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Gen Z and Social Media Purchase Behavior: Examining Influencer Recommendations and Meme Content in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar

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Abstract

Gen Z consumers are highly engaged with social media and often use these platforms as part of their shopping journey. This study examined social media factors associated with the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar. Data collection was done through a questionnaire-based survey generating 204 responses from Gen Z individuals and the data were further analyzed using descriptive statistics, visualizations, the Chi-square test, and Cramér's V. Instagram was the most used social media platform, with 60.78% of participants choosing it over other platforms. Influencer trustworthiness was significantly associated with purchasing a product or service solely based on a social media recommendation, $\chi^2(4) = 33.55$, $p < .001$. Similarly, the types of memes participants enjoyed most were significantly associated with their likelihood of purchasing a product after seeing a viral meme, $\chi^2(8) = 16.73$, $p = .033$. As some cells had expected frequencies below 5, a Monte Carlo procedure was additionally performed, which produced a similar significant result ($p \approx .032$). Overall, the findings indicate that Instagram, influencer recommendations, and meme content are relevant elements of the social media environment associated with Gen Z consumers' purchase-related responses. Marketers targeting this demographic may therefore consider using influencers and engaging meme content, particularly on Instagram, as part of their social media strategies.

***Keywords**: Gen Z, Social Media, Purchase Behavior, Influencer Recommendations, Meme Content.*

Introduction

The consumption of social media is rising day by day and the Generation-z seems to be at the fore front with the average individual spending around 2.4 hours per day on social media. There are numerous social media platforms, among which Instagram and Facebook are particularly favored by Generation Z. (Dar & Nagrath, 2023).

The young demographic born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s is referred to as 'Generation Z' or Gen Z (Trivedi, 2023). A significant57% of internet users in India are Gen Z indicating a strong digital presence, with a higher internet engagement compared to other age groups.(Swazan et al., 2022). The gen-z uses social media to interact with their social circle while also following celebrities, influencers, and all kinds of famous people they look up to, more or less gen-z's day to day activities are influenced by social media shaping their consumer behavior. The key defining characteristics of this young generation encompasses beingdigitally savvy, globally connected, while strongly valuing equality, transparency and ethical practices (Gurjar & Singodiya, 2024). Demonstrating technological proficiency, Gen Z values a seamless online shopping experience choosing e-commerce over traditional shopping,

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preferring digital mode of payments over the traditional modes and also investing time on researching products online before buying products (Binani et al., 2023).

As Gen Z are preferring online buying over physical stores, it becomes essential for brands and marketers to upgrade their existing strategies to engage this specific audience better. In this regard, brands can collaborate with influencers for product recommendations on social media to increase customer engagement and sales (Said et al., 2023). Similarly, memes are gaining much popularity and virality on social media, which has significantly influenced Gen Z's buying behavior. As such, brands should invest in humorous memes to market their products effectively (Vasile et al., 2021).

Social media sites are evolving constantly with updated features that attract younger generations like Gen Z. This dynamic characteristic makes it hard for brands and marketers to create content that goes viral and engages the target audience while captivating their attention, despite having much knowledge about social media trends. Various researchers have investigated the influence of social media on different demographics worldwide, determining its significant role in purchasing decisions and consumer behavior. However, there is a lack of information and adequate research on the influence of social media on Gen Z in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (earlier known as Aurangabad) in Maharashtra. Hence, this study aims to fill this gap by providing insight into the latest purchasing behavior of Gen Z on social media.

Literature Review

- **Social Media Platforms**

In Indonesia, social media influencers play a key role in shaping the consumer behavior of Generation Z, with 85% of participants acknowledging this influence and 75% identifying Instagram as their primary platform. It has also been observed that authenticity and transparency are the most important qualities that help in building trust in a brand. On the other hand, a lack of consistency in brand endorsements and a lack of financial transparency can gradually weaken consumer confidence. Sponsored content has also been found effective, with the partnerships perceived as authentic are preferred by 60% of users (Erwin et al., 2023).

