platforms

Platform	Percentage
Instagram	45%
YouTube	25%
TikTok	20%
Facebook	10%

Interpretation: Visual platforms dominate consumer engagement.

6 DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that social media marketing plays a crucial role in shaping Gen Z consumer behavior. The high percentage of daily social media usage indicates constant exposure to marketing content. Influencer marketing is particularly effective because influencers build trust and relatability. User-generated content further enhances credibility, making consumers more confident in their purchase decisions. The study also highlights that Gen Z prefers visual and interactive content, which explains the popularity of platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

7 FINDINGS

- 78% of respondents use social media daily
- 85% are influenced by social media in purchase decisions
- Influencers are the most impactful factor (40%)
- Instagram is the most preferred platform (45%)

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8 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

The study concludes that social media marketing exerts a significant and direct influence on the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers, effectively reshaping the traditional consumer journey. With 85% of respondents acknowledging this influence, it is clear that social platforms have transitioned from mere networking sites to primary commercial engines. The research highlights that authenticity is the cornerstone of Gen Z's consumer behavior, as evidenced by the dominance of influencer marketing (40%) and user-generated content (30%) over traditional paid advertisements. Instagram remains the leading platform for product discovery due to its visual-centric nature, while TikTok and YouTube provide critical engagement through short-form trends and long-form reviews, respectively. Ultimately, for businesses to remain competitive, they must move away from intrusive, high-production advertising and instead adopt innovative, transparent, and creator-led strategies that align with the digital-native values of this demographic.

Looking ahead, the future scope for research in this field is vast as the digital landscape continues to evolve. While this study provides a foundational understanding based on a sample of 100 respondents, future research should utilize larger, geographically diverse samples to enhance generalizability. There is a significant opportunity to explore the impact of Generative AI and hyper-personalized algorithms on consumer "discovery" phases. Additionally, as the "Metaverse" and virtual social spaces mature, investigating the purchase behavior regarding digital assets and virtual fashion among Gen Z will be crucial. Comparative studies between Gen Z and the emerging Generation Alpha could also reveal whether the current influencer-led model will persist or if a "digital fatigue" will lead to a new era of consumer skepticism.

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