



EXPLORING GEN Z CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTION AND BRANDING AS TRIGGERS OF IMPULSE BUYING

Alberta Ingriana¹, Benediktus Rolando²

^{1, 2}Management Department, Faculty of Business Management, Universitas Dinamika Bangsa, Indonesia

E-mail: ¹⁾ alberta@unama.ac.id, ²⁾ benediktus@unama.ac.id

ABSTRACT

As content and commerce continue to merge in the digital age, Generation Z has emerged as a hyper-connected and emotionally responsive consumer group, particularly vulnerable to impulse buying. This systematic literature review synthesizes findings from 46 empirical studies published between 2019 and 2024 to examine how Gen Z perceives social media branding and promotional strategies, and how these perceptions influence unplanned purchasing behavior. Results reveal that emotionally immersive content, influencer endorsements, and algorithm-driven advertisements play a significant role in bypassing rational decision-making. Emotional states such as boredom, loneliness, and fear of missing out (FOMO) frequently act as triggers, especially on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Thematic and bibliometric analyses highlight recurring themes including emotional branding, digital identity, and social validation. However, the literature still lacks cultural diversity, longitudinal perspectives, and coverage of emerging platforms. This review offers a deeper understanding of Gen Z's impulse buying psychology and urges marketers, educators, and policymakers to adopt digital strategies that are not only effective but also ethical, inclusive, and emotionally responsible.

Keywords: Branding, Consumer Behavior, Generation Z, Impulse Buying, Social Media

1. INTRODUCTION

Impulse buying has long been a subject of interest in consumer behavior research, referring to unplanned purchases triggered by emotional reactions rather than rational thought. Traditionally observed in brick-and-mortar retail environments, this behavior is now undergoing a radical transformation as it adapts to the mechanisms of the digital age. With the proliferation of e-commerce, personalized advertising, and instant transactions, impulse buying has evolved into a digitally mediated phenomenon, particularly among younger generations who spend a substantial portion of their time online. At the forefront of this transformation is Generation Z (Gen Z), a demographic cohort born approximately between 1995 and 2012. This group represents not only the first true digital natives but also one of the most influential consumer segments in the global market today.

Unlike previous generations, Gen Z has grown up immersed in a digital ecosystem characterized by constant connectivity, rapid access to information, and highly visual, interactive media. Their social, cultural, and economic lives are heavily influenced by platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where they interact with peers, consume entertainment, and engage with brands simultaneously. These platforms have become more than just tools for social interaction; they now function as dynamic marketplaces where content and commerce are seamlessly integrated. For Gen Z, the distinction between entertainment and advertising is increasingly blurred,

especially when influencers, product placements, and sponsored content are delivered in a format that mirrors authentic user-generated media.

This convergence of media and marketing has a profound impact on the way Gen Z experiences branding and promotions. Influencer culture, aesthetic storytelling, and algorithm-driven content curation have created a new paradigm in which advertising no longer feels intrusive but rather embedded within everyday life. As a result, Gen Z consumers are constantly exposed to subtle marketing cues that are designed to evoke emotional responses and prompt immediate purchasing decisions. Visuals that highlight exclusivity, urgency (such as countdowns or “limited stock” labels), and social validation (likes, shares, comments) serve as powerful psychological stimuli that increase susceptibility to impulse buying. Importantly, this behavior is not merely transactional it is often linked to deeper emotional needs such as identity expression, social belonging, and emotional regulation.

Various psychological constructs have been used to explain why Gen Z is particularly vulnerable to impulsive purchasing in the context of social media. One such factor is the fear of missing out (FOMO), a common phenomenon among digital users who fear being excluded from experiences or trends that others are enjoying. Promotional campaigns that emphasize scarcity, exclusivity, or trending popularity directly appeal to this fear, prompting consumers to act quickly. Moreover, emotional states such as stress, boredom, or loneliness can also drive individuals to seek gratification through spontaneous purchases. In these scenarios, buying behavior is less about product utility and more about achieving emotional relief or boosting self-esteem processes that can be easily exploited by targeted digital marketing.

While numerous studies have touched on these dynamics, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding of how Gen Z specifically interprets and responds to social media branding and promotions as impulse-buying triggers. The current literature is fragmented across different disciplines such as marketing, psychology, and media studies, often focusing on isolated variables rather than offering a holistic view. Furthermore, many of these studies are geographically limited, leaving gaps in our understanding of cultural variations in Gen Z's digital behavior. As such, a systematic synthesis of existing research is essential to identify consistent patterns, contradictions, and underexplored areas. Doing so will not only advance theoretical knowledge but also inform ethical marketing practices in an age where digital persuasion is both ubiquitous and increasingly sophisticated.

To ground this analysis in local context, a report from GoodStats titled “Indonesia Gen Z Report 2024” presents valuable empirical insights into Gen Z's online shopping priorities. According to the report, the three most important factors for Gen Z when making online purchases are price, product quality, and promotions or discounts. These preferences reflect a pragmatic yet value-driven consumer mindset, which is consistently leveraged by digital marketing strategies on social platforms. For example, social media ads often highlight affordability, while influencers frame certain products as high quality or trustworthy. Promotions such as flash sales and voucher codes are frequently delivered through interactive stories, reels, and posts that demand rapid engagement, subtly reinforcing the impulsivity of the transaction.

