

A New Paradigm of Online Marketing: A Study of Generation Z Consumer Behavior and Their Attitudes Towards Brands

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Abstract - The digital transformation of the marketing environment has redefined how consumers engage with brands. As a generation with rising purchasing power, Generation Z represents a critical target audience for online marketing. This study investigates Gen Z consumers' online shopping behavior, including their consumption habits, preferred purchasing methods, information sources, brand attitudes, and key factors influencing purchasing decisions. Data were collected through an online survey of 125 Gen Z respondents and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings reveal a strong preference for online channels, although physical interaction remains important for categories such as food, clothing, and accessories. Primary information sources include search engines, Instagram, YouTube, and peer reviews. Product quality, online ratings, and reviews are the most influential factors in purchasing decisions. Low brand loyalty is observed, likely due to limited income and a preference for value over brand allegiance. The study provides insights into a shifting marketing paradigm shaped by digital-native consumers.

Keywords: *gen z, online marketing, digital technology*

I. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z (born between 1997–2012) is known as digital natives who grew up with the internet, social media, and mobile technology. They are the first generation who have been exposed to the digital world since childhood and are used to instant access to information, virtual communication, and ever-evolving technology. According to Van den Bergh & Behrer (2016), Gen Z not only consumes technology, but uses it as a tool to express themselves and interact directly with their favorite brands. They have a huge influence on online shopping and demand a fast, convenient, and personalized shopping experience. As stated by Bernstein (2015), Generation Z

has high expectations of the consumer experience, tends to avoid complicated processes, and prefers the convenience of digital transactions. On the other hand, they are also critical of traditional marketing and trust reviews from fellow users more than celebrities or conventional advertising.

Technology is considered a tool that makes life easier and increases their autonomy as consumers. Ameen et al. (2021) state that Generation Z is a group of consumers who naturally interact with cutting-edge technology and value efficiency and innovation as the main values in the decision-making process. In fact, Priporas, Stylos, & Fotiadis (2017) added that they have high expectations for a smart retailing-based shopping experience, which offers efficiency and control in every transaction. Understanding Generation Z's consumer behavior is crucial in the context of online marketing in today's digital era. Pollard (2021) notes that this generation has significant purchasing power, with disposable income reaching 360 billion US dollars, making them a prime target for global companies. According to Clarkston Consulting (2022), Gen Z is also more aware of the value of money, more selective, and often does in-depth research before making a purchase, different from previous generations.

In the context of marketing, understanding their shopping habits, preferences, and attitudes towards brands is essential so that the strategies implemented can be on target. The development of digital technology has drastically changed the marketing landscape. Social media such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are not only a means of entertainment, but also a primary platform for Gen Z to obtain product information and shape brand perception. Singh et al. (2022) show that social media has a huge influence on Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards brands, creating emotional connections that are able to influence their purchase intentions. This is in line with the findings of Statista (2023) which shows that more than 60% of Gen Z purchases are directly influenced by social media content. As many as 65% of Gen Z admitted to having made purchases based on recommendations from influencers (Apptus, 2023), but at the same time, they are also increasingly skeptical of promotional content that is considered inauthentic. According to Wood (2013), Generation Z has a high sensitivity to authenticity and tends to avoid advertising that seems coercive or excessive. Therefore, companies need to prioritize an approach that is based on real engagement and values that are relevant to their lives. In addition, the unique characteristics of Generation Z also influence the way they interact with brands. They demand a fast, informative, and personalized shopping experience. According to Schlossberg (2016), Gen Z emphasizes the value of experience more than loyalty to a certain brand. They also tend to be more flexible and not hesitate to switch to other brands if they find a more attractive or socially ethical offering. Casalegno et al. (2022) even emphasize that Generation Z shows high concern for sustainability and tends to support brands that have social and environmental responsibility.

In this context, this study aims to identify the behaviors, attitudes, and factors that influence Generation Z's purchasing decisions in the online marketing environment. This research focuses on the information channels used, their preference for products and brands, and their willingness to pay more to get products from their favorite brands. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more relevant and effective marketing strategies in reaching Generation Z consumers, as well as provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of digital consumption in the era of technology-based economic transformation.