Gen Z's behavior on Instagram, highlights that influencers' intention to purchase a product is influenced by credibility, parasocial interaction (PSI), and confidence. Physical attractiveness of influencers is less influential whereas credibility and PSI are stronger predictor of purchase intention among Gen Z. Therefore brands should be more focused on building a strong relationship with followers through PSI, and enhance credibility as well as confidence rather than the physical appeal (Huang & Copel, 2020).

Millennials and Generation Z's green buying habits are largely influenced by social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and X. These genration of youngsters, especially Gen Z, are often seen behaving considerate towards their environmental responsibility, given that such behaviors are believed to be the social norm while being supported by their social media followers and also the influencers. Rather than focusing on showing a materialistic lifestyle for social status, Generation Z should be encouraged to develop the habit of buying green products by understanding the advantages of sustainable living over a materialistic approach towards life. Businesses and marketers can use social media to target and involve Generation Z in promoting environmentally conscious consumer choices (Sethuraman et al., 2023).

Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube are the social media platforms that consistently influence the attitudes of younger individuals. Hence, by properly utilizing the social media marketing, Business can efficiently reach and engage with this demographic. Social media marketing campaigns particularly on designed for a low budget, such as pay-per click advertising on platforms like Facebook, can generate successful results, while factors such as product quality, quick response time, and convenience in e-commerce exhibit a positive effect on consumers' attitudes towards purchases (Migkos et al., 2024).

- **Social media Influencer**

Generation Z and Millennials are most often guided by recommendations and reviews made by influencers while the credibility and authenticity of these influencers motivate consumers to purchase their recommended products. Influencers can effectively build emotional connections with their followers on social media platforms; thereby influencing the formation of favorable perceptions and inclinations towards the products they promote. Through creating attractive content on social media, such as

relatable stories, honest reviews, and captivating images, influencers can better connect with their target audience and successfully influence their ability and willingness to purchase the promoted products. On the contrary, the dissatisfaction of a consumer with the quality of a company's products and services has the potential to reduce the extent of the influence that social media influencers can exert over their followers; thus, despite their trust in the influencers, consumers can consider switching to competing brands of the products promoted by the influencers (Hapsari et al., 2024).

Gen Z, being more digital proactive and susceptible to the effects of social media marketing strategies, is more influenced by the endorsements of their products made by social media influencers. Social media influencers have attractive features such as attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness that significantly impact the purchase intentions of Gen Z. In addition, the brand image mediates the relationships between the credibility attributes of influencers and the purchase intentions of Gen Z. Therefore, by selecting appropriate influencers, organizations can target Gen Z and have a competitive advantage, especially in the cosmetics industry where social media influencers play a critical role (Putri Nugroho et al., 2022).

- **Memes**

Memes on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok significantly impact Gen Z. Humour and relevance make these memes impactful, and these memes are easy to replicate making them interactive. These memes play a significant role in creating marketing strategies that grabs attention, and create appeal among consumers. Factors such as virality, evolution of the format, and embedding strategies help in keeping Gen Z engaged in social interaction and processing the information. In this digital era, marketing strategies that are created using memes and media factors becomes key in shaping Gen Z consumer behavior on social media (Bowo et al., 2024).

Authenticity, transparency, storytelling, user-generated content, emotional appeal, co-creation, influencer partnerships, personalization, collaborations, and interactivity are key strategies for influencing Gen Z through content marketing. On social media platforms, the right blend of personalized experiences and interactive content should be implemented into content marketing strategies to enhance engagement with Gen Z consumers (Singh, 2023).

Social media not only influences consumers but also marketers. Companies can enhance business performance by utilizing social media as a marketing strategy, despite the rise in social media consumers, most businesses fail to utilize social media to its full extent while executing marketing activities and strategies. Social media can lead to repeat purchases, create connections, and strengthen customer loyalty. In modern times, consumers, especially Generation Z, heavily rely on online platforms like blogs, Facebook, and YouTube to share their opinions about products and services (Chivandi et al., 2020).

