



DIGITAL BHARAT AND THE GEN Z CONSUMER: SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND BUYING INTENTION IN INDIA'S YOUTH-DRIVEN ECONOMY

Dr. Ali Mahdi Naqvi

Assistant Professor, Unity P.G. College, Associated with the University of Lucknow, Lucknow, India. ORCID ID: 0009-0003-5410-8789

Mohammad Absar Ansari

**Research Scholar, Integral Business School, Integral University, Lucknow, India
absaransari@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0009-0006-7559-3279**

ABSTRACT

Generally speaking, Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) is more digitally connected than any previous generation, and its members typically use social media rather than traditional advertising to form views about brands and make purchasing decisions (Dimock, 2019). According to a 2024 Snapchat–Boston Consulting Group report, India's approximately 377 million Gen Z consumers already drive close to US\$860 billion in annual spending, which is expected to rise to US\$2 trillion by 2035 and account for nearly half of India's total consumption by FY30. This chapter examines how Gen Z customers' buying intentions are influenced by social media marketing (SMM), treating brand trust as the factor linking the two. A structural path model connecting SMM, brand trust, and buying intention was tested using data from 200 Indian social media users collected via an actual field survey and a questionnaire consisting of a five-point Likert scale based on the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and the established factors of SMM (Kim & Ko, 2012; Yadav & Rahman, 2017). The results were analysed by SPSS software with descriptive statistics, testing for reliability, Pearson correlation, and Baron and Kenny mediation regression. According to the findings, brand trust only somewhat influences the link between SMM and buying intention, making up less than one-third of the overall effect. Finally, it summarizes how all of this has an impact on youth power, digital inclusion, and India's development path. Last but not least, this chapter also points out which five SMM dimensions- entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word of mouth- are most effective in creating trust and inducing purchase intention in this sample.



Keywords: *Social Media Marketing; Buying intention; Brand Trust; Generation Z; Power and Population Age, Youth; Structural Equation Modeling; Consumer Behaviour; Digital economy*

1. Introduction

In the last fifteen years, there has been more change in brand communication than in the fifty years before. Short-form video, influencer marketing and algorithm-fed feeds are on equal footing with TV, print and mural advertising. Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have become direct discovery, evaluation and buying portals. Gen Z, the group that has grown up in a world of cell phones and constant connectivity (Dimock, 2019), is where this change is most evident (between c. 1997–2012).

Traditional advertising doesn't work as well for this generation compared to social posts that are “entertaining, inviting, authentic” (Duffett, 2017), because they value experiences from their social groups the most, and word-of-mouth from the opinion leader of the brand or the brand itself, or the authenticity of the activity of the brand they like, shapes the decision to buy it (Chetioui et al., 2020). That is the benefit for brands of having such a cheap channel with huge reach, but there is also a dilemma over what social media activity will be effective in psychologically affecting consumer purchase behaviour.

The Indian context sharpens the question significantly. In 2025, India's active internet user base reached 958 million, with younger users playing an important role in digital engagement and short-video consumption. Short-video content was consumed by 588 million users (61% of active internet users), while among urban users, 230 million (56% of the urban active internet base) shopped online. The IMAI–Kantar report also highlights the growing prominence of quick commerce and social commerce alongside traditional online marketplaces (IMAI–Kantar, 2025).). According to a joint Google–Deloitte report, India's e-commerce market is projected to reach \$250 billion by 2030, with the country's approximately 220-million-strong Generation Z cohort expected to account for nearly 45% of online spending. The report also highlights the growing role of creator-led commerce and digital discovery, suggesting a shift from the traditional linear shopping funnel toward an always-on cycle of discovery, validation, and purchase.



Prior research has shown that the core building blocks of social media marketing- entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word of mouth- have a significant impact on brand equity and buying intention in luxury fashion and e-commerce settings (Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012; Yadav & Rahman, 2017). What is less apparent is whether this trend applies to Gen Z especially, and how far brand trust lies between marketing exposure and purchasing choice (Dabbous et al., 2020).

This chapter fills that gap by examining a structural route model in which SMM, through brand trust, impacts buying intention directly or indirectly. It begins by outlining the theoretical foundation and relevant literature on social media marketing, brand trust, and buying intention, from which two hypotheses are planned to be tested. It then describes the research methods and empirical findings, discusses their significance, compares the study's objectives and hypotheses to the results, and concludes with theoretical, managerial, and national-development implications. Along with that, the chapter also includes, in the conclusion, the research chapter's limitations and scope for future research.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) remains one of the most widely used frameworks for describing how consumers make decisions. According to Ajzen (1991), behavioural intention is the strongest single predictor of actual behaviour and is shaped by three inputs: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Taking this into consideration, social media marketing exposure to a brand's content influences both product-related attitudes and subjective norms surrounding a purchase, which all feed into buying intention; this is why buying intention is utilized as the dependent variable here.

