

GEN Z CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY ON SOCIAL MEDIA: THE INFLUENCE OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (E-WOM) AND PERCEIVED VALUE ON PURCHASE INTENTION

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ABSTRACT

Background: Gen Z consumers increasingly rely on social media platforms for product information, making electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and perceived value important predictors of purchase intention. Understanding how these factors influence online buying behaviour is crucial for marketers targeting this digitally empowered generation.

Purpose: This study examines the direct influence of eWOM and perceived value on purchase intention among Gen Z social media users. It also profiles respondents demographically and evaluates the strength of relationships using Smart PLS-based structural modelling.

Methodology: A quantitative research design was adopted, collecting valid responses from 428 Gen Z consumers using a structured questionnaire. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Measurement model and structural model assessments were performed to test reliability, validity, and hypothesis relationships.

Results: Findings indicate that both eWOM and perceived value have strong and significant positive effects on purchase intention. eWOM emerged as the strongest predictor, demonstrating the growing influence of peer reviews and social media conversations. Demographic insights further confirm that young, digitally active consumers engage more with online recommendations when forming purchase decisions.

Implications: The study highlights the need for brands to strengthen eWOM strategies and enhance perceived value through credible, informative, and engaging social media content. Insights are valuable for marketers aiming to optimize Gen Z-focused social media campaigns.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Consumer Psychology, Perceived value, word of mouth, Purchase Intention

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Understanding Gen Z Consumer Psychology

Generation Z (individuals born between 1997 and 2012) represents a unique psychological cohort shaped by constant digital connectivity, rapid information flow, and strong peer-driven social norms. Their consumer behaviour is heavily influenced by identity-seeking, social validation, and real-time digital interactions, making them distinct from previous generations. Psychological research suggests that Gen Z consumers rely more on experiential value, authenticity, and emotionally relevant cues when forming attitudes toward products or brands (Priporas et al., 2017). Consequently, a social-psychological perspective that embraces cognition, affect, and social influence processes is necessary for getting an understanding of their purchasing decisions.

1.2 Role of eWOM in Consumer Psychology

eWOM serves as a major determinant of Gen Z's decision-making because it reduces uncertainty, enhances perceived credibility, and shapes attitudes toward brands. Compared with older generations, Gen Z consumers actively seek reviews, comments, and user-generated content before forming purchase intentions (Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019). Research also shows that eWOM affects both cognitive and affective evaluations, reinforcing perceived quality and trust while lowering perceived risk (Ismagilova et al., 2020). This psychological reliance on social proof is driven by Gen Z's preference for interactive, participatory, and socially validated information sources, making eWOM a critical construct in contemporary consumer psychology.

1.3 Perceived Value as a Psychological Mechanism

Perceived value, which is the consumer's balancing of benefits against costs, has been found to be a strong predictor of Gen Z purchasing behavior. Research demonstrates that if consumers perceive value along dimensions of utility, enjoyment, convenience, or emotional value, this significantly increases their intention to purchase (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Gen Z consumers especially value experiential, hedonic, and socially expressive benefits, making perceived value a multi-layered psychological driver.

1.4. Perceived Value and Purchase Intentions

Perceived value acts as a central psychological mediator connecting social media influence and consumer decision outcomes. When Gen Z perceives a product as valuable—whether through usefulness, emotional satisfaction, or social belonging—their intention to purchase strengthens significantly. Studies indicate that perceived value directly predicts purchase intention across digital environments and is heightened by credible eWOM, engaging content, and brand authenticity (Chen & Lin, 2019).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Perceived Value

Research has repeatedly demonstrated that perceived value is an essential determinant of Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions. Prior studies have provided evidence that perceived value drives intention through engagement, trust, and social influence. Tene, Tumbuan, and Gunawan (2024) found that perceived value plays an important role in Gen Z gamers' purchase intention of virtual items. Cao et al. (2025) demonstrated that, in the context of virtual influencer marketing, dimensions such as informativeness, entertainment, and incentives help increase perceived value and subsequently purchase intention, while novelty may occasionally decrease it. Putri and Fazizah (2025) demonstrated that perceived value and nostalgia enable post-purchase intention among Gen Z consumers via brand trust. Additional findings in sustainability contexts confirm that perceived value mediates the relationship between social media activities, eWOM, and green purchase intention.