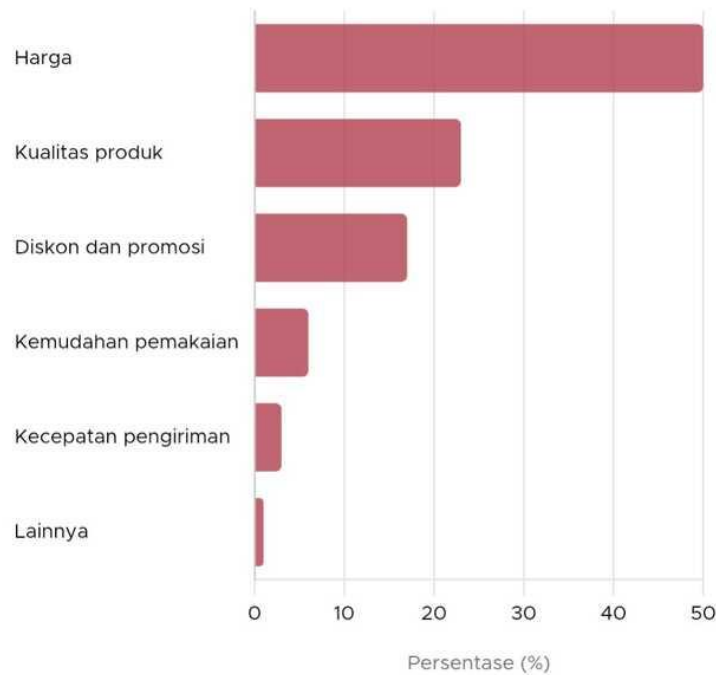


Figure 1. Key Factors Gen Z Considers When Shopping Online
Source: *GoodStats, 2024*

This data supports the argument that social media is not simply a promotional platform but a behavioral trigger that exploits psychological susceptibilities unique to Gen Z. The integration of value-driven messages with visually engaging and socially validated content transforms traditional advertising into an immersive experience that often bypasses conscious decision-making. This phenomenon reinforces the notion that modern consumer behavior particularly among younger generations must be analyzed within the broader context of digital culture, media influence, and emotional engagement.

In sum, the background reveals that Gen Z's impulse buying behavior is significantly shaped by their interaction with social media, where branding and promotional strategies tap into their emotional needs and social habits. These influences are reinforced by visually persuasive, algorithmically tailored, and socially validated content that encourages spontaneous purchases. Despite widespread observations of this trend, academic research has yet to consolidate findings across disciplines and contexts into a comprehensive framework. Therefore, a systematic literature review that synthesizes how social media promotion and branding strategies drive Gen Z's impulse buying is not only timely but critical for advancing theoretical insight and informing responsible marketing practices in a digital-first world.

This systematic literature review is guided by the following key research questions:

1. How do Gen Z consumers perceive social media promotions and branding?
2. In what ways do these perceptions contribute to impulse buying behavior?
3. What theoretical and methodological approaches have been used to examine this relationship?
4. What gaps exist in the current body of literature that should be addressed in future research?

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These questions aim to uncover not only behavioral trends but also the cognitive and emotional interpretations Gen Z consumers develop in response to branding cues online.

The primary objective of this study is to conduct a systematic literature review that synthesizes existing empirical research on the relationship between social media promotions, branding strategies, and impulse buying behavior in Gen Z consumers. Specific objectives include:

- To identify and analyze the key emotional, psychological, and social drivers of impulse buying in Gen Z consumers as influenced by social media.
- To examine how branding strategies, including influencer marketing and visual aesthetics, impact Gen Z's purchasing behavior.
- To assess the theoretical models and research methods employed in current studies.
- To highlight patterns, contradictions, and research gaps in the existing literature.
- To provide actionable insights for marketers, educators, and policymakers aimed at fostering ethical and effective digital marketing practices.

This study offers both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the literature on consumer psychology, digital marketing, and generational studies by offering a consolidated view of Gen Z's impulse buying behavior in response to social media branding. While impulse buying has been extensively studied, few works have focused exclusively on Gen Z and the evolving nature of digital platforms. This review fills that void by offering a critical synthesis of recent empirical findings.

Practically, the insights generated by this study can inform businesses and marketers seeking to design ethical, effective, and resonant promotional campaigns. By understanding the specific emotional and social triggers that influence Gen Z's buying decisions, brands can build more authentic and sustainable relationships with their consumers. The findings also highlight the importance of transparency, consent, and psychological safety in marketing to younger audiences.

In terms of policy, the study underscores the need for regulatory frameworks that protect vulnerable consumers from exploitative marketing tactics. As digital advertising becomes increasingly personalized and persuasive, there is a growing imperative to ensure that consumers, especially adolescents and young adults are not manipulated into making impulsive decisions that could affect their financial and emotional well-being.

Ultimately, this study provides a comprehensive foundation for future research and strategy development at the nexus of consumer behavior, digital marketing, and generational dynamics. It calls for a rethinking of how marketing success is measured—not only in terms of conversions and engagement, but also in ethical responsibility and long-term consumer satisfaction.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Search Strategy

This systematic literature review adopted a comprehensive and structured approach to identify relevant academic works exploring the relationship between Generation Z's (Gen Z) perceptions of social media promotion, branding, and impulse buying behavior. The Scopus database was utilized as the sole academic repository due to its rigorous indexing of peer-reviewed journals and wide coverage of disciplines pertinent to marketing, digital behavior, psychology, and consumer studies.