2.2 Social Media Marketing Activities

Kim and Ko (2012) defined SMM as a multidimensional construct consisting of five components: entertainment (how enjoyable or fun the content is), interaction (the exchange of views between brand and user, as well as among users themselves), trendiness (how current the content feels),



customization (content tailored to the individual user), and word of mouth. Subsequent research has validated the five-factor structure in both the luxury fashion (Godey et al., 2016) and e-commerce (Yadav & Rahman, 2017) sectors.

2.3 Brand Trust

Brand trust indicates how confident a buyer is in a company's honesty and integrity. Because online transactions do not allow for the physical inspection of a product before purchase, trust serves as the risk-reduction function that a physical store would otherwise provide (Dabbous et al., 2020). Social media may either build trust through communication that is valuable, responsive, and transparent, or erode it if the content appears manipulative. Given that Generation Z is wary of explicitly persuasive advertising (Duffett, 2017), how SMM creates trust is an especially important subject for this demographic.

2.4 Buying Intention

Buying intention measures a buyer's inclination to purchase a specific product or brand in the near future, and it serves as the most commonly used indicator in buyer behaviour research, as it is simple to quantify and corresponds well with real purchasing. In social media marketing research, buying intention is usually considered the ultimate goal of SMM activities, brand equity, and brand trust (Chetioui et al., 2020; Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012).

2.5 Generation Z as a Consumer Cohort and India's Youth Dividend

Generation Z is the most recent generation following Millennials (Dimock, 2019), and the first to be born when their upbringing was permanently intertwined with the smartphone and social media. Gen Z differs significantly from Millennials in its consumption behaviour: members favour snappy, frequent, and visually engaging videos, trust the opinions of peers and social media influencers, expect firms to be authentic, and research products on social media before purchase (Chetioui et al., 2020; Duffett, 2017). Given both the size of this age cohort in India and its rising growth rate, its contribution to the demographic dividend will be pivotal to whether a rising generation of young consumers sustains India's trajectory toward digitally savvy, consumption-oriented growth. These defining features of Generation Z render this cohort especially apt for a research discussion of the SMM framework and for a seminar on youth power and the demographic dividend.



3. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

3.1 Social Media Marketing and Buying Intention

In their influential research on luxury apparel companies, Kim and Ko (2012) concluded that consumers' perception of SMM positively affected brand equity, relationship equity, and value equity, which ultimately affected buying intention. Godey et al. (2016) replicated this pattern of findings in other countries, showing that SMM dimensions such as entertainment and trendiness had a positive and significant effect on buying intention. Yadav and Rahman (2017) created and validated their own SMM scale for the e-commerce context, discovering long-term beneficial effects on both brand equity and purchasing behaviour. Focusing specifically on Gen Z, Duffett (2017) revealed that SMM favourably changed the cognitive, affective, and behavioural components of young consumers' attitudes, while the degree of that effect declined at later stages. This body of work, taken together across different settings, supports the chapter's first hypothesis.

H1: Social media marketing greatly influences the buying intention of Gen Z customers.

3.2 The Mediating Role of Brand Trust

While the direct connection between SMM and buying intention is clearly established, other researchers argue that this relationship is heavily mediated by intermediate factors such as trust. Within social commerce, Dabbous et al. (2020) found that trust mediates the influence of marketing and communication variables on buying intention by lowering the perceived transaction risk. Similarly, Chetoui et al. (2020) demonstrated that how credible and trustworthy young customers perceived social media influencers influenced their opinions toward the company and, ultimately, their buying intent. On this basis, SMM appears to work in part by first building brand trust, which serves as the foundation for the chapter's second hypothesis.

H2: Brand trust plays a crucial role in mediating the connection between social media marketing and buying intention among Gen Z consumers.

4. Conceptual Framework

Building upon the theoretical discussion and hypotheses presented above, this chapter offers a structural path model with social media marketing (SMM) as the independent variable, brand trust as

the mediating variable, and buying intention (PI) as the dependent variable. The model contains a direct channel from SMM to PI (H1) as well as an indirect route from SMM to brand trust and then to PI (H2). This model is depicted in Figure 1.

