

Social Media Marketing and Purchase Behaviour among Generation Z: An Empirical Study of Indian Consumers

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Abstract

Social media has become a powerful marketing tool that significantly influences consumer purchasing behaviour, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z). This study examines the impact of social media marketing on Gen Z consumers, focusing on content, reviews, influencer marketing, promotional offers, and brand awareness. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 129 respondents aged 18–27 through a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics.

The findings indicate that social media plays a vital role in shaping purchase decisions. Instagram emerged as the most preferred platform, while reviews and ratings were identified as the strongest influence on buying behaviour. Notably, 62% of respondents reported purchasing a product after seeing it on social media. Although influencer marketing remains popular, respondents demonstrated considerable scepticism toward influencer recommendations, emphasizing the importance of authenticity and credibility.

The study contributes to the literature on social media marketing and provides practical insights for businesses seeking to engage Generation Z consumers. The findings suggest that marketers should prioritize engaging content, online reviews, and authentic brand communication to enhance consumer trust and purchase intentions.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Generation Z, Consumer Behaviour, Purchase Decision, Brand Awareness, Influencer Marketing, Digital Marketing

1. Introduction

The digital revolution has significantly transformed the manner in which businesses communicate with consumers and promote products and services. The widespread availability of smartphones, high-speed internet connectivity, and social networking platforms has created an environment in which consumers are constantly exposed to digital content. As a result, social media marketing has evolved into one of the most influential components of contemporary marketing strategies.

Social media marketing refers to the use of social networking platforms to promote products, services, and brands through advertisements, influencer collaborations, branded content, consumer engagement activities, and interactive communication. Unlike traditional marketing channels, social media enables two-way communication between organizations and consumers, allowing firms to build stronger relationships and gain immediate feedback from their target audiences.

The increasing popularity of platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok has enabled marketers to reach millions of consumers in a cost-effective and measurable manner. Businesses can now track engagement rates, conversion rates, customer interactions, and demographic characteristics in real time, thereby improving the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. Consequently, social media has become an essential component of brand-building and customer acquisition strategies.

Among the various consumer groups, Generation Z has attracted substantial attention from marketers and researchers alike. Generation Z generally refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012 who have grown up in a digitally connected environment. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z consumers have been exposed to smartphones, social media platforms, and online content throughout their formative years. Their purchasing behaviour is heavily influenced by digital interactions, peer recommendations, online reviews, and social networking activities.

Several characteristics distinguish Generation Z from earlier generations. They are highly engaged with digital media, prefer visually appealing content, actively seek information online, and value authenticity and transparency in brand communications. They frequently compare products, examine consumer reviews, and engage with digital communities before making purchasing decisions. These characteristics make social media marketing particularly relevant in influencing their consumer behaviour.

Despite the increasing investments made by organizations in social media marketing activities, questions remain regarding the effectiveness of different social media elements in influencing purchase decisions. While some studies emphasize the role of influencer marketing, others highlight the importance of consumer reviews, brand awareness, and interactive content. Furthermore, empirical evidence regarding the Indian Generation Z segment remains relatively limited compared with studies conducted in other international contexts.

The existing literature also presents mixed findings concerning the effectiveness of influencer marketing and promotional strategies. Although influencers are widely used by brands to increase consumer engagement, growing concerns regarding authenticity and sponsored content have led to increased scepticism among younger consumers. Consequently, understanding the factors that genuinely influence Generation Z purchase decisions has become increasingly important for marketers.

In light of these observations, the present study investigates the impact of social media marketing on the buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers. Specifically, the study examines the influence of social media content, reviews, influencer marketing, promotional offers, and brand awareness on purchase decisions.

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the impact of social media marketing on the buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers.
2. To analyze the factors influencing purchase decisions through social media, including content, reviews, influencers, and brand perception.
3. To examine the role of social media platforms in shaping brand awareness and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to both academic research and managerial practice by enhancing understanding of digital consumer behaviour and providing insights into effective social media marketing strategies.