The review focused on publications between 2019 and 2024 to ensure the relevance and contemporaneity of the selected studies, given that Gen Z's interaction with digital media has become more pronounced in this period. The search strategy was implemented using a well-formulated Boolean search string applied to the article titles, abstracts, and keywords fields:

("Generation Z" OR "Gen Z") AND ("impulse buying" OR "impulsive purchasing") AND ("social media" AND "promotion" OR "marketing") AND ("branding" AND "consumer behavior")

To maintain methodological rigor and reduce bias, the search was limited to English-language journal articles, with additional filters set to exclude conference papers, editorials, book chapters, and grey literature. Only articles with accessible full text were retained for screening, ensuring data extraction completeness and analytical depth. All search steps and results were recorded in a detailed logbook to promote transparency and replicability of the review process.

2.2. Study Selection Process

The study selection process was systematically structured to identify the most relevant and high-quality literature addressing the relationship between Generation Z consumers, social media promotion, branding, and impulse buying behavior. Following the initial database search using the defined keywords and inclusion criteria, a four-stage selection process was conducted: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The Boolean-enhanced search strategy initially retrieved a substantial number of records from the Scopus database. In the identification phase, duplicates and irrelevant titles were removed to refine the dataset. This was followed by an abstract screening stage, where each article was evaluated for thematic alignment with the research topic.

Subsequent to abstract screening, articles that qualified were subjected to full-text review to determine methodological quality and conceptual relevance. This step helped eliminate studies that, despite appearing relevant on the surface, lacked empirical grounding or failed to address the primary variables under investigation. The final inclusion of articles was guided by a consistent application of the predetermined criteria. The refined dataset derived from this structured selection process formed the analytical basis for further synthesis and analysis.

2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In line with the objectives of this review, rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. These criteria served to filter studies based on relevance, methodological robustness, and accessibility.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

| Criteria | Inclusion | Exclusion |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Publication Year | 2019 – 2024 | Outside 2019 – 2024 |
| Language | English | Non-English |
| Article Types | Peer-reviewed empirical journal articles (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) | Editorials, book chapters, theoretical papers without data, conference papers |

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|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Publication Field | Journals related to marketing, consumer behavior, digital media, or social commerce | Non-marketing or unrelated behavioral research |
| Subject Focus | Studies focusing on Gen Z, social media promotion, branding, and impulse buying behavior | Studies on other generations or unrelated topics |
| Access | Open Access or accessible full-text articles | Closed access or unavailable full texts |

These inclusion parameters ensured the final dataset represented high-quality, thematically relevant empirical research suitable for answering the study’s research questions.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this systematic literature review followed the PRISMA 2020 framework, which provided a structured and transparent roadmap for the identification, screening, and selection of relevant academic sources. This methodology enabled a rigorous evaluation of a broad literature corpus while ensuring that only high-quality and thematically aligned studies were included in the final synthesis. The process began with the initial identification of 1,248 articles retrieved from the Scopus database using a comprehensive and Boolean-enhanced search string designed to capture studies relating to Generation Z, impulse buying, social media promotions, and branding. The identification phase involved the removal of 112 duplicate records to avoid redundancy, followed by an automatic exclusion of 87 irrelevant articles through Scopus's filtering system. An additional 93 records were excluded for reasons such as domain mismatch or the absence of relevant keywords, leaving 956 records for further examination.

During the screening stage, each article’s title and abstract were thoroughly reviewed to assess its thematic alignment with the research focus. This resulted in the exclusion of 123 articles that lacked direct relevance to the central themes of Gen Z consumer behavior, branding, and social media marketing, leaving 833 articles deemed suitable for full-text retrieval. However, due to access limitations, 123 full-text documents could not be retrieved and were therefore removed from further consideration. This left a total of 710 full-text articles which were evaluated against a pre-defined set of eligibility criteria. The criteria considered both the conceptual alignment of the study with the research questions and the methodological clarity and robustness of the research design. After this stage of rigorous eligibility assessment, 46 articles were ultimately included in the final synthesis and bibliometric analysis. The entire process is illustrated in the PRISMA flowchart (Figure 2), which provides a visual representation of the multi-phase selection process and ensures the transparency and reproducibility of this systematic review.

