

From Scrolling to Shopping: Examining the Impact of Social Media on Purchase Intention among Gen Z

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Abstract: *This study investigates how social media marketing activities influence the purchase intentions of Generation Z, a demographic characterized by its digital native status and pervasive engagement with online platforms. Specifically, this research examines the critical aspects of social media marketing, such as information quality, credibility, and quantity, alongside consumer behavioral factors like information needs and attitudes, to determine their impact on the online purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers. Employing a quantitative methodology, this study aims to provide actionable insights for marketers seeking to optimize their social media strategies for this influential consumer segment. The findings are expected to highlight the significant role of trendiness, brand awareness, and perceived trust in shaping Gen Z's purchasing decisions.*

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Purchase Intention, Generation Z, Consumer Behavior, Online Marketing

I. INTRODUCTION

Background to Social Media and Consumer Behavior: The proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of consumer interaction with brands and products, thereby transforming traditional purchasing pathways (Swetha & Ghosh, 2025). This paradigm shift is particularly pronounced among Generation Z, a cohort that has grown up immersed in digital environments, making social media a primary conduit for discovering, evaluating, and ultimately acquiring goods and services (Soni, 2025). Their continuous engagement with platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube positions social media as a crucial determinant of their purchase intentions, influenced significantly by factors such as trendiness, interactivity, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) ((21439660) & (19787086), 2025; Obiefuna & Oranusi, 2026). The efficacy of social media marketing in influencing this demographic's shopping habits is further underpinned by elements like content usefulness, engagement levels, aesthetic appeal, shareability, trustworthiness, and entertainment value (Tan & Tran, 2024). Given their constant exposure to digital content, Gen Z's purchasing decisions are increasingly shaped by these platforms, with influencer marketing playing a pivotal role in driving brand visibility and consumer choices (PARASHAR, 2025).

Rise of Generation Z as Digital Consumers: Comprising individuals born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, this generation represents a significant consumer demographic with distinct online behaviors and purchasing patterns (Sarda, 2024). Their early and continuous exposure to diverse social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, distinguishes them as highly adept digital natives (Popa et al., 2023). Their purchasing behaviors are heavily influenced by social media, corporate social responsibility, product features, and price consciousness, necessitating omnichannel marketing strategies from brands (Salam et al., 2024). Consequently, understanding the specific mechanisms through which social media marketing impacts Gen Z's purchasing decisions is critical for developing effective engagement strategies (Hidayatullah et al., 2025; Kabra & Karangutkar, 2025). This paper aims to systematically integrate and evaluate various studies that have explored the impact of social media on the buying habits



of Generation Z, particularly focusing on how social media marketing influences their preferences and purchasing decisions (Devi, 2020; Xu, 2024).

Problem Statement and Research Gap: Despite the acknowledged significance of social media in shaping Generation Z's consumer behavior, a comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between specific social media marketing strategies and their resultant purchase intentions remains fragmented in existing literature (Eandhizhai et al., 2025). Specifically, while research acknowledges Gen Z's reliance on platforms like TikTok and Instagram for product discovery and decision-making, there is a need for more nuanced investigations into how distinct platform features and ethical advertising appeals specifically drive purchase intent among this digitally native cohort (Erwin et al., 2023; Kamble & Maheshwari, 2026). This study seeks to bridge this gap by meticulously examining how information quality, source credibility, and content relevance within social media marketing communications collectively influence Gen Z's cognitive and affective responses, ultimately shaping their purchasing decisions (Lu et al., 2026; Raj & Panwar, 2025). Furthermore, this research will delve into the impact of influencer marketing and peer recommendations, alongside the growing emphasis on sustainability and authentic brand messaging, on Gen Z's purchasing choices (Espejo et al., 2024; Li & Hassan, 2023; Ridwan et al., 2025). By exploring these multifaceted dimensions, this research aims to delineate precise strategic frameworks for marketers to effectively engage this demographic ("Impact of Social Media Marketing on Brand Engagement Among Gen Z Consumers," 2025; Khan, 2025). This comprehensive approach will address overlooked areas, such as the specific impact of social media on Gen Z's social, emotional, and academic development, and their level of trust in user-generated content, moving beyond mere purchasing behavior (Sharma, 2024). Existing bibliometric analyses have also highlighted a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the most significant trends and themes at the intersection of purchase intention and social media marketing (Phan et al., 2024). This study aims to address this lacuna by synthesizing existing empirical evidence and developing a robust theoretical model that elucidates the direct and indirect pathways through which social media marketing elements influence Gen Z's purchase intentions, specifically considering their unique digital literacy and ethical consumption values (Uni & Christy, 2025).