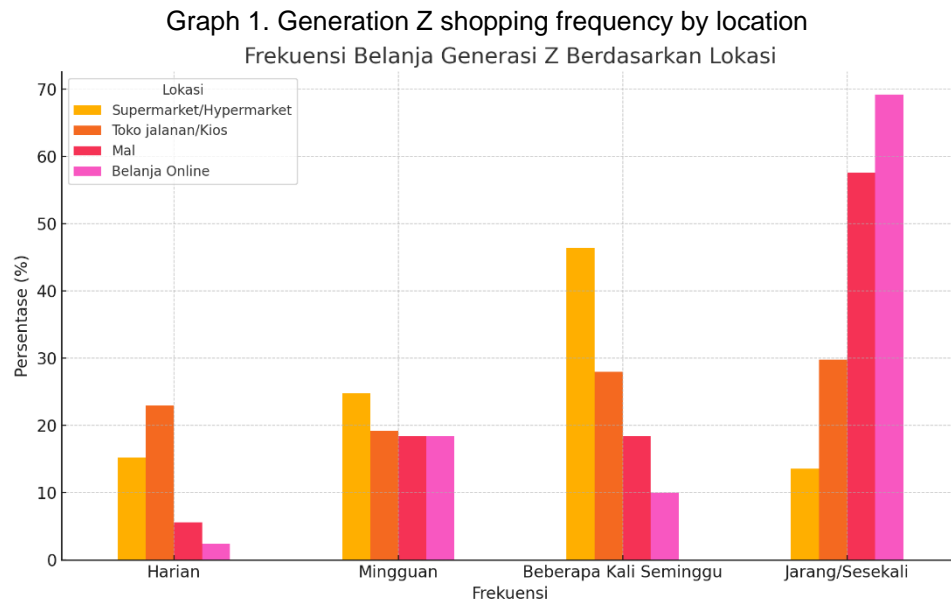
II. METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method as the main data collection technique. The survey was conducted online using the Google Forms platform and disseminated through social media, namely Facebook and WhatsApp. The research instrument is a questionnaire designed to measure various aspects of Generation Z consumer behavior in the context of online marketing, such as the frequency and location of shopping, preferred shopping channels, preferences for certain product categories, sources of information before purchase, and factors that influence purchasing decisions. In addition, the questionnaire also includes questions regarding attitudes towards brands and the level of willingness to pay more for products from favorite brands. Respondents in this study are individuals who belong to Generation Z, namely those born between 1997 and 2012, with additional criteria in the form of experience in making online purchases. The number of respondents who were successfully collected was 125 people. The majority of respondents were women (83.2%), single (82.4%), and most of them were students (80%) with a monthly income of less than 1900 RON (55.2%).

The data obtained was analyzed descriptively using the help of Microsoft Excel software. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of graphs and tables to show patterns of consumer behavior, while cross-tabulation is conducted to see the relationship between variables such as revenue and brand preferences. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide a clear and measurable picture of Generation Z's consumption behavior, as well as the factors that influence their purchasing decisions in the current digital marketing context.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

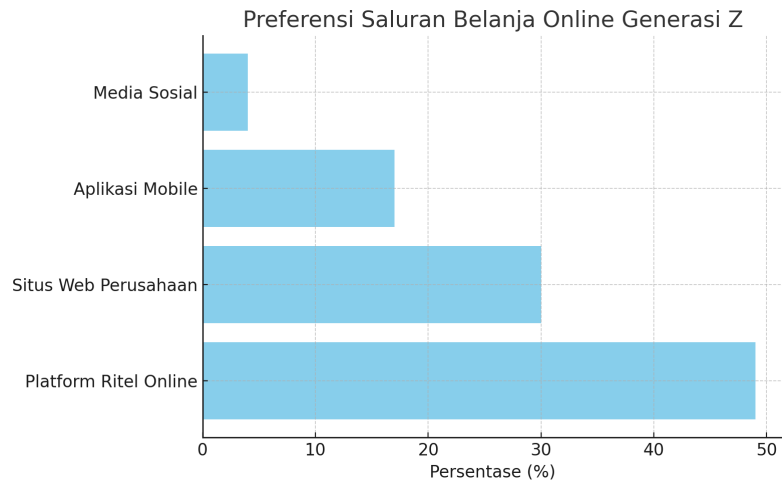
This study provides a fairly comprehensive overview of Generation Z's shopping behavior in the context of online marketing. Based on the data obtained, it is known that the majority of respondents still make purchases directly at physical stores rather than through online channels. This can be seen from the results of surveys regarding the frequency of shopping in various locations.



The figure above shows that as many as 46.4% of respondents stated that they shop at supermarkets or hypermarkets several times a week, while only 10% of respondents do online shopping with the same frequency. Most respondents (69.2%) stated that they only occasionally or rarely shop online. This fact shows that even though Gen Z grew up in a digital environment, physical experiences are still an important part of their shopping behavior, especially for products that require direct interaction such as food, clothing, or everyday necessities. In contrast, shopping malls such as malls show a much lower frequency of visits. Most respondents only visit the mall once a month or even less frequently. This may be due to affordability factors, geographic location, or a preference shifting to small retail and online stores for practicality.