Research Objectives

- To examine the most popular social media platforms among Gen Z consumers in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar.
- To examine the association between the trustworthiness of social media influencers and the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar.
- To examine the association between the type of memes and the purchase likelihood of Gen Z consumers in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar.

Hypotheses

H_1: Instagram is the most popular social media platform among Gen Z consumers.

H_2: Trustworthiness in social media influencers' product recommendations is significantly associated with the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers.

H_3: There is a significant association between meme types and the purchase behavior of Gen Z consumers.

Research Methodology

- **Research Design**

In this study, a quantitative research method is used. A survey using a structured questionnaire created with Google Forms was conducted to collect primary data from the population of Gen Z consumers in the city of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar. The Google Form was further distributed through

social media platforms, email, and in person. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic data, and the numerical data were presented with the help of graphs, charts, and tables. To test the hypotheses, the Chi-square test was used along with Cramér's V test to assess the strength of the association. The Monte Carlo test was also used as an additional test where required to verify the significance of the association. Secondary data were collected from existing literature relevant to the study, journal articles, websites, books, etc.

- **Sampling**

According to the estimated population for 2026, the population of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar city is approximately 1,768,000 (Census2011.co.in, n.d.). It is very challenging to estimate the population of Gen Z in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar as the 2021 Census was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the estimated total population of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar city is considered as the population size for this study. Using Cochran's formula, a minimum sample size of approximately 196 respondents was obtained at a 95% confidence level, assuming a population proportion of 50% and a 7% margin of error. A final sample of 204 respondents was considered for this research, which exceeded the indicative minimum sample size. The use of a 7% margin of error instead of the conventional 5% was considered appropriate to complete the research within the specified time frame while obtaining an adequate number of eligible Gen Z respondents. At the same time, Generation Z exhibits a high level of similarity in online consumer behavior (Grigoreva et al., 2021), which provides contextual support for examining this population as a relatively similar consumer group. Snowball sampling was used to gather data as it is suitable for accessing a hard-to-reach audience that exhibits similar behavioral patterns. The Google Form was initially distributed to accessible Gen Z individuals such as family members, friends, and colleagues, who were further asked to refer others who met the study criteria.

Results

A total of 225 people participated in this research survey and after screening 21 respondents were filtered out as few of them were not from Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar and other few didn't belong to the gen Z demographics fitted for this research. Thus data from 204 suitable respondents was organised and tabulated in Ms-Excel, processing the data gave the following results –

- **Age**

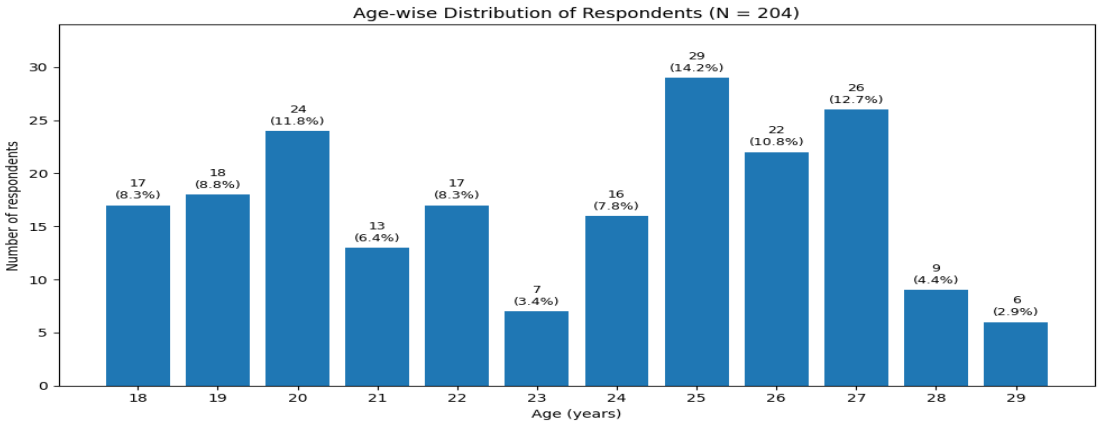


Fig. 6.1.