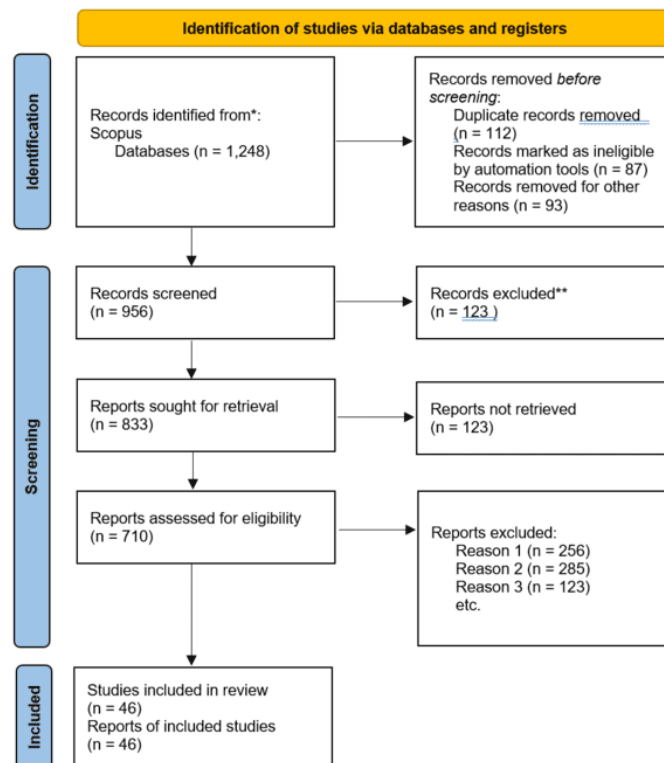


Figure 2. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process
Source: Author's own work

2.5. Quality Assessment Protocol

To guarantee that only methodologically sound and reliable studies were included in the final synthesis, a systematic quality assessment was conducted using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), which is specifically designed to appraise qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research. The MMAT framework enabled the evaluation of each study based on key dimensions such as the clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of methodological design, adequacy of sampling strategies, validity and reliability of measurement instruments, and the depth and coherence of the data analysis. Each article was independently reviewed by two researchers to ensure consistency and objectivity in the scoring process. A standardized scoring sheet was utilized, assigning values on a scale of 0 to 2 for each criterion, where 0 indicated that the criterion was not met, 1 indicated that it was partially met, and 2 indicated full compliance.

To qualify for inclusion in the final review, studies were required to achieve a minimum threshold of 70% across all criteria, which corresponded to a score of at least 14 out of 20. Discrepancies between reviewers' assessments were resolved through consensus discussions and, when necessary, consultation with a third reviewer. This rigorous evaluation process ensured that only studies with strong methodological underpinnings contributed to the synthesis, thereby enhancing the overall validity and credibility of the review findings. Additionally, this approach minimized the risk of bias and methodological weaknesses that could compromise the integrity of the research outcomes.

2.6. Data Extraction Process

Following the completion of the quality assessment, a structured data extraction process was undertaken to systematically gather relevant information from each of the 46 included studies. The data extraction was conducted using a pre-designed Microsoft Excel template to ensure consistency and reduce the risk of omission or bias. This template included multiple fields capturing bibliographic information (such as author names, year of publication, and journal), contextual characteristics (such as the geographical setting of the study and the social media platforms examined), as well as methodological details (including research design, sample size, and data collection techniques). Furthermore, theoretical frameworks, key variables studied, and primary findings were also recorded.

This comprehensive approach facilitated cross-study comparison and thematic grouping during subsequent stages of analysis. To improve reliability, the data extraction was carried out by two independent reviewers who populated the extraction form separately. Their outputs were then compared and consolidated, with any inconsistencies resolved through collaborative discussion. In the case of qualitative studies, significant quotations and themes were preserved to maintain the contextual richness of the data. For quantitative studies, numerical findings such as effect sizes, correlations, and significance levels were documented when available. This dual-review strategy, combined with a standardized extraction protocol, contributed to the accuracy and completeness of the dataset and laid a strong foundation for both thematic and bibliometric analysis.

2.7. Bibliometric Analysis Methods

To complement the thematic synthesis and offer a macro-level perspective on the intellectual structure of the research field, a bibliometric analysis was performed using VOSviewer (version 1.6.18). This software allowed for the visualization of relationships among keywords, authors, and documents through co-occurrence and citation-based mapping. The bibliometric analysis focused primarily on identifying clusters of commonly recurring themes, co-cited references, and key terminologies that dominated the academic discourse on Gen Z, social media marketing, branding, and impulse buying behaviors. Prior to analysis, a custom thesaurus file was created to exclude overly general terms such as “study,” “effect,” or “research,” ensuring that the resulting maps captured only conceptually meaningful connections.

A threshold of five occurrences was set for keyword co-occurrence analysis to filter out rarely used terms and focus on more prominent trends. The resulting network visualizations revealed several major clusters indicating thematic convergence around topics such as emotional and psychological drivers of impulse buying, the role of branding in digital identity formation, and the influence of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. The bibliometric outputs offered valuable insights into the density and strength of conceptual linkages, as well as the evolution of interest in specific subtopics over the selected five-year publication window. This layer of analysis helped reinforce the findings from the thematic synthesis and highlighted the dominant areas of inquiry as well as emerging research directions within the literature.

2.8. Thematic Synthesis Approach

In addition to the bibliometric mapping, a thematic synthesis was undertaken to extract and integrate the substantive content and insights from the included articles. This synthesis followed a three-stage approach inspired by Thomas and Harden’s framework. The first stage involved inductive, line-by-line open coding of the key findings, discussion points, and conclusions from each study. These codes captured diverse concepts such as emotional motivation, digital branding tactics, Gen Z shopping preferences, and platform-specific behaviors. In the second stage, related codes were aggregated into broader descriptive themes that reflected shared findings across multiple studies



without imposing interpretative assumptions. Examples of these themes included perceptions of social media promotions, impulsive consumer tendencies in digital environments, and the psychological impact of branding cues on Gen Z behavior.

