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INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON PURCHASE DECISIONS OF GENERATION Z CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

Social media has emerged as one of the most transformative forces shaping consumer behaviour in the 21st century. This article examines the influence of social media marketing on the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers, drawing on primary survey data collected from 120 respondents in Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu. Using descriptive statistics and Chi-Square tests of independence, the study investigates associations between social media usage patterns and purchasing behaviour, platform preference and buying decisions, and trust in influencers and purchase intent.

The findings reveal that Instagram is the dominant platform among Generation Z, with customer reviews and product quality information being the most influential factors in purchase decisions. Chi-Square analysis confirms a statistically significant association between social media platform preference and purchase behaviour and between trust in social media influencers and purchase outcomes ($\chi^2 = 15.829$, $p = 0.003$). However, no significant relationship was found between time spent on social media and frequency of online purchases. The study concludes that while social media exerts a notable influence on Generation Z consumption patterns, trust, authenticity, and product information quality are critical mediators of purchasing decisions.

KEYWORDS: Social Media Marketing, Generation Z, Purchase Decisions, Consumer Behaviour, Instagram, Influencer Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern digital era, marketing has evolved far beyond traditional methods such as print advertisements, television commercials, and billboards. The widespread adoption of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the relationship between businesses and consumers. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter (now X) have become indispensable tools for communication, engagement, and commercial promotion. Generation Z, individuals born roughly between 1997 and 2012, represents the first generation of true digital natives.

Unlike previous generations, Generation Z consumers have grown up immersed in social media, making them the most digitally connected and social-media-influenced consumer cohort in history. With India housing the world's largest youth population, understanding how social media marketing shapes Generation Z purchase decisions carries significant academic and commercial implications. Despite a growing body of literature on digital marketing, few studies have quantitatively analysed the relationship between specific social media usage patterns and purchasing behaviour among Indian Generation Z consumers using inferential statistical methods such as Chi-Square analysis. This article addresses that gap by combining descriptive tabular analysis with hypothesis testing to draw evidence-based conclusions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the influence of social media promotions and discounts on purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers.
- To identify the key factors that shape buying behaviour through social media platforms.
- To examine the relationship between social media usage patterns and online purchasing frequency using Chi-Square analysis.
- To study the impact of influencer marketing on Generation Z buying behaviour.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Deepika (2005) A study on reflective factors of social media marketing activities and its influence on purchase intention of Gen Z. *Acta Psychologica*, identified key social media marketing factors such as interactivity, entertainment, credibility, and customisation that influence Generation Z purchase intentions, concluding that personalised marketing significantly strengthens buying likelihood.

Elmira Djafarova and Bowes (2021) 'Instagram made me buy it': Generation Z impulse purchases in fashion industry. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, explored how Instagram influences impulse purchasing among Generation Z in the fashion industry, highlighting the role of visual appeal and influencer endorsements.

Ying (2025) examined TikTok as a marketing tool, demonstrating how algorithm-driven personalisation and user-generated content strongly impact brand trust and purchase intentions.

Munoz (2022) found that TikTok's entertainment-driven content and organic product discovery through peer reviews and influencer authenticity drive purchase conversions among Generation Z.

Collectively, the literature establishes that Generation Z consumers are more influenced by peer reviews, authentic content, and visually compelling platforms than by traditional advertising.

However, empirical quantitative tests of these associations remain limited in the Indian context, forming the primary motivation for this study.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The scope of this study is limited to 120 Generation Z respondents drawn through convenient sampling from Nagercoil town, Tamil Nadu. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire over a six-month period (June to December 2025). The study is restricted to social media marketing as an independent variable and purchase decision as the dependent variable. Limitations include the potential for biased responses, the confined geographic scope, and the relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalisability of the findings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

his study adopts a descriptive research design using both primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered through a well-structured, pre-tested questionnaire administered to 120 respondents across Nagercoil town. Secondary data were sourced from peer-reviewed journals, published reports, websites, and academic books. Simple percentage analysis was used for descriptive tabulation of survey responses. Additionally, Chi-Square tests of independence were applied to examine whether statistically significant associations exist between key variables.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The survey was administered to 120 Generation Z respondents. The following tables summarise the demographic and socio-economic profile of the respondents.

Table 1.1: Socio Economic Profile of the Respondents

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 20 years	69	57.5
21-25 years	47	39.2
26 years and above	4	3.3
Annual Income		
Below Rs. 50,000	82	68.3
Rs. 50,000 – 1,00,000	26	21.7
Rs. 1,00,000 – 1,50,000	8	6.7
Rs. 1,50,000 – 2,00,000	4	3.3

Occupation		
Student	80	66.7
Self-Employed	12	10.0
Salaried Employed	14	11.7
Other	14	11.6
Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.1 depicts that more than half the respondents (57.5%) belong to the below-20 age group, confirming that the sample predominantly represents the core Generation Z demographic. Only 3.3% are aged 26 and above, implying that the findings are particularly reflective of the younger segment of Generation Z. Majority of respondents (68.3%) fall in the lowest income bracket (below Rs. 50,000), which is consistent with the student-dominated sample (66% students). This indicates that social media marketing influences even economically constrained consumers.