The desired age group for this study was finalized to be between 18 and 29 years, which represents the Gen Z demographic. The highest participation was from individuals aged 25 years, comprising 14.2%, followed by individuals aged 27 years, comprising 12.7% of the respondents. The least participation in this survey was found among 29-year-old individuals, with just 2.9% of the respondents. The rest of the age distribution is presented in Fig 6.1.

- **Gender**

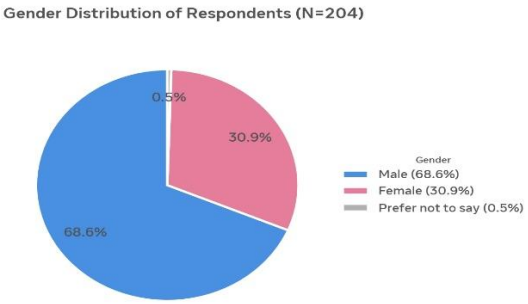


Fig - 6.2

About 140 participants making 68.6% of the total respondents were male and 63 participant i.e. 30.9% were female while just 1 individual respondent 'Prefer not to say' as shown in the fig 6.2.

- **City**

Every single respondent selected for this study is from the Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar city which is categorized as the urban area.

- **Educational Status**

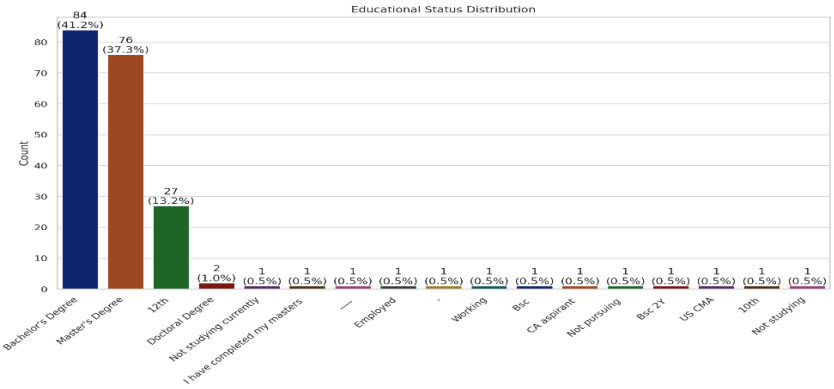


Fig. 6.3.

It is found out that the highest participating respondents in this research were currently pursuing Bachelor's degree comprising of 84 individuals making it 42.2% of the total number of respondents followed be individuals pursuing Master's degree (37.3%) and 12th std (13.2%) respectively.

- **Employment Status**

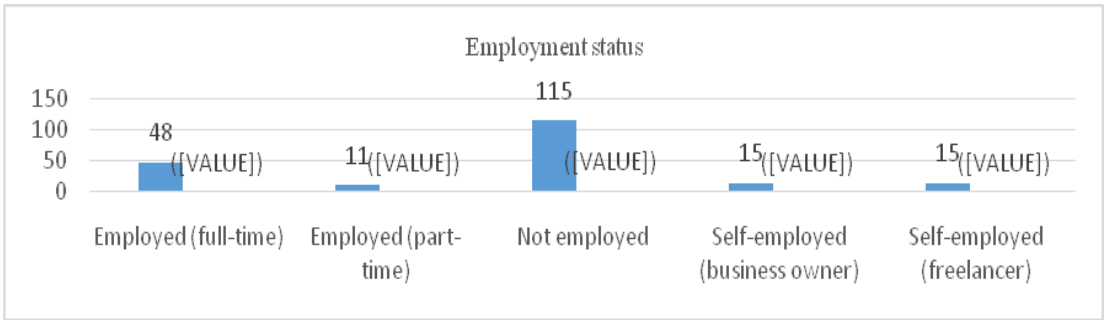


Fig. 6.4.