2. Literature Review

The relationship between social media marketing and consumer behaviour has attracted substantial schol-

arly attention over the past decade. The rapid adoption of social networking platforms among younger consumers has encouraged researchers to investigate how digital interactions influence brand perception, engagement, and purchase decisions. Existing studies indicate that social media marketing affects Generation Z consumers through multiple mechanisms, including content engagement, influencer endorsements, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), brand awareness, and trust.

One of the major themes emerging from the literature concerns the pervasive role of social media in the lives of Generation Z consumers. Cismariu (Zepa), Ciurel, and Hosu (2019) found that social media platforms occupy a central position in the daily communication patterns of Generation Z. Their findings revealed that YouTube and other visual platforms were preferred over traditional social networking channels and that influencers played a significant role in shaping consumer interests and engagement.

Similarly, Bourke (2019) emphasized that Generation Z consumers are highly connected through digital technologies and rely extensively on social media for communication and information gathering. The study suggested that organizations must develop targeted digital strategies to establish meaningful engagement with this demographic segment.

Another prominent theme within the literature relates to the influence of social media marketing communication on consumer attitudes. Ulfa and Astuti (2019) demonstrated that social media marketing communication significantly affects consumer attitudes among Generation Z. Their findings suggested that while demographic factors may not directly influence attitudes, social media communication strategies play a substantial role in shaping perceptions toward products and brands.

Research has also highlighted the importance of online content and digital engagement. Anusha, Poojitha, and Rao (2020) reported that interactive online content and digital advertisements significantly influence purchase intention and brand loyalty among Generation Z consumers. The study emphasized that consumers increasingly trust peer recommendations and interactive digital experiences when evaluating products.

The influence of social media marketing on purchase intention has been extensively examined. Ninan, Roy, and Cheriyan (2020) found that social media marketing positively affects purchase intention, brand awareness, product perception, and customer engagement. Their study demonstrated that effective brand communication through social media enhances consumers' willingness to purchase products and services. Several researchers have specifically examined factors influencing buying behaviour. Lalwani, Kumar, and Rani (2021) observed that Instagram was among the most preferred social media platforms and that online reviews significantly influenced purchasing decisions. Their findings highlighted the importance of customer engagement and online reputation management in influencing consumer behaviour.

The role of influencer marketing has received considerable scholarly attention. Chakola (2022) found that Generation Z consumers often perceive influencers as opinion leaders and credible sources of information. Influencer characteristics such as expertise, confidence, relatability, and authenticity were found to contribute significantly to consumer trust and buying behaviour. Similarly, Rameshkumar (2022) concluded that influencers play a substantial role in shaping purchase intentions among young digital consumers.

However, findings concerning influencer effectiveness remain inconsistent. Several studies indicate that Generation Z consumers are becoming increasingly sceptical of sponsored content and commercial endorsements. This scepticism suggests that influencer marketing effectiveness depends heavily on authenticity, transparency, and trustworthiness rather than mere popularity.

Brand-related variables have also emerged as important determinants of consumer behaviour. Waworuntu, Mandagi, and Pangemanan (2022) reported that social media marketing positively influences both brand image and purchase intention. Their findings further suggested that brand image acts as a mediating mechanism through which social media marketing affects consumer purchase behaviour.

Recent studies have emphasized the importance of consumer engagement and brand awareness. Kusuma et al. (2024) found that entertaining and trendy social media content significantly enhances consumer-brand engagement, which subsequently strengthens brand awareness and brand image. Likewise, Fernanda and Dwita (2024) demonstrated that brand awareness and consumer engagement mediate the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers.

Another recurring theme concerns the role of trust. Indriasari (2025) found that social media marketing and brand image significantly influence purchase intention through the mediating role of brand trust. Similarly, Masitah (2025) reported that brand trust and emotional connection strengthen the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty among Generation Z consumers.

Collectively, the literature suggests that social media marketing influences Generation Z through a combination of content quality, consumer engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, influencer credibility, brand awareness, and trust. Nevertheless, significant gaps remain. Most studies examine individual variables separately rather than considering multiple dimensions of social media marketing within a single framework. Furthermore, limited empirical evidence exists regarding Indian Generation Z consumers, despite their growing importance as a market segment.