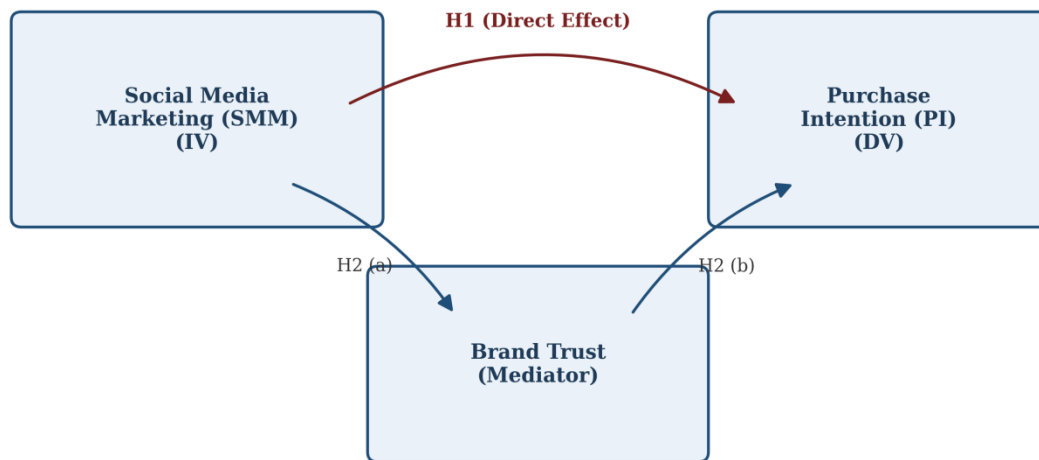


Figure 1. Conceptual Structure Connecting Social Media Marketing, Brand Trust, and Buying Intention

Source: Developed by the author for this study, based on Dabbous et al. (2020), Kim and Ko (2012), and Chetioui et al. (2020).

5. Research Objectives

Building on the conceptual framework above, this chapter pursues four objectives:

- O1:** Determine the level of social media marketing engagement, brand trust, and buying intent among Gen Z consumers.
- O2:** Investigate the connection between social media marketing and buying intention among Gen Z buyers.
- O3:** Examine the role of brand trust as a mediator in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers.



O4: Experimentally evaluate a structural route model that connects social media marketing, brand trust, and buying intention, and draw practical and developmental implications for marketers and policymakers working with Gen Z consumers.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Research Design

This chapter adopts a quantitative, descriptive-cum-causal, cross-sectional survey approach. It is intended to find out how Gen Z consumers regard social media marketing, brand trust, and buying intention at one moment in time, statistically testing the relationships between them.

6.2 Population and Sample

The target population for this research was Indian Gen Z consumers — defined as Indian customers aged 18–26 who use at least one social media channel regularly and follow at least one brand on that channel. The sample consisted of 200 Indian Gen Z respondents, randomly recruited from the population based on the general guideline for sample sizes in regression-based path models and small-to-medium structural models, i.e., ten to twenty observations per estimated path (Hair et al., 2019).

6.3 Sampling Technique

A non-probability sampling method — purposive/convenience sampling — was used. To be considered, a respondent had to be a regular user of social media, within the given age bracket, currently living in India, and to have made at least one purchase in the last six months based on social media promotions/advertisements. This was intended to exclude respondents with only incidental knowledge of the subject.

6.4 Research Instrument and Measures

All data were gathered through a well-designed questionnaire comprising four sections. Section A consists of demographic questions, including gender, age, education, main social media platform, most active time on social media, and monthly spending influenced by social media. The second section consisted of items measuring the five SMM factors- entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word of mouth- adapted from Kim and Ko (2012) and Yadav and Rahman (2017).



The third section measured brand trust using three items adapted from Dabbous et al. (2020), and the final section covered buying intention using four items adapted from Chetioui et al. (2020). All items used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

6.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data were gathered through a standardized questionnaire from 200 respondents across India and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Data were analyzed through descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, and mediation (regression-based) analysis, with results interpreted in comparison to prior comparable research and the wider digital-consumption setting in India outlined in the Introduction.

6.6 Data Analysis Technique

IBM SPSS analysis was conducted at five levels: descriptive statistics for demographic profiles of respondents and the three constructs of interest; Cronbach's alpha testing of internal consistency reliability (conventional threshold of 0.70 adopted. Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994); Pearson correlation coefficients to test relationships among the three constructs; simple linear regression to test the direct relationship between SMM and buying intention (Hypothesis 1); and a four-step mediation process following Baron and Kenny (1986), together with a Sobel test, broadly consistent with the path-analytic logic underlying structural equation modelling (Hair et al., 2019).