Social Media Usage Patterns

Table 1.2: Preferred Social Media Platform

S. No.	Platform	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Instagram	80	66.7
2.	Facebook / TikTok / YouTube	38	31.7
3.	Others / Not Specified	2	1.6
	Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.2 presents that instagram emerges as the overwhelmingly preferred platform (66.7%), consistent with its visual-first architecture and strong appeal among younger audiences. Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube collectively account for 31.7%, while only 1.6% use other platforms.

Table 1.3: Daily Time Spent on Social Media

S. No.	Daily Time Spent	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Less than 1 hour	38	31.7
2.	1 to 3 hours	54	45.0
3.	3 to 5 hours	13	10.8
4.	More than 5 hours	15	12.5
	Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.3 shows that the majority of respondents (45%) spend between 1 and 3 hours daily on social media, representing moderate engagement. Around 23.3% are heavy users spending more than 3 hours per day, while 31.7% have minimal exposure of less than 1 hour.

Purchase Behaviour and Influencing Factors

Table 1.4: Social Media Content Influencing Purchase Decisions

S. No.	Content Type	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Customer Reviews	49	40.8
2.	Friends/Family Recommendations	44	36.7
3.	Sponsored Ads	15	12.5
4.	Influencer Recommendations	12	10.0
	Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

Customer reviews are the most influential content type (40.8%), followed by friends and family recommendations (36.7%). Formal influencer endorsements and sponsored advertisements are comparatively less effective, suggesting that peer opinion carries greater weight than commercial promotions.

Table 1.5: Purchase Made After Seeing Products on Social Media

S. No.	Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Yes, many times	23	19.2
2.	Yes, a few times	61	50.8
3.	No	36	30.0
	Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

Seventy percent of respondents have made purchases after seeing products on social media (19.2% many times and 50.8% a few times), while 30% have not. This demonstrates the significant commercial impact of social media on Generation Z purchasing behaviour.

Table 1.6 Factors Influencing Online Purchase Decisions

S. No.	Factor	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Quality of Product Information	47	39.2
2.	Discount Offers	43	35.8
3.	Attractive Visuals/Videos	15	12.5
4.	Brand Reputation	15	12.5
	Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

Quality of product information (39.2%) and discount offers (35.8%) are the top two drivers of online purchase decisions, underscoring that Generation Z consumers, while digitally engaged, remain price-sensitive and information-driven.

Table 1.7 Level of Trust in Social Media Influencers

S. No.	Trust Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Not at all	51	42.5
2.	Slightly	34	28.3
3.	Moderately	29	24.2
4.	Highly	6	5.0
	Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

A striking 42.5% of respondents report no trust in social media influencers at all, with a further 28.3% expressing only slight trust. Only 5% trust influencers highly. This signals a growing scepticism towards influencer-based marketing among Generation Z, despite its widespread use by brands.

Table 1.8: Perception of Social Media's Influence on Consumer Behaviour

S. No.	Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Strongly Agree	15	12.5
2.	Agree	49	40.8
3.	Neutral	42	35.0
4.	Disagree	13	10.8
5.	Strongly Disagree	1	0.9
	Total	120	100

Source: Primary Data

Over half the respondents (53.3%) agree or strongly agree that social media influences consumer behaviour, while 35% remain neutral and only 11.7% disagree. This affirms that Generation Z is broadly aware of and acknowledges the persuasive power of social media on their decisions.

Chi-Square Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Three Chi-Square tests of independence were conducted to examine statistically significant associations between key social media usage variables and purchasing behaviour. All tests use a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

Test I: Association Between Platform Preference and Purchase Behaviour

Hypothesis

- H_0 : There is no significant association between preferred social media platform and purchase behaviour of Generation Z consumers.
- H_1 : There is a significant association between preferred social media platform and purchase behaviour of Generation Z consumers.