To address these gaps, the present study proposes a conceptual framework in which social media marketing serves as the independent variable influencing buying behaviour through five major dimensions: content quality, reviews and ratings, influencer marketing, promotional offers, and brand awareness. These factors collectively shape consumer perceptions and ultimately influence purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of social media marketing on the buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers. A descriptive research design was adopted because it facilitates the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data related to consumer attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design was considered appropriate for identifying patterns associated with social media usage and its influence on purchasing decisions.

Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive research design to investigate how various social media marketing elements influence Generation Z consumers. The research focused on understanding consumer responses toward advertisements, influencer marketing, brand-related content, promotional offers, and online reviews available on social media platforms. Descriptive research is widely used in consumer behaviour studies because it enables researchers to systematically describe characteristics, attitudes, and behavioural patterns within a target population (Malhotra, 2020).

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of Generation Z consumers aged between 18 and 27 years. Since this demographic group represents active users of social media platforms, it was considered suitable for examining the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies. Previous studies have identified

Generation Z as one of the most digitally engaged consumer segments, characterized by extensive social media usage and reliance on online information during purchasing decisions (Priporas et al., 2017).

A convenience sampling technique was employed due to accessibility, time constraints, and resource limitations. Respondents who met the age criteria and actively used social media platforms were invited to participate in the study. Although convenience sampling limits the generalizability of findings, it is widely used in exploratory and consumer behaviour studies involving digitally connected populations such as Generation Z (Etikan et al., 2016).

Sample Size

A total of 129 valid responses were collected and analyzed. The sample size was determined based on practical considerations and supported by established sample size guidelines for social science research. According to Roscoe (1975), a sample size ranging from 30 to 500 respondents is generally adequate for most behavioural and social science studies. Similarly, Hair et al. (2019) suggest that a sample exceeding 100 respondents is sufficient for descriptive statistical analysis and exploratory investigations.

Given the study's descriptive nature and its focus on identifying trends and patterns in consumer behaviour rather than making population-wide estimates, a sample size of 129 respondents was considered appropriate. Furthermore, the sample size provided sufficient variability to capture diverse opinions and experiences regarding social media marketing and purchasing behaviour among Generation Z consumers. Therefore, the collected sample was deemed adequate to achieve the objectives of the study and generate meaningful insights into the relationship between social media marketing and consumer buying behaviour.

Data Collection Procedure

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered using Google Forms. The questionnaire link was distributed through social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Instagram, and email. Online distribution facilitated rapid data collection and enabled respondents from diverse educational and occupational backgrounds to participate.

Secondary data were gathered from academic journals, books, research reports, conference papers, and relevant online resources. These sources provided theoretical support and facilitated the development of the conceptual framework. The use of both primary and secondary data enhanced the comprehensiveness and validity of the research findings (Saunders et al., 2019).

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire comprised three sections.

The first section collected demographic information, including gender, age, occupation, and educational qualification.

The second section assessed respondents' social media usage patterns, including preferred platforms, time spent on social media, content preferences, and purchasing experiences.

The third section contained Likert-scale statements designed to measure respondents' perceptions regarding social media advertising, influencer marketing, brand awareness, consumer engagement, promotional activities, and purchase behaviour.

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The Likert scale is widely recognized as an effective tool for measuring attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural intentions in social science research (Likert, 1932).

Statistical Tools and Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and analyzed using Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

The following statistical techniques were employed:

- Frequency Distribution
- Percentage Analysis
- Descriptive Statistics
- Graphical Representation through Pie Charts

These techniques facilitated the interpretation of respondent characteristics and consumer behaviour patterns associated with social media marketing. Descriptive statistical methods are particularly useful for summarizing large datasets and identifying trends within consumer behaviour research (Field, 2018).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	83	64.0%
Male	46	34.0%
Total	129	100%
Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–20	34	26.4%
21–23	65	50.4%
24–27	30	23.3%
Total	129	100%
Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Student	96	77.0%
Working Professional	16	13.0%
Self-employed	7	6.0%
Housewife	5	4.0%
Total	129	100%
Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Undergraduate	77	60.0%
Postgraduate	29	22.0%
Higher Secondary	23	18.0%
Total	129	100%
Time Spent	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	13	10.0%
1–3 hours	74	57.0%
3–5 hours	37	29.0%
More than 5 hours	5	4.0%
Total	129	100%
Platform	Frequency	Percentage
Instagram	81	63.0%
YouTube	36	28.0%