The third and final stage involved developing higher-order analytical themes that went beyond simple description to offer conceptual integration. Through iterative refinement and researcher triangulation, four major themes emerged: (1) Generation Z's perception of promotional content on social media and how it triggers unplanned purchases; (2) the psychological and emotional mechanisms through which branding influences impulsive decision-making; (3) the situational and contextual factors that mediate or amplify impulsivity, such as platform design or influencer presence; and (4) the comparative dynamics of different digital environments, particularly contrasting visual platforms like Instagram with short-form video platforms like TikTok. These themes provided a comprehensive framework to understand the underlying mechanisms of Gen Z's impulse buying behavior in the age of social media and served as the conceptual foundation for the review's discussion and implications.

2.9. Reliability and Validity Measures

To ensure the credibility and robustness of the systematic review findings, multiple reliability and validity measures were employed throughout the research process. Inter-rater reliability was assessed at three critical stages: article screening, quality assessment, and data extraction. At each stage, the level of agreement between the reviewers was quantified using Cohen's kappa coefficient, which consistently demonstrated strong agreement (values above 0.80), thereby confirming the consistency of the evaluative decisions. Methodological triangulation was achieved by integrating studies of varied research designs qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods thereby enriching the synthesis with diverse empirical perspectives. This triangulation allowed for a more holistic understanding of the complex behavioral phenomena under investigation.

In addition, investigator triangulation was implemented by involving multiple researchers in coding and synthesis stages, which helped minimize subjectivity and bias. To further enhance transparency, an audit trail was maintained documenting every major methodological decision, including the rationale for exclusion, data coding frameworks, and quality assessment outcomes. A reflexive journal was also kept to record researchers' evolving perspectives and to identify potential biases that might influence interpretation. The combination of these strategies strengthened the trustworthiness, transparency, and replicability of the review, and positioned it as a methodologically sound contribution to the academic understanding of Gen Z consumer behavior.

2.10. Ethical Considerations

Although this systematic review did not involve any form of primary data collection involving human participants, it was nonetheless conducted under strict adherence to established ethical research principles. All academic sources consulted were properly cited in accordance with scholarly standards to ensure appropriate attribution and to avoid plagiarism. Only publicly accessible, peer-reviewed articles were included, and no confidential or proprietary materials were used. The review process was designed to be objective and unbiased, with attention paid to representing a balanced perspective across diverse academic viewpoints. Contradictory findings were reported honestly, and no selective reporting was employed to favor any specific conclusion.

Furthermore, when synthesizing studies that touched upon potentially sensitive or culturally specific topics such as the influence of identity, emotion, or digital manipulation care was taken to maintain neutrality and avoid overgeneralization. This ethical stance was reinforced by a commitment to transparency in both the inclusion and interpretation of sources. No conflicts of

interest influenced the selection or analysis of materials. Overall, the review aligns with principles of academic integrity, intellectual honesty, and responsible scholarship.

2.11. Limitations of the Methodology

Despite the methodological rigor employed throughout this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the review was restricted to English-language publications, which may have excluded valuable insights from non-English academic contexts, particularly those in emerging markets where Generation Z digital behavior may differ significantly. Secondly, the exclusive reliance on the Scopus database, while ensuring high-quality sources, may have resulted in the omission of relevant articles indexed in other reputable databases such as Web of Science or EBSCOhost. Additionally, the decision to include only full-text accessible and open-access articles may have introduced a degree of publication bias, favoring studies from institutions with better accessibility or open publishing policies.

The bibliometric analysis itself, while useful in mapping research trends, is limited by its dependence on frequency-based metrics and may overlook conceptually rich but less frequently cited works. Similarly, thematic synthesis, though systematically conducted, is inherently interpretive and may be influenced by researcher perspectives despite the triangulation efforts. Lastly, while the review period of 2019–2024 was chosen for its relevance to current digital trends, it may have excluded foundational studies conducted before this window that continue to inform contemporary debates. These limitations do not undermine the validity of the findings but rather serve as important context for interpreting the results and identifying avenues for future research.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Study

The final dataset of 46 articles selected through the systematic review process offers a comprehensive and diverse portrayal of research trends related to Generation Z's impulse buying behavior in the context of social media branding and promotion. Geographically, the studies show notable concentration in Southeast Asia, particularly in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, reflecting both the demographic dominance of Gen Z in these regions and the prevalence of social media as a marketing tool. A substantial number of studies were also conducted in Western contexts such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and parts of Europe, indicating the global resonance of the research topic.

From a methodological standpoint, the distribution between qualitative and quantitative studies was relatively balanced, with a slight dominance of quantitative methods. Most studies employed online surveys and structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore the relationship between variables such as social media usage, brand attitude, and impulsive purchasing intent. Qualitative studies, on the other hand, utilized interviews and focus group discussions to gain deeper insights into the psychological and emotional dimensions of Gen Z's consumer behavior. Mixed-method approaches were less common but offered valuable triangulated perspectives where present.

In terms of social media platforms investigated, Instagram and TikTok were overwhelmingly dominant, cited in over 80% of the selected studies. This aligns with current usage statistics showing that these platforms are the most popular among Gen Z users, largely due to their visual, short-form, and influencer-driven content formats. Facebook, Snapchat, and YouTube appeared less frequently and often as supplementary platforms. This descriptive mapping provides a foundational context for the thematic and bibliometric analyses that follow.