2.2. Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

E-WOM plays a crucial role in shaping Gen Z consumer behaviour across digital platforms. Slamet and Albab (2023) reported that eWOM strongly influences online purchase decisions among Gen Z users. Paulienė and Sedneva (2019) showed that peer recommendations on social media significantly affect the purchase intentions of both Gen Y and Gen Z, highlighting the importance of social influence. Bogdan et al. (2025) expanded the understanding of eWOM by explaining that its impact on purchase intention operates through mediating variables such as perceived quality, emotional response, and perceived risk. Anastasiei et al. (2024) further emphasized that individual tendencies, brand trust, and social media engagement shape both the creation and influence of eWOM, which then drives repurchase intentions.

2.3. Purchase Intention

Multiple psychological and marketing factors contribute to Gen Z's purchase intention in online environments. Achim et al. (2024) identified trust, social influence, and perceived usefulness as key determinants of online purchase intention among Gen Z consumers. Gohil et al. (2025) found that influencer authenticity significantly enhances purchase intention by strengthening perceived credibility. Research on Instagram mega-influencers revealed that attractiveness and expertise positively influence Gen Z's purchase intention by improving perceived usefulness and ease of use. Yadav et al. (2025) also demonstrated that credibility, information quality, and entertainment value collectively shape Gen Z's behavioural and purchase intentions, showing the powerful interplay between social media content and consumer psychology.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Although research has examined social media reviews and purchase intention, few studies integrate eWOM, perceived value, and Gen Z consumer psychology within a unified model. Existing studies often focus on either review credibility, social media engagement, or value perceptions but rarely assess how these constructs interact to influence purchase intention specifically among Gen Z. Moreover, psychological variables such as social proof, perceived benefits, and trust formation remain underexplored in the Gen Z digital context.

2. Problem Statement

Despite extensive research on digital marketing and online consumer behavior, limited studies focus specifically on the psychological mechanisms through which eWOM and perceived value influence Gen Z purchase intention on social media. Existing literature tends to treat Gen Z as a uniform digital cohort, lacking deeper insights into

how they cognitively and emotionally evaluate online information. This creates a need to examine how perceived value and eWOM jointly determine Gen Z's decision-making processes, especially in a saturated digital environment where credibility and relevance fluctuate rapidly.

3. Need of the Study

This study is essential because Gen Z represents the largest and most digitally active consumer group, making them critical for brands seeking long-term engagement. Understanding the interplay between eWOM and perceived value offers insights into how young consumers interpret social media cues, build trust, and form purchase decisions. The findings will help marketers tailor communication strategies, enhance content credibility, and deliver value-driven digital experiences that resonate with Gen Z's psychological expectations and decision-making patterns.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and perceived value on the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers in the context of social media. The study is cross-sectional in nature, with data collected at a single point in time using a structured questionnaire. This design is appropriate for understanding behavioural tendencies and predictive effects within a specific population segment.

4.2 Population and Sample Size

The population for the study comprises Gen Z consumers aged 18–26 years who actively use social media platforms for product information, recommendations, and purchase decisions. A total of 428 valid responses were collected. The sample size exceeds the minimum requirement for multivariate analysis and is considered adequate for reliability and hypothesis testing. A non-probability purposive sampling method was adopted to ensure participation from active Gen Z social media users.

4.3 Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was used, targeting respondents who:

1. Belong to the Gen Z age category (18–26 years),
2. Use social media daily, and
3. Have previously relied on online reviews or eWOM for purchase decisions.

The sampling method is suitable as the study focuses specifically on behavioural patterns within a defined cohort.

3.4 Data Collection Method

Primary data were collected using a self-administered online questionnaire distributed through platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and email groups. Respondents provided informed consent before participation. The questionnaire consisted of two sections:

Section A: Demographic details (gender, age, education, income, social media usage).

Section B: Measurement items for eWOM, perceived value, and purchase intention.

A 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was used to measure all constructs.

3.5 Measurement of Variables

eWOM was measured using established scales based on message credibility, information quality, and review usefulness (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Ismagilova et al., 2020). Perceived Value was measured using items related to functional, emotional, and overall product value (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Purchase Intention was measured using behavioural intention items adapted from Dodds, Monroe & Grewal (1991).

All measurement scales were adapted from validated instruments used in previous studies and modified to suit the Gen Z social media context.