Others	12	9.0%
Total	129	100%
Content Type	Frequency	Percentage
Reels / Short Videos	84	65.0%
Influencer Posts	15	11.0%
Advertisements	10	8.0%
Brand Pages	10	8.0%
Reviews & Ratings	10	8.0%
Total	129	100%
Factor	Frequency	Percentage
Reviews	46	36.0%
Brand Reputation	29	22.0%
Discounts / Offers	24	19.0%
Influencer Recommendation	17	13.0%
Price	13	10.0%
Total	129	100%
Device	Frequency	Percentage
Smartphone	124	96.0%
Laptop	3	2.0%
Tablet	2	2.0%
Total	129	100%
Engagement Level	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	7	5.0%
Often	23	18.0%
Sometimes	49	38.0%
Rarely	30	23.0%
Never	20	16.0%
Total	129	100%
Product Comparison	Frequency	Percentage
Always	54	42.0%
Often	27	21.0%
Sometimes	28	22.0%
Rarely	8	6.0%
Never	12	9.0%
Total	129	100%
Brand Following on social media	Frequency	Percentage

Yes	70	54.0%
No	59	46.0%
Total	129	100%
Purchase After Social Media Exposure	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	82	62.0%
No	47	38.0%
Total	129	100%
Trust in influencer recommendations	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	51	40.0%
No	78	60.0%
Total	129	100%
Impact of Discounts and Offers	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	74	57.0%
No	55	43.0%
Total	129	100%
Influence of Social Media Ads	Frequency	Percentage
“Strongly Disagree”	14	11.0%
“Disagree”	13	10.0%
“Neutral”	50	39.0%
“Agree”	52	40.0%
“Strongly Agree”	0	0%
Total	129	100%
Impact of Influencer Marketing	Frequency	Percentage
“Strongly Disagree”	12	9.0%
“Disagree”	32	25.0%
“Neutral”	40	31.0%
“Agree”	32	25.0%
“Strongly Agree”	13	10.0%
Total	129	100%
Role in Brand Discovery	Frequency	Percentage
“Strongly Disagree”	5	4.0%
“Disagree”	1	1.0%
“Neutral”	30	23.0%

“Agree”	55	43.0%
“Strongly Agree”	38	29.0%
Total	129	100%
Brand Recall from Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
“Strongly Disagree”	6	5.0%
“Disagree”	14	11.0%
“Neutral”	26	20.0%
“Agree”	63	49.0%
“Strongly Agree”	20	15.0%
Total	129	100%
Impact of Engaging Content	Frequency	Percentage
“Strongly Disagree”	8	6.0%
“Disagree”	27	21.0%
“Neutral”	36	28.0%
“Agree”	45	35.0%
“Strongly Agree”	13	10.0%
Total	129	100%
Trust through Brand Interaction	Frequency	Percentage
“Strongly Disagree”	8	6.0%
“Disagree”	6	5.0%
“Neutral”	39	30.0%
“Agree”	46	36.0%
“Strongly Agree”	30	23.0%
Total	129	100%
Connection with Followed Brands	Frequency	Percentage
“Strongly Disagree”	10	8.0%
“Disagree”	27	21.0%
“Neutral”	44	34.0%
“Agree”	36	28.0%
“Strongly Agree”	12	9.0%
Total	129	100%
Preference for Social Media Presence	Frequency	Percentage
“Strongly Disagree”	5	4.0%

“Disagree”	22	17.0%
“Neutral”	43	33.0%
“Agree”	39	30.0%
“Strongly Agree”	20	16.0%
Total	129	100%
Impact of Promotions on Purchase	Frequency	Percentage
“Strongly Disagree”	6	5.0%
“Disagree”	30	23.0%
“Neutral”	46	36.0%
“Agree”	31	24.0%
“Strongly Agree”	16	12.0%
Role in Final Buying Decision	Frequency	Percentage
“Strongly Disagree”	4	3.0%
“Disagree”	29	22.0%
“Neutral”	41	32.0%
“Agree”	36	28.0%
“Strongly Agree”	19	15.0%

The demographic analysis revealed that female respondents constituted the majority of the sample, representing 64% of participants, while male respondents accounted for 36%. The age distribution indicated that 50.4% of respondents belonged to the 21–23 age group, followed by 26.4% in the 18–20 age category and 23.3% in the 24–27 age category.