Table 1.9 Observed Frequency – Platform Preference vs Purchase Behaviour
(Others merged with Facebook/TikTok/YouTube for analysis)

Platform	Purchased Many Times	Purchased Few Times	Never Purchased	Total
Instagram	18	44	18	80
Facebook/TikTok/YouTube	5	17	16	38
Others	0	0	2	2
Total	23	61	36	120

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.10 Expected Frequency – Platform Preference vs Purchase Behaviour

Platform	Purchased Many Times	Purchased Few Times	Never Purchased
Instagram	15.33	40.67	24.00
Facebook/TikTok/YouTube & Others	7.67	20.33	12.00

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.11 Chi-Square Test Results – Platform Preference vs Purchase Behaviour

Statistical Parameter	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
Chi-Square Value (χ^2)	6.711	2	Significant (p = 0.035)
Critical Value (0.05, df=2)	5.991	—	—
p-value	0.035	—	p < 0.05
Decision	Reject H_0	—	H_1 Accepted

Interpretation

The calculated Chi-Square value of 6.711 exceeds the critical value of 5.991 at 2 degrees of freedom

and the 5% level of significance. The p-value (0.035) is less than 0.05, confirming that the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a statistically significant association between the preferred social media platform and purchase behaviour of Generation Z consumers. Instagram users demonstrate a higher propensity to make purchases compared to users of other platforms. This is attributable to Instagram's seamless shopping integration, visually immersive content, and influencer-rich environment, which collectively create a more purchase-conducive digital experience. Marketers targeting Generation Z should therefore prioritise Instagram as their primary social commerce channel.

Test II: Association Between Time Spent on Social Media and Online Purchase Frequency

Hypothesis

- H_0 : There is no significant association between time spent on social media and frequency of online purchases among Generation Z consumers.
- H_1 : There is a significant association between time spent on social media and frequency of online purchases among Generation Z consumers.

Table 1.12 Observed Frequency – Time on Social Media vs Online Purchase Frequency

Time Spent	Frequent (Weekly/Monthly)	Occasional	Rarely	Total
Less than 1 hour	8	9	21	38
1 to 3 hours	17	14	23	54
More than 3 hours (combined)	10	4	14	28
Total	35	27	58	120

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.13 Expected Frequency – Time on Social Media vs Online Purchase Frequency

Time Spent	Frequent	Occasional	Rarely
Less than 1 hour	11.08	8.55	18.37
1 to 3 hours	15.75	12.15	26.10
More than 3 hours (combined)	8.17	6.30	13.53

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.14 Chi-Square Test Results – Time on Social Media vs Online Purchase Frequency

Statistical Parameter	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
Chi-Square Value (χ^2)	3.275	4	Not Significant (p = 0.513)
Critical Value (0.05, df=4)	9.488	—	—
p-value	0.513	—	p > 0.05
Decision	Fail to Reject H_1	—	H_0 Retained

Interpretation

The calculated Chi-Square value of 3.275 is substantially below the critical value of 9.488 at 4 degrees of freedom and the 5% significance level. The p-value (0.513) is far greater than 0.05. Accordingly, the null hypothesis is retained. There is no statistically significant association between the time spent on social media and the frequency of online purchases. This finding is noteworthy: while social media exposure creates awareness and interest, mere duration of platform usage does not directly translate into purchasing frequency. The quality of engagement, the nature of content encountered, and individual purchase intention are likely more decisive factors than sheer time spent online. Businesses should therefore focus on targeted, high-quality content rather than seeking to maximise passive screen time.

Test III: Association Between Trust in Influencers and Purchase Behaviour

Hypothesis

- H_0 : There is no significant association between trust in social media influencers and purchase behaviour of Generation Z consumers.
- H_1 : There is a significant association between trust in social media influencers and purchase behaviour of Generation Z consumers.

Table 1.15 Observed Frequency – Trust in Influencers vs Purchase Behaviour (Moderately and Highly merged)

Trust Level	Purchased Many Times	Purchased Few Times	Never Purchased	Total
Not at all	5	22	24	51
Slightly	6	18	10	34
Moderately / Highly (combined)	12	21	4	37
Total	23	61	38	122

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.16 Expected Frequency – Trust in Influencers vs Purchase Behaviour

Trust Level	Purchased Many Times	Purchased Few Times	Never Purchased
Not at all	9.61	25.50	15.89
Slightly	6.41	17.00	10.59
Moderately / Highly	6.98	18.50	11.52

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.17 Chi-Square Test Results – Trust in Influencers vs Purchase Behaviour

Statistical Parameter	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
Chi-Square Value (χ^2)	15.829	4	Significant (p = 0.003)
Critical Value (0.05, df=4)	9.488	—	—
p-value	0.003	—	p < 0.05
Decision	Reject H ₀	—	H ₁ Accepted

Interpretation

The calculated Chi-Square value of 15.829 far exceeds the critical value of 9.488 at 4 degrees of freedom, with a highly significant p-value of 0.003, well below the 0.05 threshold. The null hypothesis

is therefore rejected. There is a statistically significant association between the level of trust consumers place in social media influencers and their purchase behaviour. Respondents with moderate to high trust in influencers are more likely to have made multiple purchases, while those with little or no trust are more likely to have refrained from purchasing. This finding underscores that influencer marketing effectiveness is mediated by perceived credibility rather than mere exposure. Generation Z consumers apply critical evaluation to influencer content, and only those who genuinely trust an influencer are moved toward purchase. Brands must therefore invest in long-term, authentic influencer partnerships rather than one-off promotional campaigns.