In this research 56.37% of the total participants i.e. 115 respondents were found out to be unemployed while the part time employed participants responded the least with the count being just 11 (5.39%). A more detailed Employment distribution of the respondents is shown in fig 6.4.

- **Hypothesis Testing**
  - ***Instagram is the most popular social media platform among Gen Z consumers.***

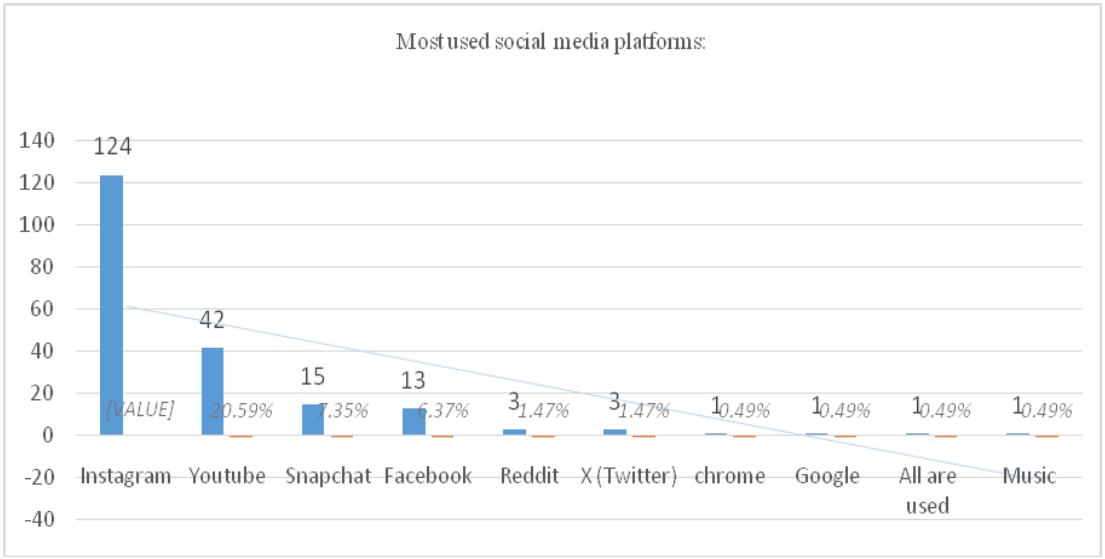


Fig. 6.6.1a

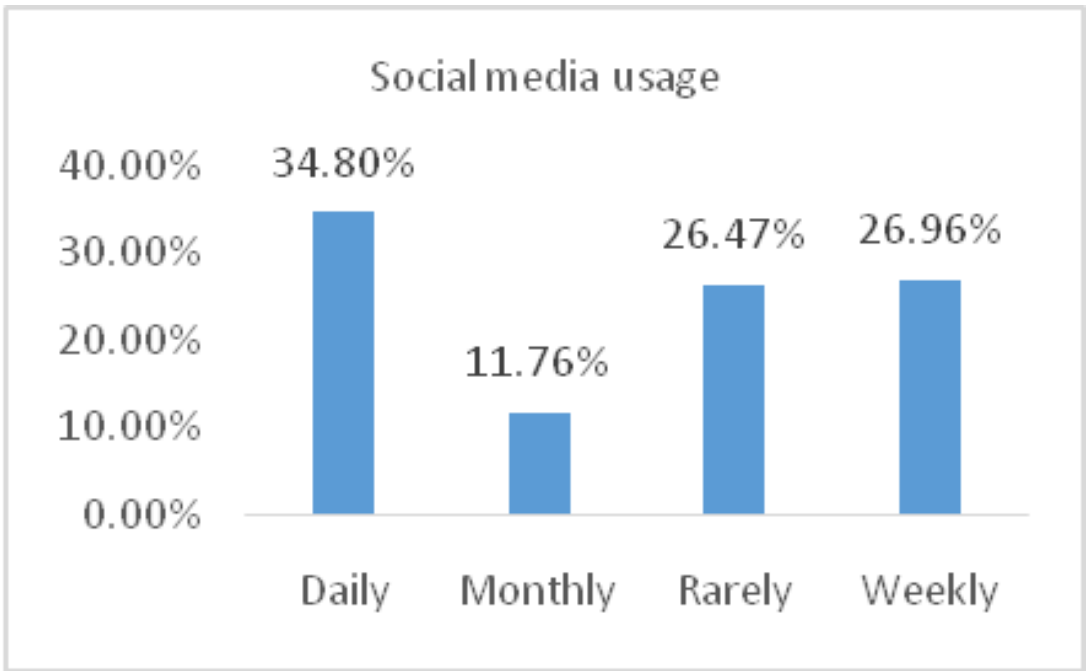


Fig. 6.6.1b

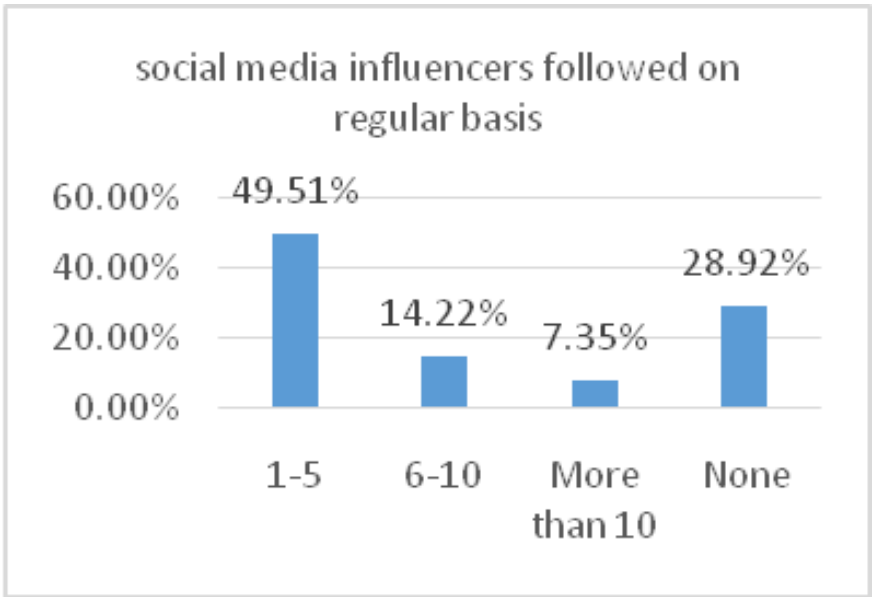


Fig. 6.6.1c

Instagram is found out to be the most used social media platform among the gen Z of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar city with a massive 60.78% of participants choosing it over all the other platforms. Youtube, being the second highest voted social media platform, is only 20% of the total respondents which shows that Instagram is certainly the Rank 1 choice of Gen Z in the city of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar. Snapchat (7.35%) followed by Facebook (6.37%) are the next most popular social media platforms while the survey result as shown in the fig 6.5.1a., also indicates that very few individuals use Reddit, X (previously Twitter), Chrome and Google to socialize online. With this result, *H1: Instagram is the most popular social media platform among Gen Z consumers* is Accepted.

- **Null Hypothesis (H0) - Trustworthiness in social media influencers' product recommendations is not significantly associated with the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers.**

Alternate Hypothesis (H_2): Trustworthiness in Social media influencers' product recommendations is significantly assosiated with the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers.