6.7 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and subjects were informed about the research before commencing; no identifying data were collected, and responses were treated anonymously and used for academic purposes only, following standard ethical guidelines for questionnaire-based social science research.

7. Data Analysis and Results

7.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The 200 Gen Z respondents sampled were relatively balanced by gender, with women slightly overrepresented, and were concentrated in the 20–24 age group, consistent with the study's focus on college-going and early-career Gen Z individuals. Instagram was the preferred platform, followed by YouTube, in line with platform priorities noted above for this age group and with findings reported



by IMAI-Kantar (2025) that adoption was highest among India's youngest internet users for short-video and social platforms.

7.2 Descriptive Statistics of Study Constructs

Examination of the means and standard deviations of the three composite constructs shows that respondents rated social media marketing activities most favourably ($M = 3.73$), reflecting a positive implied attitude toward brand content. Brand trust ($M = 2.88$) and buying intention ($M = 2.66$) were rated more modestly, indicating that a positive perception of marketing content does not always translate into trust or purchasing intention — consistent with the partial-mediation results described later.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (N = 200)

Construct	No. of Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	5	3.73	0.62	2.00	5.00
Brand Trust (BT)	4	2.88	0.72	1.00	5.00
Buying Intention (PI)	4	2.66	0.72	1.00	4.75

Source: Dataset (N = 200), analysed by the author using SPSS. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

7.3 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of all three constructs. Table 2 shows that all three exceeded the generally accepted threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating that the items comprising each construct fit together well and that the resulting composite scores can be considered reliable for subsequent analyses.

**Table 2. Reliability Statistics (Cronbach's Alpha)**

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	5	0.840	Good
Brand Trust (BT)	4	0.862	Good
Buying Intention (PI)	4	0.863	Good

Source: Dataset ($N = 200$), analysed by the author using SPSS. Alpha > 0.70 is considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

7.4 Correlation Analysis

Before testing the hypotheses using regression, the three constructs were examined for correlations with one another using Pearson correlations. As shown in Table 3, the three constructs were significantly and positively correlated at the 0.01 level, providing initial evidence supporting the theoretically hypothesized relationships and ruling out any unforeseen negative relationship among the study variables.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Matrix

Construct	1. SMM	2. Brand Trust	3. Buying Intention
1. Social Media Marketing (SMM)	1.000		
2. Brand Trust	0.412**	1.000	
3. Buying Intention	0.439**	0.465**	1.000

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), $N = 200$. Source: SPSS output.

7.5 Testing of the Direct Effect: Social Media Marketing and Buying Intention (H1)

Linear regression analysis revealed that social media marketing was a significant, positive predictor of buying intention ($\beta = 0.507$, $t = 6.875$, $p < .001$), explaining approximately 19.3% of the variance in buying intention ($R^2 = 0.193$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.189$, $F(1, 198) = 47.27$, $p < .001$) (see Table 4). Significant statistical support was found for Hypothesis 1.



Table 4. Regression Results: Buying Intention Regressed on Social Media Marketing (H1)

Predictor	B (Unstandardised)	Std. Error	t-value	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	0.767	0.279	2.753	0.006
Social Media Marketing	0.507	0.074	6.875	< 0.001

$R^2 = 0.193$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.189$, $F(1, 198) = 47.27$, $p < .001$. Source: SPSS regression output ($N = 200$).

7.6 Mediation Analysis: The Role of Brand Trust (H2)

The mediating effect of brand trust was examined using the four-step method of Baron and Kenny (1986). Step 1 indicated that SMM significantly predicted buying intention (total effect, path c: $\beta = 0.507$, $p < .001$; see Table 5). Step 2 indicated that SMM strongly predicted brand trust (path a: $\beta = 0.473$, $t = 6.366$, $p < .001$), accounting for 17.0% of the variance. In Step 3, after controlling for SMM, path b revealed a strong association between brand trust and buying intention ($\beta = 0.344$, $t = 5.183$, $p < .001$). In Step 4, the direct effect of SMM on buying intention once brand trust is accounted for (path c': $\beta = 0.344$, $t = 4.524$, $p < .001$) remained significant but was clearly smaller than the total effect, indicating partial rather than full mediation.