3.2 Thematic Synthesis

Thematic synthesis of the 46 included studies revealed four core themes that consistently emerged across geographic, methodological, and disciplinary boundaries. The first theme centers on Gen Z's perception of promotional content on social media, emphasizing the influence of personalized advertising, flash deals, influencer recommendations, and interactive marketing formats such as live shopping and story polls. These stimuli are often perceived as entertaining rather than intrusive, which increases their effectiveness in bypassing conscious resistance to advertising.

The second theme concerns the psychological and emotional mechanisms of branding, where branding strategies that emphasize authenticity, social value, and identity expression are found to significantly impact Gen Z's purchasing impulses. Emotional appeals—such as those invoking self-worth, confidence, or peer validation—are particularly effective when embedded in aesthetically pleasing and socially endorsed content.

The third theme addresses emotional and situational triggers of impulse buying behavior. Numerous studies show that emotional states such as boredom, stress, and loneliness act as catalysts for unplanned purchases. These emotional vulnerabilities are further exploited by algorithmic curation, which presents emotionally appealing content at moments when users are most susceptible. Situational factors, such as late-night scrolling or exposure to influencer "haul" videos, amplify the effect.

The fourth theme explores contextual influences, particularly how platform design, content format, and user interface features affect impulsive buying behavior. TikTok's "For You" page, Instagram's story swipe-ups, and countdown timers in promotional posts are cited as mechanisms that drive urgency and reduce rational reflection. Across these themes, the synthesis reveals a digitally native consumer whose purchasing decisions are shaped less by rational deliberation and more by emotional, social, and environmental cues curated through algorithmic filters.

3.3. Bibliometric Analysis

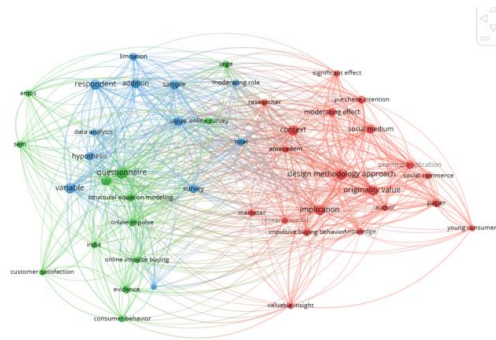
Bibliometric analysis was conducted to identify key trends, intellectual structures, and research clusters emerging from the reviewed literature. Using VOSviewer software (version 1.6.18), we performed three visualizations—network, overlay, and density to analyze keyword co-occurrence patterns, temporal evolution of research themes, and areas of conceptual intensity. This analysis offers not only a structural mapping of the field but also contextual insights into its evolution and focal points over time.

3.3.1 Network Visualization: Mapping Conceptual Clusters

The network visualization (Figure 3) provides a graphical representation of the relationships between frequently occurring keywords in the selected articles.

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**Figure 3.** Network Visualization 46 Articles

Source: Authors' own work

Nodes represent keywords, while edges denote co-occurrence relationships. Larger nodes indicate higher frequency, and proximity between nodes suggests conceptual closeness. The green cluster is heavily populated with methodological terms such as “*variable*,” “*SEM*,” “*AMOS*,” “*questionnaire*,” and “*structural equation modeling*.” This cluster reveals a strong quantitative foundation in the literature, emphasizing statistical modeling, hypothesis testing, and data-driven approaches. The presence of terms like “*consumer behavior*,” “*online impulse*,” and “*customer satisfaction*” at the periphery of this cluster suggests their use as dependent variables in model-based studies.

The blue cluster centers on data collection techniques and participant-focused descriptors, including “*respondent*,” “*sample*,” “*survey*,” “*value*,” and “*data analysis*.” This cluster reflects the procedural rigor with which research in this domain is conducted, focusing on how information is gathered, validated, and analyzed. The red cluster represents the conceptual and theoretical dimension of the literature. It includes keywords such as “*design methodology approach*,” “*originality value*,” “*implication*,” “*social commerce*,” and “*young consumer*.” This grouping captures the emphasis on contextualization, application, and theoretical contribution. Terms like “*purchase intention*,” “*moderating effect*,” and “*practical implication*” further suggest an ongoing effort to link empirical findings to broader academic and business relevance.

Notably, keywords such as “*online impulse buying*” and “*consumer behavior*” appear near the intersection of clusters, indicating their central role in connecting methodological approaches with conceptual inquiries. The visualization illustrates that the field is both theoretically rich and methodologically diverse, bridging quantitative modeling with evolving digital commerce contexts.

3.3.2 Overlay Visualization: Evolution of Scholarly Attention

The overlay visualization (Figure 4) adds a temporal dimension to the bibliometric analysis.