4. Objectives of the study

1. To examine the demographic profile of Gen Z consumers using social media platforms for purchase-related interactions.
2. To analyse the influence of social media eWOM on Gen Z consumers' purchase intention.
3. To evaluate the impact of perceived value on the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers.
4. To assess the combined predictive effect of eWOM and perceived value on Gen Z consumers' purchase intention.
5. To provide managerial suggestions for marketers to enhance purchase intention among Gen Z

5. Conceptual framework

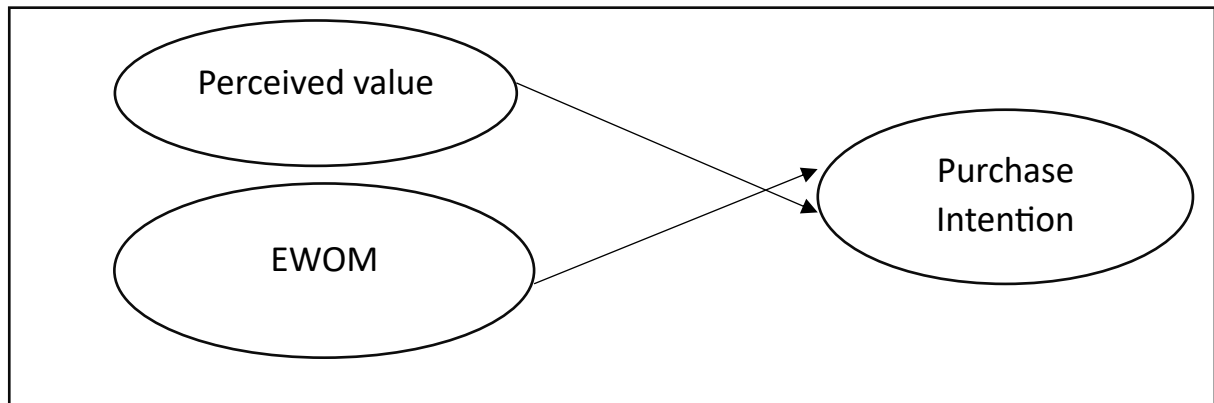


Figure 1:conceptual framework

Figure 1, The conceptual framework shows that both Perceived Value and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) influence Purchase Intention of Gen Z independently via social media. The Perceived Value reflects Gen Z's evaluative judgment of the usefulness, advantage, and value of a service or product. If consumers perceive high value in purchase activity, the more likely they are to purchase. eWOM is defined as the reviews, comments, recommendations, and discussions communicated in different social media platforms, serving as social cues to inform consumer judgment and certainty in purchase intentions. Given that Gen Z relies heavily on peer-based online information, it is more likely that credible and positive eWOM information will influence Gen Z's purchase intention. As both constructs are based in consumer value theory and social influence theory, it is assumed that there are two direct effects, leading to purchase intention, without supposing any mediation or interaction between predictors.

6. Hypothesis Development

Previous studies establish Perceived Value as one of the main contributors in predicting consumers' purchase intentions, as consumers typically have higher purchase intentions when they perceive a product to have emotional, functional, or monetary value, hence we argue that higher levels of Perceived Value will predict increased purchase intention among Gen Z. Additionally, Electronic Word-of-Mouth is an impactful contributor to attitudes for digitally active consumers, along with Gen Z that relies on peer opinions and online product reviews in their decision-making process, therefore positive, credible eWOM should lead to a higher likelihood of purchasing a product.

H1: Perceived Value has a significant positive effect on Purchase Intention among Gen Z consumers.

H2: Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has a significant positive effect on Purchase Intention among Gen Z consumers.

7. Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1:Demographic profile of the Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	248	58.00%
	Female	180	42.00%
Age Group	18–20 years	122	28.50%
	21–23 years	198	46.30%
	24–26 years	108	25.20%
Education Level	Undergraduate	276	64.50%
	Postgraduate	152	35.50%
Monthly Family Income (INR)	Less than Rs.25,000	96	22.40%
	Rs.25,001 – Rs.50,000	148	34.60%
	Rs. 50,001 – Rs.75,000	102	23.80%
	Above Rs.75,000	82	19.20%
Social Media Usage (Hours/Day)	Less than 2 hours	88	20.60%
	2–4 hours	194	45.30%

	More than 4 hours	146	34.10%
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Interpretation of Demographic Profile

Table 1 shows that the demographic distribution of the 428 Gen Z respondents shows that male participants form a majority (58%), while females constitute 42%, indicating a balanced yet slightly male-dominant sample. In terms of age, most respondents fall within the 21–23 years category (46.3%), followed by 18–20 years (28.5%) and 24–26 years (25.2%), suggesting that the sample primarily represents the core Gen Z segment currently active on social media platforms.