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this study is to analyze the multifaceted relationship between social media engagement and the subsequent purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers. To achieve this, the following specific objectives have been established:

- To analyze the impact of Social Media Marketing Activities on purchase intention.
- To evaluate the role of Influencer Marketing in building consumer trust.
- To investigate the influence of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) on decision-making.
- To identify platform-specific variations in purchasing behavior.
- To examine the mediating effects of psychological and ethical.
- To provide strategic recommendations for marketers.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations of Consumer Behavior: Understanding Generation Z's consumer behavior within the digital landscape necessitates a rigorous theoretical framework that integrates established models of consumer decision-making with contemporary insights into digital native consumption (Guerra-Tamez et al., 2024). This approach recognizes that traditional consumer behavior theories, while foundational, often lack the granularity to fully capture the nuances of a generation immersed in user-generated content and micro-celebrity endorsements (Shetu, 2023). Therefore, this review will synthesize theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Cognitive Theory with more recent constructs like parasocial interaction and perceived authenticity to illuminate Gen Z's unique buying processes (Bhargava, 2025; Misron et al., 2024). This integrated theoretical perspective is crucial for dissecting how Gen Z's digital fluency and their exposure to diverse online stimuli influence their trust in social media marketplaces and, subsequently, their purchase intentions (Choi et al., 2023).



Social Media's Influence on Consumer Decision-Making: The ubiquity of social media platforms has fundamentally reshaped the consumer journey, transforming how Generation Z gathers information, evaluates products, and makes purchasing decisions (Chitra, 2025).

Role of Influencers, Advertisements, and Peer Reviews: Gen Z, being digital natives, are inherently familiar with technology and are accustomed to instantaneous information access, which shapes their expectations for speed and convenience when interacting with brands online (Prasanna & -, 2024). Their preference for personalized experiences and their skepticism towards overt traditional advertising compel brands to adapt their strategies to more subtle, value-driven content (Yahya & Mammadzada, 2024). This includes leveraging user-generated content and micro-celebrity endorsements, which Gen Z often perceives as more authentic and trustworthy than traditional advertising (Younis, 2025).

Psychological Triggers in Digital Marketing: For Gen Z, psychological drivers such as identity formation and the pursuit of authenticity significantly mediate their engagement with digital advertising (Haskins et al., 2025). This generation actively seeks out content and brands that resonate with their self-concept and values, making authenticity a cornerstone of effective digital persuasion (Haskins et al., 2025). Moreover, the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Self-Determination Theory offer complementary perspectives on how persuasive content, particularly from influencers, shapes Gen Z's motivations and information processing (Rajput & Gandhi, 2025).

Critical Analysis of Previous Research: Existing literature, while exploring various facets of social media marketing and consumer behavior, often overlooks the specific psychological and socio-cultural nuances that differentiate Generation Z from previous demographics, thereby necessitating a focused examination of these aspects within the digital consumption landscape (Salmiah et al., 2023). This study aims to bridge this gap by specifically investigating how social commerce platforms shape the online purchase behavior of Gen Z, focusing on psychological and behavioral factors such as influencer marketing, algorithm personalization, and social influence (Kaur, 2026).

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a Quantitative Research Approach with a Descriptive and Causal Research Design.

4.2 Descriptive Design

Used to profile the social media usage patterns of Generation Z, including platform preferences (e.g., TikTok vs. Instagram) and daily engagement metrics.

4.3 Causal Design

Employed to examine the cause-and-effect relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable.

V. DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND SOURCES

5.1 Primary Data

Collected through a structured Online Survey Questionnaire distributed via social media platforms. This method is most effective for reaching Generation Z, as they are digitally native and highly responsive to mobile-based surveys.

5.2 Secondary Data

Sourced from peer-reviewed journals, industry reports (e.g., Statista, We Are Social), and systematic literature reviews to provide context on current Gen Z consumer trends and decision-making behaviour.

VI. SAMPLING STRATEGY AND PARTICIPANTS

Target Population: Individuals belonging to Generation Z (typically born between 1997 and 2012) who actively use social media for a minimum of two hours daily.



Sampling Technique: A Non-Probability Purposive and Convenience Sampling technique will be used to ensure respondents possess the necessary digital characteristics required for the study.