Summary of Chi-Square Test Results

Table 1.18: Consolidated Chi-Square Test Summary ($\alpha = 0.05$)

Test	Variables Tested	χ^2 Value	df	P-value	Decision
Test I	Platform Preference vs Purchase Behaviour	6.711	2	0.035	Significant
Test II	Time on Social Media vs Purchase Frequency	3.275	4	0.513	Not Significant
Test III	Trust in Influencers vs Purchase Behaviour	15.829	4	0.003	Highly Significant

Source: Primary Data

MAJOR FINDINGS

Descriptive Findings

- A majority of respondents (57.5%) are below 20 years of age, confirming a predominantly young, digitally active sample.
- 68.3% of respondents belong to the lowest income bracket (below Rs. 50,000), yet remain substantially influenced by social media marketing.
- Instagram is the most preferred platform, used by 66.7% of respondents, making it the primary channel for social media marketing influence.
- 45% of respondents spend 1 to 3 hours daily on social media, indicating consistent but moderate platform engagement.
- Customer reviews (40.8%) and friends/family recommendations (36.7%) are the most influential content types, surpassing formal influencer endorsements (10%) and sponsored advertisements (12.5%).

- 70% of respondents have made purchases after seeing products on social media, confirming its commercial significance.
- Quality of product information (39.2%) and discount offers (35.8%) are the top factors driving purchase decisions.
- 42.5% of respondents have no trust in social media influencers, reflecting widespread scepticism about influencer authenticity.
- 53.3% of respondents acknowledge that social media influences consumer behaviour, while 35% remain neutral.
- Fashion and apparel is the category most influenced by social media, accounting for 45% of socially-influenced purchases.

Chi-Square Test Findings

- Test I confirms a statistically significant association between platform preference and purchase behaviour ($\chi^2 = 6.711$, $p = 0.035$). Instagram users exhibit a higher purchase propensity compared to users of other platforms.
- Test II finds no statistically significant association between daily time spent on social media and online purchase frequency ($\chi^2 = 3.275$, $p = 0.513$). Duration of social media usage alone does not drive purchasing.
- Test III establishes a highly significant association between trust in social media influencers and purchase behaviour ($\chi^2 = 15.829$, $p = 0.003$). Higher trust is strongly linked to greater purchase frequency.

SUGGESTIONS

- Social media marketing strategies should be concentrated on Instagram, the dominant platform among Generation Z, utilising Reels, Stories, and shopping integrations to maximise commercial reach.
- Brands should prioritise authentic customer reviews and peer-based testimonials over traditional influencer endorsements, as peer opinions carry greater credibility among Generation Z.
- Considering the low-income profile of the respondents, affordable product bundles, limited-time discounts, and transparent pricing information on social media platforms are likely to have a stronger influence on purchase decisions.
- Influencer partnerships should be built on long-term collaboration and genuine product use, as the Chi-Square analysis confirms that only trusted influencer endorsements translate into purchase behaviour.

- Marketers should focus on the quality and relevance of content rather than increasing posting frequency or targeting users based on passive screen time, since time spent on social media does not significantly predict purchasing frequency.
- Campaigns should target younger Generation Z consumers (below 20) with visual, short-form content in the fashion and apparel categories, as these represent the most socially influenced purchase segment.
- Transparency in advertisements is critical; 40% of respondents are uncertain about the authenticity of social media ads, and 48% believe most advertisements are misleading or exaggerated. Clear, honest communication will help rebuild consumer trust.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of social media marketing on the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers, combining descriptive percentage analysis with Chi-Square tests of statistical independence. The findings establish that social media, particularly Instagram, plays a significant and measurable role in shaping purchasing behaviour among this demographic. The Chi-Square analysis reveals two critical insights. First, the platform on which Generation Z consumers are most active has a statistically significant bearing on whether they make purchases, with Instagram users being more purchase-prone. Second, trust in social media influencers is a powerful predictor of purchase behaviour, with high-trust consumers being substantially more likely to buy, suggesting that the quality and credibility of social media interactions matter far more than their quantity.

The broader findings reinforce the primacy of peer reviews, product information quality, and affordability cues in Generation Z purchase decisions. Scepticism toward formal advertising and influencer endorsements is widespread, and businesses must respond by championing authenticity, transparency, and value in their social media marketing strategies. Fashion and apparel emerge as the category most susceptible to social media influence, offering a clear channel for targeted campaigns. As digital technologies evolve and Generation Z matures into the dominant consumer demographic, the insights from this study offer valuable guidance for marketers, policymakers, and researchers seeking to understand and engage with one of the most digitally sophisticated consumer generations in history.

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