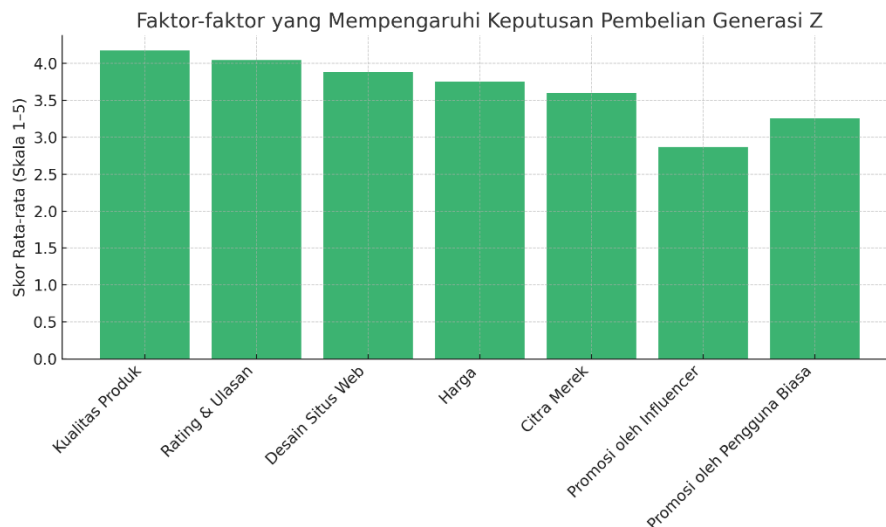
Preferred Online Shopping Channels

Graph 2. Preferred online shopping channels



The graph above shows the online shopping channel preferences of Generation Z. It can be seen that almost half of the respondents (49%) prefer to use online retail platforms such as eMag and AboutYou, while 30% choose the official website of the company. Only a small percentage use mobile apps (17%) and social media (4%) to shop. This shows that despite being active on social media, Gen Z still trusts platforms that are considered safe and professional for purchase transactions.

Graph 3. Factors influencing generation Z's purchasing decisions



The graph above shows the factors that influence Generation Z's purchasing decisions. The most influential factors are product quality (average score of 4.17), followed by ratings and reviews (4.04), and website design (3.88). In contrast, promotions by influencers only obtained a score of 2.87, which signifies that Gen Z is less likely to trust paid promotions and prefer reviews from regular users (3.26). This emphasizes the importance of authenticity and trust in building relationships between brands and young digital consumers. When it comes to online shopping channels, the survey results show that 49% of respondents prefer to use online retail platforms (such as eMag or AboutYou), while 30% prefer to shop directly through the company's official website. Only 17% choose to use mobile apps and only 4% use social media as a shopping

channel. These findings show that even though Generation Z is active on social media, they are still cautious about making transactions and trust more structured and professional channels.

1. Preferences by Product Category

Shopping preferences also vary depending on the product category. Most respondents stated that it is more convenient to buy products such as clothing, shoes, food, cosmetics, and accessories directly at physical stores. These products are considered necessary to see or try before purchase. The only categories where online purchases are more prominent are electronics and home appliances, which often come with clear technical specifications and consumer reviews.

2. Information Media Before Purchase

In looking for information before making a purchase, 35.2% of respondents stated that they use search engines every day. Social media platforms such as Instagram (29%), TikTok (28%), and YouTube (26%) are also widely used to obtain product information. However, traditional media such as advertisements in newspapers, radio, and television show very low usage rates, reflecting a shift in information behavior among digital consumers. Interestingly, promotion through influencers has low influence compared to reviews from regular users. This is reflected in the low average score for influencer promotion (2.87 on a scale of 5), compared to the high scores given for product quality (4.17), positive reviews (4.04), and brand reputation. This supports the view that Generation Z is increasingly critical and demands authenticity in marketing communication.

3. Willingness to Pay More

The level of willingness to pay more for branded products is also an important indicator in assessing brand loyalty. Most respondents are only willing to pay up to 10% (38%) or 30% (42%) more for brands they like. Only a small fraction are willing to pay double the original price. This suggests that despite the loyalty tendency, price sensitivity is still the dominant factor, especially among low-income respondents.

4. Correlation Between Revenue and Brand Preference

Cross-analysis of revenue and brand preference showed that more than 40% of respondents with revenues below 1900 RON preferred non-branded products that were 50% cheaper than branded products. Meanwhile, only 10% of the same group is willing to pay 25% more for branded products. This suggests that purchasing power levels play a big role in shaping purchasing decisions, and companies need to adjust pricing and promotion strategies based on this market segmentation.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the behavior of Generation Z consumers in the context of online marketing is influenced by various factors that reflect their distinctive characteristics as a digital native generation. While they are very familiar with technology, most still show a preference for in-person shopping experiences, especially for product categories that require physical interaction such as food, clothing, and cosmetics. However, they also actively utilize digital channels as a source of information before buying, relying on search engines, social media such as Instagram and YouTube, and other user reviews.

The results show that Generation Z tends to trust content that is considered authentic and organic more than promotions carried out by influencers. Product quality and positive reviews are key factors in purchasing decisions, while brand loyalty is still low, especially among consumers with limited income. The high price sensitivity shown by respondents also emphasized the importance of a competitive and transparent pricing strategy.

As such, companies and marketers need to design marketing approaches that align with Generation Z's values and shopping habits. These findings are expected to be the basis for developing digital marketing strategies that are more relevant and adaptive to the needs and expectations of young consumers in the current era of digital transformation.

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