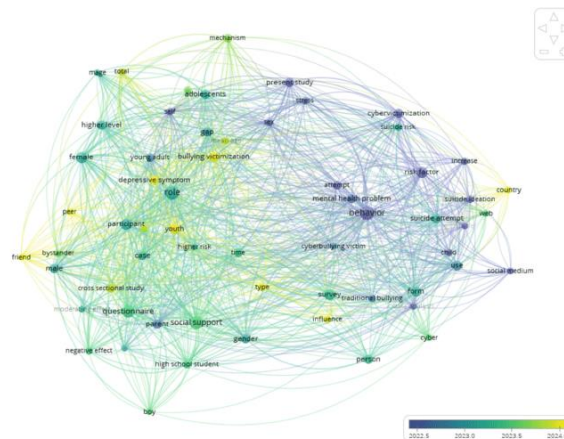


Figure 4. Overlay Visualization 46 Articles

Source: Authors' own work

Keywords shaded in dark blue to purple, such as “questionnaire,” “SEM,” “hypothesis,” “variable,” and “data analysis,” represent foundational research themes that were most prominent around 2022. These early contributions focused heavily on establishing methodological reliability, measurement models, and statistical validity, forming the empirical backbone of the field.

As the color transitions to green and yellow, corresponding to more recent years (2023–2024), the visualization highlights the growing prominence of application-oriented and consumer-centric themes. Keywords such as “originality value,” “practical implication,” “social commerce,” and “young consumer” are now appearing more frequently, signaling a scholarly shift toward understanding the practical and theoretical implications of Gen Z’s behavior in digital environments. The rising prominence of “context” and “purchase intention” also reflects a move toward studying how platform design and marketing stimuli affect consumer decision-making.

This temporal shift illustrates the field's dynamic nature: it is moving from technical precision and instrument development toward applied investigations of branding influence, user experience, and generational behavior in social commerce ecosystems. The overlay thus affirms that current research is increasingly concerned with contextual relevance, societal impact, and the psychological dimensions of impulsive buying in digital settings.

3.3.3 Density Visualization: Identifying High-Impact Concepts

The density visualization (Figure 5) highlights areas of intense keyword usage, indicating where scholarly attention is most concentrated.



embedded seamlessly into everyday content consumption. The findings suggest that Gen Z does not perceive marketing efforts as external stimuli but as integrated aspects of their digital experience. Promotional cues such as limited-time offers, influencer endorsements, and visually engaging content not only stimulate interest but also initiate emotional responses that override rational decision-making processes.

The evidence also shows that branding strategies that focus on emotional storytelling, social authenticity, and aesthetic coherence are more likely to generate spontaneous purchases. The role of emotional states as antecedents of impulsivity particularly boredom, stress, and loneliness—was emphasised across multiple studies. These emotions are heightened in digital contexts, where endless scrolling and content curation often encourage distraction and momentary gratification.

Importantly, the synthesis highlights that Gen Z's impulse buying is not just reactive but also aspirational. Purchases are often motivated by a desire to affirm identity, signal belonging, or engage in trending cultures. This underscores the growing importance of identity-aligned branding, where product choices are seen as extensions of self-expression within peer networks.

4.2 Theoretical Implications

The findings of this review extend several key theoretical models in consumer behavior, particularly the S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) framework and the Theory of Planned Behavior. In the context of social media, stimuli are not isolated advertisements but emotionally resonant, socially validated content formats that function simultaneously as entertainment and persuasion. This requires a rethinking of the traditional stimulus-response sequence to include algorithmic mediation and platform interactivity as variables of influence.

Additionally, the concept of digital identity has emerged as a critical mediating construct that bridges branding and impulse buying behavior. The integration of emotional engagement and social signaling into branding strategies aligns with recent developments in self-concept theory and generational psychology, suggesting a convergence of cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions in shaping consumer responses. This theoretical expansion opens the door for future frameworks that incorporate digital affordances, peer validation mechanisms, and emotional regulation as core constructs.

4.3 Practical Implications

For marketers and brand strategists, the insights presented in this review offer actionable guidance on how to effectively engage Gen Z consumers in digital environments. Strategies that combine visually appealing content with emotional storytelling and time-sensitive calls to action are more likely to trigger impulsive responses. The use of micro-influencers, live selling sessions, and interactive formats such as polls and quizzes can further enhance user engagement by creating a sense of participation and personalization.

Furthermore, brands should focus on authenticity, transparency, and alignment with Gen Z's values, such as inclusivity, sustainability, and social justice. Campaigns that appear overly manipulative or purely transactional risk alienating this generation, who are highly attuned to insincerity in digital messaging. By contrast, brands that foster trust and emotional connection can turn impulse buying into sustained loyalty and advocacy.

4.4 Research Gaps

Despite the breadth of existing research, several critical gaps were identified. First, there is a scarcity of longitudinal studies that track the long-term effects of social media branding on

consumer habits. Most current studies rely on cross-sectional data, limiting insights into causality and behavioral persistence. Second, geographic representation remains skewed, with minimal attention given to Gen Z populations in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, where cultural norms and digital access may yield different outcomes.

Third, emerging platforms such as BeReal or Threads, which are gaining popularity among Gen Z, are underrepresented in the literature. Fourth, there is insufficient exploration of individual psychological differences, such as self-esteem, self-control, and digital literacy, which may moderate the relationship between branding exposure and impulsive behavior. Addressing these gaps will be essential to developing a more holistic understanding of Gen Z's evolving consumer psychology.

4.5 Future Research Directions

Future studies should employ longitudinal designs and experimental methods to better isolate causal relationships between digital marketing stimuli and consumer responses. There is also a pressing need for cross-cultural comparative studies that examine how cultural values, digital infrastructure, and regulatory environments shape Gen Z's impulse buying patterns. Additionally, research should explore the impact of emerging technologies, such as AI-generated content, virtual influencers, and augmented reality, in shaping consumer perceptions and behavior.