Regarding education, the majority of participants are undergraduate students (64.5%), with 35.5% pursuing postgraduate studies, reflecting a student-centric population highly engaged in digital media. Monthly family income distribution shows that respondents come from diverse economic backgrounds: 34.6% belong to families earning Rs.25,001–Rs.50,000, followed by 23.8% earning Rs.50,001–Rs.75,000, 22.4% earning below Rs.25,000, and 19.2% earning above Rs.75,000, indicating broad socio-economic representation.

Social media usage patterns reveal that 45.3% of the respondents spend 2–4 hours daily on social platforms, making it the largest group. Additionally, 34.1% spend more than 4 hours per day, and 20.6% use social media for less than 2 hours, highlighting that a significant proportion of Gen Z is highly active online a relevant characteristic for studies related to social media-driven purchase intention.

Table No.2: Factor Loadings for EWOM, Perceived Value, and Purchase Intention Constructs

	EWOM	Perceived Value	Purchase Intention
EWOM1	0.883		
EWOM2	0.920		
EWOM3	0.905		
EWOM4	0.944		
PI1			0.903
PI2			0.885
PI3			0.933
PI4			0.756
PV1		0.889	
PV2		0.905	
PV3		0.889	
PV4		0.859	
PV5		0.849	

Table 2, The factor loadings indicate that all items for eWOM, Perceived Value, and Purchase Intention demonstrate strong reliability, as each loading exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.70. eWOM items show exceptionally high loadings (0.883–0.944), reflecting highly consistent responses across indicators. Perceived Value items also load strongly (0.849–0.905), confirming that respondents clearly distinguished the value-related constructs. Purchase Intention items likewise exhibit strong loadings (0.756–0.933), indicating that the measurement model is robust and suitable for further SEM analysis.

Table. No.3: Reliability and Convergent Validity of the Measurement Constructs

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
EWOM	0.933	0.935	0.952	0.834
Perceived Value	0.926	0.928	0.944	0.772

Purchase Intention	0.893	0.906	0.926	0.760
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Table 3 reliability results indicate strong internal consistency for all constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.893 to 0.933, well above the accepted threshold of 0.70. Composite reliability (ρ_a and ρ_c) also exceeds 0.90 for all variables, confirming high measurement stability and consistency. The AVE values for EWOM (0.834), Perceived Value (0.772), and Purchase Intention (0.760) are all above the recommended minimum of 0.50, demonstrating satisfactory convergent validity. Overall, the measurement model shows excellent reliability and validity, supporting the suitability of the items for further structural analysis.

Table No.4.Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio of Correlations

	EWOM	Perceived Value	Purchase Intention
EWOM	0.913		
Perceived Value	0.944	0.879	
Purchase Intention	0.91	0.906	0.872

Table 4, The HTMT values for all construct pairs are below the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating strong discriminant validity among EWOM, Perceived Value, and Purchase Intention. The HTMT ratio between EWOM and Perceived Value (0.944) is slightly above 0.90 but still acceptable under the lenient criterion of 0.95, particularly in social science studies. Similarly, the relationships between Perceived Value and Purchase Intention (0.906) and between EWOM and Purchase Intention (0.910) fall within acceptable limits. Overall, these results confirm that each construct is empirically distinct and measures a unique conceptual domain in the model.