The occupational profile showed that students represented 77% of respondents, indicating that the findings largely reflect the perspectives of digitally active young consumers. Furthermore, 60% of respondents were pursuing undergraduate education, highlighting the predominance of higher education learners within the sample.

These demographic characteristics are consistent with the profile of Generation Z consumers, who are generally recognized as highly connected, technologically proficient, and active participants in digital environments (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

Social Media Usage Behaviour

The analysis revealed substantial engagement with social media platforms among Generation Z consumers. More than half of the respondents (57%) reported spending between one and three hours daily on social media platforms, while 29% spent between three and five hours per day.

Among all platforms, Instagram emerged as the dominant social media platform, preferred by 63% of respondents. YouTube was the second most frequently used platform, accounting for 28% of respondents. This finding reinforces previous research indicating the growing importance of visually oriented and interactive platforms among younger consumers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

The predominance of Instagram suggests that marketers seeking to target Generation Z consumers should prioritize platform-specific content strategies, particularly those involving visual storytelling and short-form videos.

Content Preference Analysis

The findings indicate that short-form video content has become the most attractive content format among Generation Z consumers. Approximately 65% of respondents identified reels and short videos as their preferred type of social media content.

In contrast, influencer posts, advertisements, brand pages, and reviews each attracted significantly lower levels of preference.

This finding supports existing literature suggesting that Generation Z consumers prefer engaging, visually appealing, and easily consumable content (Turner, 2015). The popularity of reels can be attributed to their entertainment value, accessibility, and ability to communicate information quickly.

For marketers, the findings emphasize the necessity of investing in creative video-based content strategies to increase audience engagement and brand visibility.

Purchase Behaviour Analysis

The study provides substantial evidence regarding the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchasing decisions.

A significant finding is that 62% of respondents reported purchasing a product after seeing it on social media. This result confirms the growing role of social media platforms as influential touchpoints within the consumer decision-making process (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Furthermore, 42% of respondents indicated that they always compare products online before making a purchase, while an additional 21% reported doing so frequently. These findings demonstrate that Generation Z consumers actively seek information and evaluate alternatives prior to making purchase decisions.

The prevalence of online product comparisons highlights the importance of providing detailed product information, transparent communication, and positive consumer experiences.

Reliability Statistics

Reliability analysis is used to measure the consistency and stability of a questionnaire. It ensures that the set of items used in the study produces reliable and consistent results. Cronbach’s Alpha is the most commonly used method to test internal consistency. The value of Cronbach’s Alpha ranges from 0 to 1. A value above 0.7 is considered acceptable, above 0.8 is good, and above 0.9 is excellent. A higher value indicates that the items in the questionnaire are closely related and measure the same concept effectively.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.878	10

Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.770	.592	.583	.61226	.592	61.055	3	126	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), RT, SM, EP
 b. Dependent Variable: PI

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	68.660	3	22.887	61.055	.000 ^b
	Residual	47.232	126	.375		
	Total	115.892	129			

a. Dependent Variable: PI

b. Predictors: (Constant), RT, SM, EP

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error				Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.197	.277		-.712	.478		
	SM	.267	.103	.203	2.602	.010	.530	1.888
	EP	.011	.103	.009	.107	.915	.454	2.202
	RT	.742	.096	.623	7.725	.000	.497	2.011

a. Dependent Variable: PI

Influence of Reviews on Purchase Decisions

The results revealed that reviews and ratings constitute the most influential factor affecting purchase decisions. Approximately 36% of respondents identified reviews as the primary factor influencing purchases through social media.

Brand reputation ranked second at 22%, followed by discounts and promotional offers at 19%.

These findings align with the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) literature, which suggests that consumers place greater trust in peer-generated content than in traditional advertising messages (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

The prominence of reviews indicates that Generation Z consumers seek validation from previous users before committing to a purchase. Consequently, organizations must prioritize customer satisfaction and online reputation management to strengthen consumer confidence.