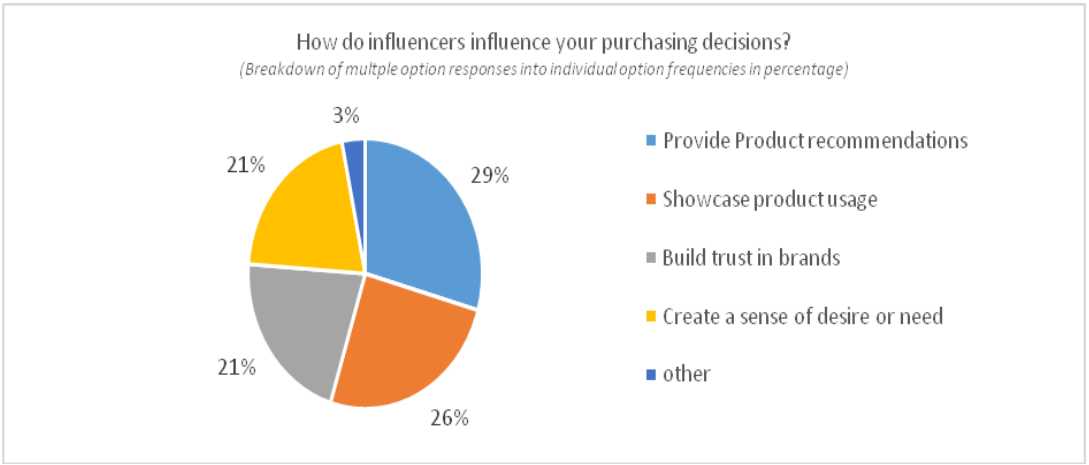


Fig. 6.6.2

Contingency table showing the cross tabulation –

Observed Value (O)						
	Agree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Strongly Agree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Grand Total**
No	20	27	61	5	15	**128**
Yes	31	4	32	9	0	**76**
Grand Total	**51**	**31**	**93**	**14**	**15**	**204**
Expected Value (E)						
	Agree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Strongly Agree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Grand Total**
No	32	19.451	58.353	8.784313725	9.411764706	**128**
Yes	19	11.549	34.647	5.215686275	5.588235294	**76**
Grand Total	**51**	**31**	**93**	**14**	**15**	**204**
(O-E)^2/E						
	Agree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Strongly Agree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Grand Total**
No	4.5	2.92981	0.1201	1.630295868	3.318014706	**128**
Yes	7.5789474	4.93442	0.2022	2.745761462	5.588235294	**76**
Grand Total	**51**	**31**	**93**	**14**	**15**	**204**

Chi square (X^2)	33.5478
Degree of freedom (df)	4
p-value	0.00000092 *(calculated using Ms-Excel Formula =CHISQ.DIST.RT)*
Cramér's V	0.406

- **Row:** *Have you ever purchased a product or service solely based on a recommendation you saw on social media?*
- **Column:** *Do you find social media influencers' trustworthy sources for product recommendations?*

As the p-value = 0.00000092 is less than the significance level (α) = 0.05, as shown in Table 6.2.2, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H2) is accepted. The Cramér's V = 0.406 indicates a moderate association. Thus, the findings support the hypothesis that *"Trustworthiness in social media influencers' product recommendations is significantly associated with the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers."*

- **Null hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant association between meme types and the purchase behavior of Gen Z consumers.**

Alternate hypothesis (H_3):There is a significant association between meme types and the purchase behavior of Gen Z consumers.