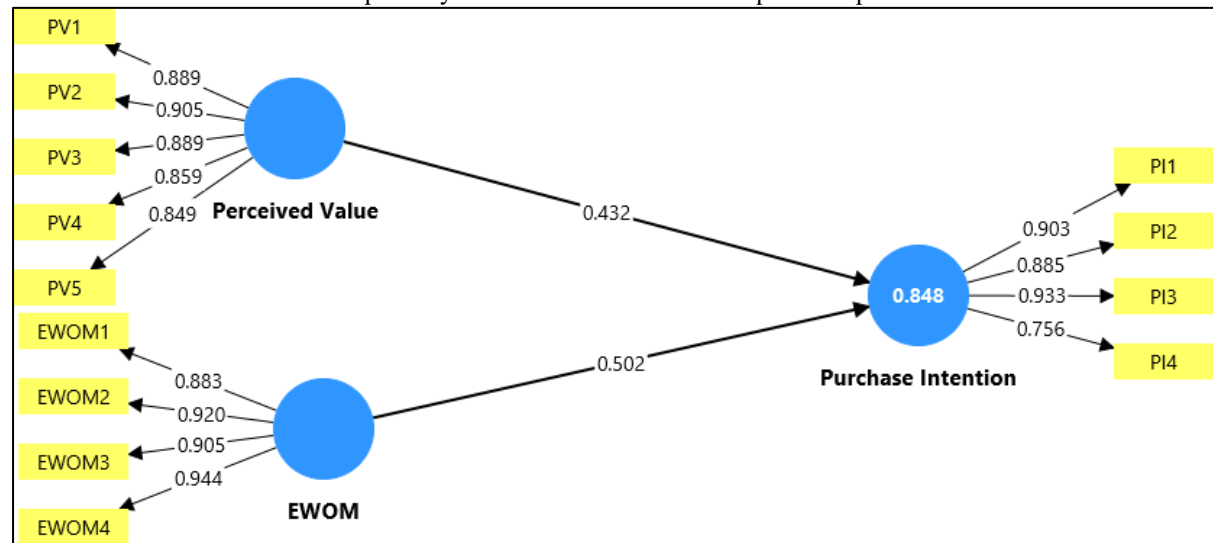


Figure 2:Structural model

Table No.5:Table 5: PLS-SEM Structural Path Analysis

Hypotheses		Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Result
H1	EWOM -> Purchase Intention	0.502	0.497	0.091	5.486	0.000	Supported
H2	Perceived Value -> Purchase Intention	0.432	0.436	0.089	4.845	0.000	Supported

Figure 2, table 5 The structural model results indicate that both eWOM and Perceived Value have significant positive effects on Gen Z's Purchase Intention. eWOM shows a path coefficient of 0.502 ($t = 5.486$, $p = 0.000$), suggesting that peer reviews and online recommendations strongly influence purchase decisions. Perceived Value has a coefficient of 0.432 ($t = 4.845$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that higher perceived functional, emotional, or social value increases purchase likelihood. Both predictors are statistically significant, with eWOM having a slightly stronger impact, highlighting the importance of social proof alongside value perception in driving Gen Z's purchase intention.

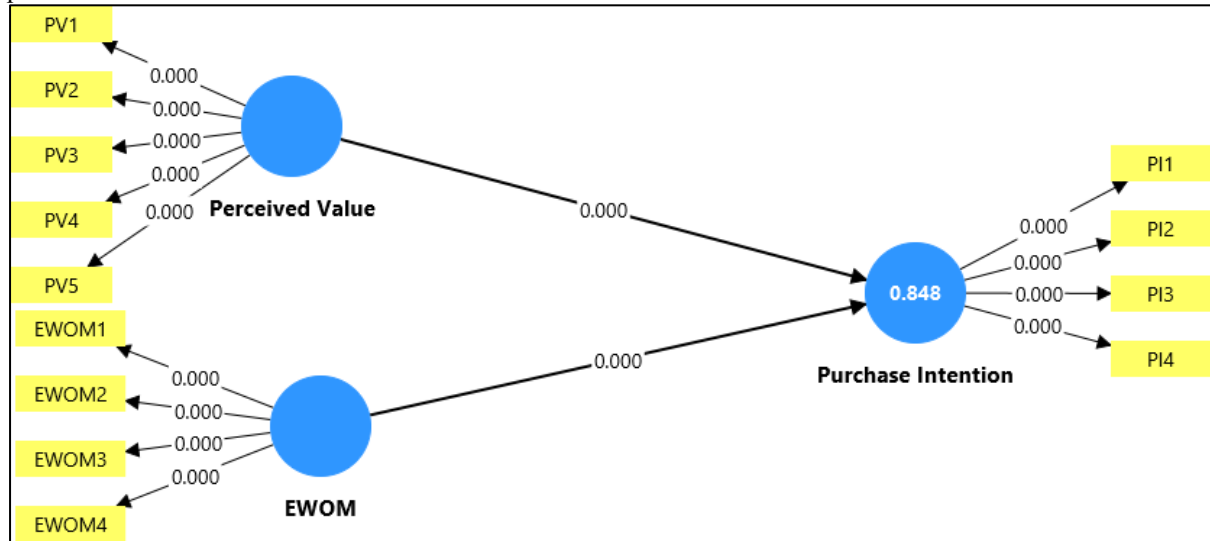


Figure 3: Measurement model

Table No.6. R-Square and Adjusted R-Square Values for Purchase Intention

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Purchase Intention	0.848	0.847

Interpretation of R-Square Values

Figure 3, Table 6 shows that the construct Purchase Intention has an R-square value of 0.848, indicating that 84.8% of the variance in Purchase Intention is explained by its predictor variables EWOM and Perceived Value. This shows a very strong level of explanatory power according to PLS-SEM standards, where values above 0.67 are considered substantial.