A Sobel test confirmed the significant presence of an indirect effect ($a \times b = 0.473 \times 0.344 = 0.163$; $z = 4.019$, $p < .001$), with 32.1 percent of the effect explained by the mediating variable of brand trust. Accordingly, SMM can be said to influence buying intention about one-third through brand trust, with the remainder of its effect being direct. Overall, these findings offer strong support for H2.

Table 5. Mediation Analysis: Brand Trust as Mediator Between SMM and Buying Intention

Path	Description	β (B)	t-value	Sig. (p)	R^2
c	SMM $\rightarrow$ PI (total effect)	0.507	6.875	< 0.001	0.193
a	SMM $\rightarrow$ Brand Trust	0.473	6.366	< 0.001	0.170
b	Brand Trust $\rightarrow$ PI (controlling SMM)	0.344	5.183	< 0.001	0.290*
c'	SMM $\rightarrow$ PI (controlling Brand Trust)	0.344	4.524	< 0.001	0.290*



Note: $*R^2 = 0.290$ refers to the combined model (PI regressed on both SMM and Brand Trust). Indirect effect ($a \times b$) = 0.163; Sobel $z = 4.019$, $p < .001$. VIF = 1.21 (no multicollinearity concern); Durbin-Watson = 2.08 (no autocorrelation concern). Source: SPSS regression output ($N = 200$).

8. Discussion of Findings

The results provide compelling empirical evidence for both relationships established in the conceptual framework. The significant positive influence of SMM on buying intention (H1) reproduces and extends earlier findings from Millennial and general adult samples (Kim & Ko, 2012; Godey et al., 2016; Yadav & Rahman, 2017): an effect previously documented for Millennial or general adult consumers is confirmed here for a Gen Z sample. Given that this generation is often described as skeptical of overt marketing (Duffett, 2017), the findings suggest that content which is genuinely engaging, interactive, current, personalized, and shareable can nonetheless persuade even a discerning audience to purchase. In an Indian context where Gen Z's collective spending is expected to roughly treble as a share of consumption by FY30, even a modest, well-targeted gain in SMM effectiveness carries disproportionate weight.

The partial mediation obtained for brand trust (H2) adds an important degree of nuance: SMM does not influence buying intention through a single, undifferentiated exposure effect. Approximately a third of its influence appears to operate through building brand trust, consistent with Dabbous et al. (2020) and Chetoui et al. (2020). Because mediation is partial, SMM also appears to have a direct persuasive effect operating separately from trust, comparable to rapid emotional reactions, such as the surprise or enjoyment created by humorous or 'trendy' content, occurring before longer-term trust has been established.

Taken together, these findings suggest two priorities for practice: (1) capturing the immediate effect by focusing on content that can be shared easily and quickly, and (2) building trust over time through consistent, transparent and responsive brand communication, directing a meaningful share of marketing resources toward converting engagement into purchase intention.

9. Testing of Objectives and Hypotheses

This section checks, briefly and in turn, how far each stated objective was met and each hypothesis was supported, drawing on the results presented in Section 7.



Objective 1: Determine the level of social media marketing engagement, brand trust, and buying intent among Gen Z consumers.

Achieved. The descriptive statistics in Table 1 point to a moderately high level of perceived social media marketing engagement ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.62$), alongside moderate levels of brand trust ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.72$) and buying intention ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.72$) among the sampled Gen Z respondents.

Objective 2: Investigate the connection between social media marketing and buying intention among Gen Z buyers.

Achieved. Correlation analysis (Table 3) and regression (Table 4) established a significant positive association between social media marketing and buying intention ($r = 0.439$, $p < .001$; $\beta = 0.507$, $p < .001$).

Objective 3: Examine the role of brand trust as a mediator in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers.

Achieved. The four-step mediation analysis together with the Sobel test (Table 5) confirmed that brand trust significantly and partially mediates the connection between social media marketing and buying intention, accounting for roughly 32.1% of the total effect.

Objective 4: Experimentally evaluate a structural route model connecting social media marketing, brand trust, and buying intention, and draw practical and developmental implications for marketers and policymakers working with Gen Z consumers.

Achieved. The proposed path model (Figure 1) was empirically supported through a combination of direct-effect regression and mediation analysis, with both the direct path (H1) and the indirect path via brand trust (H2) statistically confirmed. The corresponding managerial and national-development implications are discussed in Section 10.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Social media marketing greatly influences the buying intention of Gen Z customers.



Supported. The regression results in Table 4 show a significant positive effect of social media marketing on buying intention ($\beta = 0.507$, $t = 6.875$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.193$).