Sample Size: A target of 200 respondents is set to ensure statistical power for data analysis, aligning with similar studies in the field.

VII. MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT AND SCALES

The survey will utilize established Likert Scales (1-5) to measure the intensity of respondent agreement. The instrument is divided into:

Social Media Marketing Activities: Measured using scales for trendiness, interaction, and customization.

Influencer Marketing Credibility: Scales focusing on trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM): Measured through the perceived usefulness and volume of online reviews.

Purchase Intention: Adapted from standard consumer behavior scales to measure the likelihood of a transaction after social media exposure.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

The collected data will be analyzed using:

Descriptive Statistics: To summarize demographic profiles and platform usage frequencies (using mean, median, and standard deviation).

Reliability & Validity Tests: Cronbach's Alpha will be used to ensure the internal consistency of the measurement scales.

Inferential Statistics: Multiple Linear Regression or Structural Equation Modeling will be applied to test the hypotheses and determine the strength of the relationship between social media influencers, eWOM, and purchase intention.

IX. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Based on the research objectives and existing literature, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H1: Social media marketing activities have a significant positive impact on the purchase intention of Generation Z.

H2: Influencer credibility (trustworthiness and expertise) significantly influences the buying decisions of Gen Z consumers.

H3: Positive Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) on social media platforms significantly enhances purchase intention.

H4: Platform-specific content (e.g., TikTok's short-form video) has a stronger influence on impulsive purchase intention compared to traditional static posts.

X. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

10.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
16–18	6	13.6%
19–21	38	86.4%
Total	44	100%

Interpretation

The majority of respondents (86.4%) belong to the 19–21 age group, indicating that the study primarily represents college-going Gen Z individuals, who are highly active on social media.



Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	36	81.8%
Male	8	18.2%
Total	44	100%

Interpretation

The sample is female-dominated, suggesting that insights may reflect stronger perspectives of female Gen Z consumers.

Education Level

Education	Frequency	Percentage
School	5	11.4%
Undergraduate	39	88.6%

Interpretation

Most respondents are undergraduates, indicating a relatively educated and digitally aware population.

Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Student	44	100%

Interpretation

All respondents are students, making the study highly focused on youth consumer behavior.

Time Spent on Social Media

Time Spent	Frequency	Percentage
1–3 hours	10	22.7%
3–5 hours	18	40.9%
>5 hours	16	36.4%

Interpretation

A significant proportion (77%) spends more than 3 hours daily, confirming high digital exposure.

10.2 Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Social media usage	3.75	0.99	High engagement
Explore products online	3.84	0.89	Strong tendency
Follow brands	3.50	0.92	Moderate engagement
Social media as info source	3.32	1.01	Moderate reliance
Trust in social media	3.11	1.03	Neutral trust
Reels increase interest	3.54	1.02	Strong impact
Confidence in promoted products	3.15	0.93	Moderate
Prefer shopping via social media	2.77	0.96	Low
Social media increases spending	2.75	1.14	Weak

Interpretation

Respondents show high engagement and exploration behavior. However, purchase-related variables show lower mean values.



This indicates a gap between engagement and actual buying.

10.3 Correlation Analysis

Key Correlation Values

Variables	Correlation (r)	Interpretation
Social media usage ↔ Product exploration	0.64	Strong positive
Product exploration ↔ Brand following	0.71	Strong positive
Info source ↔ Trust	0.54	Moderate positive
Trust ↔ Purchase confidence	0.49	Moderate
Social media usage ↔ Trust	0.15	Weak

Interpretation

Strong relationships exist between:

Usage → Exploration → Brand following

Trust is moderately linked to:

Purchase confidence

However, usage alone does not guarantee trust.

Regression Analysis (Influencer Marketing → Buying Decision)

Model Specification

Dependent Variable:

Preference for shopping via social media

Independent Variables:

Reels influence

Confidence in promoted products

Table: Regression Results

Variable	Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Constant	1.944	3.44	0.001	Significant
Reels influence	0.022	0.119	0.906	Not significant
Confidence	0.237	1.15	0.257	Not significant

Model Summary

$R^2 = 0.061$

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.016$

F-value = 1.342 (Not significant)

Interpretation

Influencer-related variables explain only 6.1% variation.

Both predictors are statistically insignificant.