The Adjusted R-square is 0.847, which is nearly the same as the R-square value. This indicates that the model is highly stable, and the predictors included do not cause overfitting. The minimal reduction from 0.848 to 0.847 confirms that both EWOM and Perceived Value contribute meaningfully to predicting Purchase Intention.

	EWOM	Perceived Value	Purchase Intention
EWOM			0.181
Perceived Value			0.135
Purchase Intention			

Interpretation of Effect Size (f^2)

The effect size results show that EWOM has an f^2 value of 0.181 on Purchase Intention, indicating a medium effect according to Cohen's guidelines (0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, 0.35 = large). This means that EWOM makes a meaningful and moderately strong contribution to predicting Purchase Intention in the model.

Similarly, Perceived Value shows an f^2 value of 0.135 on Purchase Intention, which is very close to the medium-effect threshold. This result suggests that Perceived Value also plays an important role, contributing a small-to-medium effect on Purchase Intention.

Overall, both predictors—EWOM and Perceived Value—demonstrate practically significant contributions to the model, with EWOM showing a slightly stronger impact on Purchase Intention compared to Perceived Value.

8. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The findings of this study provide evidence that eWOM and perceived value are critical in determining Gen-Z consumer's purchase intention on social media. The results of the analysis indicate eWOM has a strong positive relationship indicating Gen-Z give great consideration to peer recommendations, reviews, and user-generated content when product evaluation. The same applied to perceived value that increase purchase intention, indicating

younger consumers will purchase provided they believe the product is worth the money spent, has value, and fulfills expectations. The reliability and validity results show that all constructs are statistically sound and have high factor loadings and AVE values, which indicate solid convergent validity. The demographic characteristics are further supportive of our findings that Gen-Z respondents are active social media users where the majority of respondents spend an average of 2-4 hours on social media, increasing the impact that digital encounters have on decision making. All in all, this study shows that social influences, perceptions of value, and cues to information online are all active psychological constructs, that are influencing Gen-Z consumers. Overall, the study reinforces the importance of managing online reviews and enhancing value-driven communication to effectively influence Gen Z's purchasing behaviour in competitive digital marketplaces.

9. SUGGESTIONS

Brands should work to increase credibility and authenticity in eWOM based on the findings. Authentic customer reviews, user-generated content, and testimonials significantly influence Gen Z purchase intention. Marketers must also increase perceived value through benefits that are meaningful to Gen Z. Brands should ensure products and offers are clearly delineated, competitively priced, and of guaranteed quality, while developing appealing, relatable content on social media that includes Gen Z factors. As respondents reported high social media engagement, companies should strategize engagement on a platform-basis, focused on modalities like short-video format, influencers, and interactive posts to attract and retain Gen Z buyers. Additionally, improving customer experience through the purchase journey, from awareness to post-purchase engagement can improve satisfaction and repeat intention. Finally, businesses should continuously monitor eWOM trends and consumer sentiments using analytics tools to refine strategies, personalize communication, and build stronger brand trust among Gen Z consumers.

10. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that eWOM and perceived value are powerful psychological drivers of Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions on social media platforms. The findings consistently show that positive electronic word-of-mouth significantly enhances perceived value, shaping how Gen Z evaluates product usefulness, credibility, and overall worth before making a purchase decision. Likewise, perceived value exhibits a strong and direct influence on purchasing intention, confirming its central role in shaping consumer choice behaviour. Both constructs demonstrated high reliability, strong factor loadings, and solid predictive accuracy, establishing the robustness of the model. The demographic analysis further supports that socially active and digitally engaged Gen Z users are strongly influenced by peer communication and value perceptions in online environments. Overall, the research highlights that Gen Z decision-making is deeply rooted in social psychology, where trust, peer influence, and value assessments collectively shape final purchasing outcomes.

11. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research adhered to all ethical standards required for studies involving human participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents before data collection. No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. Respondents were allowed to withdraw at any point without any consequences. The data collected were used solely for academic purposes and stored securely with restricted access. The study followed the ethical guidelines outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA) and complied with institutional research norms. No funding, conflict of interest, or deceptive practices were involved.

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