Contingency table showing the cross tabulation –

Table: 6.6.2

Obeserved value (O)						
Row Labels	**Neutral**	**Somewhat Likely**	**Somewhat Unlikely**	**Very Likely**	**Very Unlikely**	**Grand Total**
Cultural	9	4	6	4	2	25
Humorous	56	31	19	9	35	150
Political	12	7	3	6	1	29
Grand Total	77	42	28	19	38	204
Expected value (E)						
Row Labels	**Neutral**	**Somewhat Likely**	**Somewhat Unlikely**	**Very Likely**	**Very Unlikely**	**Grand Total**
Cultural	9.43627451	5.147058824	3.431372549	2.32843137	4.656862745	25
Humorous	56.61764706	30.88235294	20.58823529	13.9705882	27.94117647	150
Political	10.94607843	5.970588235	3.980392157	2.70098039	5.401960784	29
Grand Total	77	42	28	19	38	204

(O-E)^2/E						
Row Labels	**Neutral**	**Somewhat Likely**	**Somewhat Unlikely**	**Very Likely**	**Very Unlikely**	**Grand Total**
Cultural	0.020170614	0.255630252	1.92280112	1.20001032	1.515810114	25
Humorous	0.006737968	0.000448179	0.122521008	1.76848297	1.783281734	150
Political	0.101474759	0.177484787	0.241475901	4.02947404	3.587078752	29
Grand Total	77	42	28	19	38	204
Chi square (X^2)		16.73288252				
Degree of freedom (df)		8				
p-value		0.033013909 *(calculated using Ms-Excel Formula =CHISQ.DIST.RT)*				
Monte Carlo		p ≈ 0.032				
Cramér's V		0.203				

- **Row:** *What types of memes do you enjoy the most?*
- **Column:** *How likely are you to purchase a product if you see a viral meme about it?*

Table - 6.6.3

As the p-value = 0.033013909 is less than the significance level (α) = 0.05, as shown in Table 6.2.3, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H3) is accepted. Since some expected frequencies were below 5, a Monte Carlo procedure was additionally performed as a robustness check, which also indicated a significant association (p ≈ 0.032). The Cramér's V = 0.203 indicates a small association. Thus, the findings support the hypothesis that *"There is a significant association between meme types and the purchase behavior of Gen Z consumers."*

Findings

- In the city of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, most of the Gen Z use social media on a daily basis, with almost 35% of the total participants confirming it (Fig. – 6.6.1b.).
- Instagram, with 60.78% of the votes, has been the clear favorite social media platform among Gen Z of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Fig. – 6.6.1a.).
- Gen Z of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar tends to follow at least 1–5 social media influencers regularly (Fig. – 6.6.1c.).
- 76 participants, i.e., roughly 37% of the total respondents, have purchased a product or service solely based on recommendations they watched on social media (Table – 6.2.2.).
- The products recommended by social media influencers are trusted by Gen Z in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, with trustworthiness being significantly associated with their purchase decisions. (Table – 6.2.2.).
- Social media influencers provide product recommendations (29%), showcase product usage (26%), build trust in brands (21%), and create a sense of desire (21%), thus influencing the purchase decisions of Gen Z in the city of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Fig. – 6.6.2.).
- 150 participants, which is about 73% of the total respondents, chose humorous memes, making them the favourite meme type among Gen Z of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Table – 6.6.3.).
- This research shows that the type of meme is significantly associated with the purchase behavior of Gen Z in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Table 6.6.3).

Conclusion

The goal of this research is to understand the role of social media in influencing the consumer behavior of Gen Z in the city of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, formerly known as Aurangabad. Social media platforms, social media influencers, and meme culture are among the key factors associated with the consumer behavior of Gen Z. A total of 204 Gen Z individuals participated in the survey conducted for this study. This research highlights that Gen Z consumers of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar spend significantly more time on Instagram compared to other social media platforms while following 1–5 influencers regularly. Social media influencers and their product recommendations are associated with Gen Z's purchase decisions. Similarly, humorous memes are also associated with Gen Z consumers' likelihood of purchasing products or services. The author thus recommends that marketers create humorous memes and utilize social media influencers to promote their products and services on Instagram, especially when targeting the Gen Z demographic. Further research should be conducted to

study other factors that could influence Gen Z's purchase decisions, such as price, quality, and types of products, thereby helping marketers and brands promote their products and services in new ways.

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