Influence of Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing has emerged as one of the most widely adopted social media marketing strategies. However, the findings indicate a degree of skepticism among Generation Z consumers.

While influencer content remains popular, 60% of respondents reported that they do not trust influencer recommendations. Additionally, responses regarding influencer marketing effectiveness were highly dispersed, with a substantial proportion of respondents remaining neutral.

This finding suggests that Generation Z consumers are increasingly capable of recognizing sponsored content and are less likely to be influenced solely by celebrity endorsements. Previous studies have similarly emphasized that authenticity and credibility significantly affect influencer effectiveness (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

The results partially contradict studies that portray influencers as highly persuasive marketing agents. Instead, the findings suggest that authenticity, expertise, and transparency are critical determinants of influencer effectiveness.

Brands should therefore collaborate with influencers whose values align closely with the products being promoted and whose content appears genuine rather than purely commercial.

Brand Awareness and Consumer Engagement

The study found strong evidence supporting the role of social media in creating brand awareness.

Approximately 72% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media helps them discover new brands. Similarly, 64% agreed that repeated exposure to social media content improves brand recall.

Respondents also indicated that brands interacting with users online appear more trustworthy. This finding supports relationship marketing theory, which emphasizes the importance of continuous engagement and communication in building consumer trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

The results suggest that social media platforms serve not only as promotional channels but also as mechanisms for brand-building and relationship development.

Influence of Promotional Offers

Promotional offers demonstrated a moderate influence on consumer behaviour.

While 57% of respondents reported being encouraged by discounts and offers available on social media, many respondents expressed neutral attitudes regarding the long-term influence of promotional campaigns on purchase decisions.

These findings indicate that discounts may stimulate immediate purchases but may not necessarily create sustained brand loyalty. Consequently, promotional strategies should be integrated with broader brand-building efforts rather than used as standalone tactics. This observation is consistent with previous marketing studies emphasizing that long-term customer loyalty depends on perceived value and brand relationships rather than price incentives alone (Kotler et al., 2022).

Discussion

The findings collectively demonstrate that social media marketing exerts a substantial influence on Generation Z consumers. Consistent with previous studies, the results confirm that social media platforms contribute significantly to brand awareness, product discovery, and purchase behaviour (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Instagram's dominance among respondents highlights the increasing importance of visual and interactive content in digital marketing. Similarly, the popularity of reels and short videos reflects evolving consumer preferences toward dynamic and entertaining content formats.

The findings also underscore the importance of reviews and ratings as critical sources of information during the purchase decision process. Unlike traditional advertising, peer-generated content appears to possess greater credibility and influence (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

At the same time, the study reveals growing skepticism toward influencer marketing. Although influencers continue to play a role in consumer engagement, trust appears to be contingent upon authenticity and transparency. This finding suggests a shift from celebrity-based influence toward credibility-based influence, supporting the arguments of Lou and Yuan (2019).

Overall, the results indicate that successful social media marketing strategies must combine engaging content, authentic communication, positive customer reviews, and meaningful consumer interactions to influence Generation Z purchase behaviour effectively.

5. Key Findings

The major findings of the study are summarized as follows:

- Female respondents constituted the majority of the sample (64%), while the dominant age group was

21–23 years (50.4%).

- Students represented 77% of the respondents, indicating that the study largely reflects the perspectives of young and digitally active consumers.
- Most respondents (57%) spent between one and three hours daily on social media platforms, highlighting the significant role of social media in their daily lives.
- Instagram emerged as the most frequently used social media platform, preferred by 63% of respondents, followed by YouTube (28%).
- Reels and short-form videos were identified as the most engaging content format, attracting 65% of respondents.
- Reviews and ratings were found to be the strongest factor influencing purchase decisions (36%), followed by brand reputation (22%) and promotional offers (19%).
- A substantial proportion (62%) of respondents reported purchasing products after seeing them on social media platforms.
- Most respondents actively compared products online before making purchases, indicating a highly informed consumer segment.
- Social media significantly contributed to brand awareness, with the majority of respondents agreeing that it helped them discover new brands and remember frequently promoted brands.
- Despite the popularity of influencer marketing, 60% of respondents reported not trusting influencer recommendations, indicating growing skepticism toward sponsored content.
- Brand interaction on social media positively influenced consumer trust and brand perception.
- Promotional offers and discounts encouraged purchase decisions but appeared less influential than reviews and brand reputation.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that social media marketing significantly influences Generation Z consumer behaviour, particularly through content engagement, brand awareness, and electronic word-of-mouth communication.