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Brand trust plays a crucial role in mediating the connection between social media marketing and buying intention among Gen Z consumers.

Supported (partial mediation). The mediation results in Table 5 confirm that brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between social media marketing and buying intention (indirect effect = 0.163, Sobel $z = 4.019$, $p < .001$); the direct effect remained significant after controlling for brand trust, indicating partial rather than full mediation.

10. Theoretical, Managerial, and National-Development Implications

10.1 Theoretical Implications

This chapter adds to the SMM literature in three distinct ways. First, it applies a structural, mediation-based approach to Gen Z, extending the established SMM-buying intention relationship previously reported primarily in luxury fashion (Kim & Ko, 2012), e-commerce (Yadav & Rahman, 2017), and general young-consumer contexts (Duffett, 2017). Second, it offers empirical support that brand trust is a partial, not complete, mediator, offering a more detailed explanation than models based on direct effects alone and thereby increasing theoretical richness. Third, by combining the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) with established SMM and trust measures, it provides a replicable structural model that can be applied to other product categories, platforms, and geographical regions.

10.2 Managerial Implications

For marketers, this means that SMM budgets targeting Gen Z should not be driven solely by immediate response metrics (likes, views or shares). While this content has a direct persuasive effect, approximately one-third of the overall impact is realized through the slower-building brand asset of trust. Marketers would be wise to prioritize the SMM dimensions found here to be most effective at building trust: current, consistently updated content (trendiness), genuine two-way engagement with followers (interaction), and content that feels authentic (word of mouth)- rather than relying solely on high-production entertainment that captures attention but does little to build long-term trust.



10.3 Implications for Youth Power and Digital Inclusion

Beyond brand strategy, these findings speak to a larger developmental question: how India's largest and youngest consumer generation is integrating into the digital economy. If brand trust built through authentic, responsive, and consistent digital engagement rather than one-time promotional spending accounts for nearly a third of SMM's effect on purchase behaviour, the same trust-building logic could plausibly extend to Gen Z's engagement with digital public services, financial products, and homegrown e-commerce platforms, not just global or luxury brands. A generation that has learned to distrust manipulative content is also one whose trust, once earned, can be used productively: by domestic MSMEs and D2C brands competing for space in a market where Gen Z is expected to command an increasing share of online spend, and by policymakers seeking to expand digital and financial inclusion among young, first-time earners.

11. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This chapter has some limitations. The cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time, making it unable to establish temporal or causal relationships with the same certainty as longitudinal or experimental designs, and the non-probability sampling approach limits the generalizability of the findings, including across India's diverse urban, semi-urban, and rural digital-access settings. Future research could examine other mediators (e.g., brand involvement, perceived value), moderators (e.g., platform type, frequency of use, urban-rural location), probability-based sampling methods, and measurement models assessed through covariance-based or partial least squares SEM with a discriminant validity test (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

12. Conclusion

This chapter investigated the role of SMM in shaping the buying intentions of Gen Z and whether brand trust mediates that association. Using a structured, self-report questionnaire and a regression-based structural path analysis in SPSS, the study found that SMM significantly and positively influences buying intention directly, while roughly a third of the relationship is mediated by brand trust. These findings suggest that traditional SMM models remain relevant for this generation born into the digital media age, while also highlighting the distinct salience of trust for Gen Z: it is durable, genuine, dialogic engagement, not merely the immediacy of entertainment, that ultimately



translates Gen Z's attention into purchase action. Given the vast size of India's Gen Z population, whose increased consumption will fund a large share of the country's growth, these engagement and trust dynamics are, collectively, part of how the country's youth power will shape India's consumption-led development narrative.

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Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

In the preparation of this chapter, the author(s) used AI-based tools, including ChatGPT, Claude, and QuillBot, in a limited and supportive capacity. These tools were used solely for (i) verification and cross-checking of language, terminology, and internal consistency; (ii) language polishing, including grammar, sentence structure, and readability improvements; and (iii) formatting assistance.



All AI-generated suggestions were reviewed, edited, and verified by the author(s), who take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content, analysis, and conclusions presented in this chapter. No AI tool was used to generate research data, findings, or substantive scholarly claims; the conceptual framework, hypotheses, interpretation of results, and conclusions remain the intellectual work of the author(s).

Primary data for this study were collected through a structured field questionnaire administered to 200 Gen Z respondents in India. Data analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics, reliability (Cronbach's alpha) analysis, Pearson correlation, simple linear regression, and Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation analysis with the Sobel test, as detailed in Section 6 and Section 7 of this chapter.