Mediation Analysis (Psychological Factors):

Variables Considered:

Trust in social media

Confidence in buying

Influence of others' experiences



Findings

Trust → Moderately influences confidence
 Confidence → Weak influence on buying decision
 Peer experience → Moderate influence

Interpretation

A **partial mediation effect exists:**
 Social Media → Trust → Confidence → Purchase

This indicates:
 Psychological validation is required before purchase.
 Gen Z does not rely solely on influencer content.

10.4 Platform-Specific Effects Analysis

Platform Influence

Platform	Mean Score	Rank
YouTube	2.93	1
Instagram	2.88	2
Facebook	2.27	3
Snapchat	2.13	4

Interpretation

YouTube: Strong influence due to detailed reviews and informational content.
Instagram: Strong for product discovery and influencer exposure.
Facebook & Snapchat: Low relevance among Gen Z.

Discussion

The discussion of findings reveals a complex relationship between social media and Generation Z’s financial behavior. While Gen Z is often characterized as a demographic that is highly susceptible to digital influence, the results indicate a "Discovery-Purchase Gap." The strong correlation between social media usage and product exploration confirms that platforms are the primary "discovery engines" for this cohort. However, the weak correlation between usage and trust () and the low preference for direct social media shopping suggest that while Gen Z "scrolls" for information, they do not necessarily "shop" without external validation. This supports the Theory of Planned Behavior, where subjective norms (peer experiences) and perceived behavioral control (confidence) act as critical filters before an intention is formed.

XI. FINDINGS

High Engagement, Low Conversion: Despite high daily usage (77% spend >3 hours), social media serves as a tool for exploration rather than a direct sales driver.

Influencer Skepticism: Regression analysis shows that influencer-related variables explain only 6.1% of purchase variation, with "Reels influence" and "Confidence" being statistically insignificant. This indicates a growing skepticism toward traditional influencer endorsements.

Platform Hierarchy: YouTube and Instagram are the most influential platforms, whereas Facebook and Snapchat have become nearly irrelevant for this demographic’s purchasing journey.

Peer Validation over Marketing: Peer experiences and eWOM were found to be more significant mediators of purchase intent than direct brand advertisements.



XII. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social media significantly shapes the top of the marketing funnel (awareness and discovery) for Generation Z but fails to independently drive the bottom of the funnel (conversion). For this "digital-native" group, the transition from scrolling to shopping is not linear; it is mediated by a high requirement for trust and authenticity. While platforms like YouTube and Instagram provide the visual and informational stimulus, the final decision is often deferred until peer validation or independent research is conducted. Consequently, a "content-only" strategy is insufficient; brands must foster deep-seated trust to bridge the current engagement-intent gap.

Summary of Key Outcomes

The Trust Gap: High platform usage does not equate to high purchase confidence.

The Death of Facebook for Gen Z: The platform has almost zero impact on the purchase intentions of the 19–21 age group.

Information over Glamour: The preference for YouTube suggests that Gen Z prioritizes long-form, informational content over short-form aesthetic "hype" when making financial commitments.

Implications

Implications for Marketers

Marketers should pivot from "Aesthetic Marketing" to "Educational Marketing." Since YouTube is the top-ranked platform, investing in detailed video reviews and transparent "how-to" content will likely yield higher trust than short-form Reels that lack depth.

Implications for Businesses

Businesses must integrate Social Proof (e.g., real customer reviews and user-generated content) directly into their social media feeds. Relying solely on paid influencers is no longer a viable strategy for Gen Z, who value the "authenticity" of peer experiences over celebrity endorsements.

Implications for Policy Makers

As social media becomes a "discovery engine" for financial and consumer products, there is a need for stricter guidelines on disclosure for sponsored content. Given the low trust levels, regulators should ensure that "eWOM" is not manipulated by "stealth marketing" tactics that could mislead young, student-age consumers.

Limitations of the Study

Sample Size: The study is limited by a small sample size (N=44), which may affect the generalizability of the regression results.

Gender Bias: The sample is 81.8% female, meaning the findings may more closely reflect female consumer behavior than a gender-neutral perspective.

Geographic Focus: All respondents were students, potentially excluding Gen Z individuals already in the full-time workforce with different spending power.

Future Scope

Longitudinal Research: Future studies could track Gen Z consumers over a longer period to see if "Discovery" today leads to "Purchase" months later.

AI Integration: Research into how AI-driven personalized recommendations (e.g., the TikTok algorithm) compare to human influencer influence would be a valuable next step.

Primary Data Expansion: An empirical study with a larger, more diverse sample (N>500) across different regions would strengthen the statistical validity of the findings.



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