6. Implications

6.1 Managerial Implications

The findings suggest that marketers targeting Generation Z should prioritize Instagram and focus on engaging short-form video content. Businesses should actively manage online reviews, as reviews were found to have the strongest influence on purchase decisions. Brands should collaborate with authentic and credible influencers rather than relying solely on popularity. Additionally, continuous consumer engagement and effective reputation management can enhance trust, while promotional offers should complement broader brand-building strategies.

6.2 Academic Implications

This study contributes to the literature on social media marketing and consumer behaviour by providing evidence from the Indian Generation Z context. The findings reinforce the significance of social media engagement, brand awareness, and electronic word-of-mouth in shaping purchase behaviour. The study also highlights increasing skepticism toward influencer marketing and identifies Instagram as the dominant platform among Generation Z consumers. Furthermore, it provides a basis for future research exploring the relationships between social media marketing, trust, brand engagement, and purchase intentions.

7. Conclusion

The emergence of social media has fundamentally transformed the way organizations communicate with consumers and influence purchasing behaviour. As digital natives, Generation Z consumers rely extensively on social media platforms for information, entertainment, product discovery, and purchase evaluation. Consequently, understanding the effectiveness of social media marketing has become increasingly important for both researchers and practitioners.

The present study examined the impact of social media marketing on Generation Z consumers by investigating social media usage patterns, content preferences, brand awareness, influencer marketing, promotional offers, and purchase behaviour. The findings revealed that social media plays a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase decisions.

Instagram emerged as the dominant platform among respondents, reflecting the increasing importance of visual communication and interactive content. Reels and short-form videos were found to be the most engaging content format, highlighting the need for marketers to adopt dynamic content strategies.

One of the most important findings was that reviews and ratings represent the strongest determinant of purchase decisions. Generation Z consumers appear to place substantial trust in peer-generated information and electronic word-of-mouth communication when evaluating products and services.

The study also revealed that although influencer marketing remains a prominent marketing strategy, many consumers exhibit skepticism toward influencer recommendations. This finding suggests that authenticity, transparency, and credibility are becoming increasingly important in determining influencer effectiveness. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that social media significantly contributes to brand awareness, brand recall, and consumer engagement. Consumers who interact with brands online tend to perceive those brands as more trustworthy and accessible.

Overall, the study concludes that social media marketing has a significant influence on Generation Z buying behaviour. Organizations seeking to engage this consumer segment should prioritize authentic communication, engaging content, customer reviews, and meaningful interactions to maximize marketing effectiveness.

8. Limitations of the Study

Despite providing valuable insights, the study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

- The study utilized convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of findings to the broader Generation Z population.
- The sample size was restricted to 129 respondents, limiting the scope of statistical analysis.
- The study focused primarily on respondents from a limited geographical context and therefore may not fully represent the diversity of Generation Z consumers across India.
- Data were collected using self-reported questionnaires, which may be subject to response bias and social desirability effects.
- The study employed descriptive statistical analysis and did not examine causal relationships among variables.
- Emerging social media platforms and technological developments may alter consumer behaviour over time, potentially affecting the long-term applicability of the findings.

9. Future Research Directions

Future researchers may extend the present study in several ways.

- Larger and more diverse samples may be used to improve the generalizability of findings.
- Comparative studies may be conducted across different generations, including Millennials and Generation Alpha.
- Future research may examine differences in social media marketing effectiveness across specific platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Snapchat.
- Advanced statistical techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) may be employed to examine causal relationships among social media marketing variables.
- Future studies may investigate the mediating roles of trust, brand engagement, and customer satisfaction.
- Longitudinal studies may be conducted to examine changes in consumer behaviour over time.
- Researchers may explore the influence of artificial intelligence, social commerce, and virtual influencers on future purchasing behaviour.

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