Scholars are also encouraged to investigate ethical considerations in the design of digital marketing, particularly with respect to privacy, psychological manipulation, and consumer autonomy. As the boundaries between content and commerce continue to blur, a multidisciplinary approach involving marketing, psychology, and media ethics will be crucial in framing future research agendas. These directions are not only academically relevant but also essential for guiding responsible practice in the age of digital persuasion.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Main Findings

This systematic literature review has provided an in-depth and multidimensional analysis of Generation Z's impulse buying behavior as shaped by social media branding and promotional strategies. Drawing from 46 empirical studies published between 2019 and 2024, the review found compelling evidence that Gen Z consumers are uniquely susceptible to impulsive purchases driven by emotionally charged and algorithmically curated digital content. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z does not passively consume advertisements; rather, they interact with promotional content embedded within their daily digital routines—especially on platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

The findings indicate that personalized advertising, influencer endorsements, visually aesthetic content, and features like limited-time offers or countdowns are highly effective in stimulating emotional responses that bypass rational evaluation. Emotional states such as boredom, loneliness, and stress were consistently identified as key triggers that enhance impulsivity, often reinforced by platform design and algorithmic exposure. Moreover, the concept of digital identity plays a pivotal role in Gen Z's buying behavior, as purchases are frequently tied to self-expression, social belonging, and validation from online communities.

The bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer further revealed dense conceptual clusters centered on themes like “impulse buying,” “branding,” and “social media,” highlighting the theoretical convergence across disciplines. The temporal overlay showed an evolution from technical measurement frameworks toward more psychologically grounded, consumer-centric inquiries in recent years. This suggests a growing scholarly interest in understanding the emotional and contextual underpinnings of digital consumer behavior.



Ultimately, the review underscores that Gen Z's impulse buying is not merely a product of persuasive marketing but a complex interplay between emotional vulnerability, social validation, and immersive digital environments. These insights have broad implications—not just for marketers aiming to optimize engagement, but also for educators, parents, and policymakers concerned with the ethical boundaries of digital influence on youth.

5.2 Limitations of the Research

Despite its comprehensive approach, this study is not without limitations. First, the review exclusively included English-language, peer-reviewed journal articles published within the 2019–2024 window. This language and timeframe restriction may have led to the exclusion of relevant studies from non-English-speaking regions or foundational research published earlier, potentially narrowing the scope of insights.

Second, the dataset was derived solely from the Scopus database, which—despite its academic rigor—may not fully capture interdisciplinary or emerging research found in platforms like Web of Science, EBSCO, or regional databases. This introduces the risk of publication bias, particularly in underrepresented regions such as Latin America, the Middle East, or Africa, where Gen Z behaviors might differ due to cultural or technological contexts.

Third, the reliance on cross-sectional studies in the selected literature means most findings are correlational rather than causal. The absence of longitudinal data limits our ability to understand how impulse buying behavior evolves over time or how sustained exposure to social media branding impacts long-term purchasing habits and consumer identity formation.

Finally, the heterogeneity of methodologies across studies—including varying sample sizes, inconsistent definitions of impulse buying, and differences in platform focus—presents challenges for synthesis and generalization. While thematic and bibliometric analyses help bridge these gaps, the lack of standardization remains a notable constraint.

5.3 Recommendations

In light of these findings and limitations, several recommendations are proposed to guide future research, marketing practices, and policy formulation:

1. For Future Research

Scholars should pursue longitudinal and experimental designs to establish causal links between social media exposure and impulse buying behavior. Further investigation into individual psychological traits, such as self-control, self-esteem, and digital literacy, can enrich our understanding of why some Gen Z individuals are more vulnerable than others. Additionally, cross-cultural comparative studies are essential to explore how cultural norms, values, and technological ecosystems influence buying patterns across global Gen Z populations.

2. For Marketers and Brands

While leveraging emotional and aesthetic content may drive short-term engagement, brands must prioritize ethical marketing by fostering transparency, informed consent, and emotional safety. Instead of exploiting psychological triggers, marketers should consider developing campaigns that promote responsible consumption, reflect Gen Z's core values (e.g., inclusivity, sustainability), and emphasize authenticity over manipulation.

3. For Policymakers and Educators

Regulatory bodies should update digital marketing guidelines to protect younger audiences from overly persuasive or manipulative tactics, especially those targeting emotional vulnerability. Educational institutions and digital literacy programs should equip Gen Z with critical thinking skills to navigate algorithm-driven content and make informed consumer decisions.

By integrating psychological insight, marketing ethics, and digital awareness, stakeholders across sectors can ensure that the future of consumer engagement with Gen Z is not only profitable but also sustainable, respectful, and socially responsible.

Ultimately, this systematic review not only consolidates existing academic perspectives on Gen Z's impulse buying behavior but also calls on researchers, marketers, educators, and policymakers to take an active role in shaping a more conscious and ethical digital environment. By acknowledging the psychological and social complexities behind impulsive purchasing in the age of social media, we can collectively advance toward a marketing landscape that prioritizes long-term well-being over short-term gains.

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