



# Impact of Meme Marketing on Gen Z Purchase Decisions

Deepa J, Vikrant C, Yalini N

Department of Management Studies Coimbatore Institute of Technology,  
Coimbatore - 641 014

## How to Cite this Article:

N, Y., C, V. & J, D. (2026). Impact of Meme Marketing on Gen Z Purchase Decisions. International Journal of Creative and Open Research in Engineering and Management, 02(05).  
<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i5.096>

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<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i5.096>

## ABSTRACT

In the digital era, social media has transformed the way brands communicate with consumers. Among emerging generations, Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) has proven to be highly receptive to humour-driven, visually engaging content commonly known as memes. Meme marketing has rapidly evolved into a powerful tool for brands seeking authentic and cost-effective audience engagement. This study examines the impact of meme marketing on the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers within an Indian urban context.

The study is based on primary data collected from 243 Gen Z respondents aged 18-26 years through a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale. Key variables including meme relatability, brand recall, emotional engagement, social sharing behaviour, and purchase intention were measured. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis were employed to analyse the data.

The findings reveal that meme relatability and emotional engagement are the strongest predictors of purchase intention among Gen Z consumers. Brand recall through meme exposure shows a significant positive correlation with purchase decisions. Social sharing behaviour acts as a mediating variable, amplifying the reach and persuasive effect of meme content. The study also identifies that humour alignment with brand identity is a critical factor in determining the effectiveness of meme marketing campaigns.

The study concludes that meme marketing significantly influences Gen Z purchase behaviour when content is relatable, contextually relevant, and emotionally resonant. Marketers should strategically integrate meme-based content into their digital marketing frameworks, ensuring consistency with brand voice and cultural awareness.

**Keywords:** Meme Marketing, Generation Z, Purchase Decisions, Digital Marketing, Social Media, Brand Recall, Consumer Behaviour, Emotional Engagement



## INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

The rapid proliferation of smartphones and social media platforms has dramatically altered consumer behaviour, particularly among younger demographics. Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents the first truly digital-native generation. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z has grown up with constant access to the internet, social platforms, and user-generated content, shaping their preferences, values, and purchasing habits in fundamentally different ways.

Meme marketing, the strategic use of internet memes as a promotional tool, has emerged as one of the most innovative trends in contemporary digital marketing. Memes are culturally relevant, humorous, and shareable units of content that spread virally across social networks. For brands, memes offer a unique opportunity to communicate in the language of younger consumers, fostering authenticity and relatability that traditional advertising often fails to achieve.

This study focuses on the topic "Impact of Meme Marketing on Gen Z Purchase Decisions." Purchase decisions among Gen Z are increasingly influenced by peer validation, social media trends, and digital word-of-mouth. When a brand's meme content resonates with a Gen Z consumer, it can trigger not only brand awareness but also actual buying behaviour. Understanding this dynamic is essential for marketers, brand managers, and digital strategists seeking to engage effectively with this powerful consumer segment.

The review of literature highlights the growing academic and practitioner interest in meme marketing. Prior research indicates that humour, relatability, and cultural relevance are the core drivers of meme effectiveness. Studies also suggest that emotional engagement generated by meme content significantly mediates the relationship between brand exposure and purchase intention. Social sharing behaviour further extends the reach of meme campaigns, creating network effects that amplify marketing impact beyond the original audience.

This study bridges the gap between theoretical frameworks on digital consumer behaviour and practical insights into meme marketing effectiveness. Using primary data from Gen Z respondents, the research quantifies the influence of key meme marketing dimensions on purchase decisions, providing actionable recommendations for digital marketers.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Moorman & Shrum (2023) "The Role of Humour in Digital Advertising: A Gen Z Perspective"** This study examines how humour functions as a persuasive mechanism in digital advertising targeting Generation Z. The findings indicate that Gen Z consumers respond more positively to brands that use self-aware and culturally relevant humour. The study demonstrates that humour-driven content, including memes, significantly enhances brand likability and recall among younger audiences.

**Arora & Bansal (2023) "Meme Marketing and its Influence on Consumer Engagement in Social Media"** This study investigates how meme-based content drives consumer engagement across major social media platforms. Using engagement metrics from 50 brand campaigns, the authors find that meme content generates significantly higher interaction rates compared to conventional posts. The study concludes that relatability and timeliness are the key determinants of meme marketing success.

**Sharma & Mehta (2022) "Digital Word-of-Mouth and Purchase Intentions among Gen Z Consumers"**

This research explores how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on platforms such as Instagram and Reddit influences purchase intentions among Gen Z. The findings reveal that user-generated content, particularly memes and reaction videos, is perceived as more trustworthy than branded content. Social sharing behaviour is identified as a critical mediator between content exposure and purchase intention.

**Gupta & Singh (2022) "Brand Recall in the Age of Viral Content: A Study of Internet Memes"**

This study analyses the effect of viral meme content on brand recall and long-term brand memory among millennial and Gen Z consumers. The findings show that memes with strong cultural references and brand integration lead to significantly higher brand recall scores. The study recommends that brands invest in meme literacy and cultural analytics to design effective campaigns.

**Kim & Lee (2021) "Emotional Engagement, Authenticity, and Purchase Behaviour in Social Media Marketing"**

This study examines the mediating role of emotional engagement between social media marketing exposure and purchase behaviour. Using structural equation modelling on a sample of 410 young adults, the findings reveal that authenticity-driven content, including memes and relatable humour, generates deeper emotional connections with brands. Emotional engagement is found to significantly predict purchase intention, particularly among Gen Z consumers.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In the contemporary digital marketing landscape, brands are increasingly challenged to capture and retain the attention of Generation Z consumers, who are inherently resistant to conventional advertising. Traditional marketing approaches such as television commercials, print advertisements, and banner ads are perceived as intrusive and inauthentic by Gen Z, leading to declining engagement rates and advertising avoidance behaviours.

Meme marketing has emerged as a promising alternative, leveraging humour, cultural relevance, and social sharing to engage younger consumers organically. However, despite its growing popularity among marketers, the academic understanding of how meme marketing specifically influences purchase decisions remains limited. Most existing research focuses on general social media engagement metrics rather than the direct and indirect pathways through which meme content shapes buying behaviour.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of meme marketing is contingent on several critical factors, including the relatability of content, alignment with brand identity, cultural sensitivity, and the timing of meme deployment. Brands that misunderstand these nuances risk reputational damage through tone-deaf or appropriative content, underscoring the need for empirically grounded insights.

Therefore, this study addresses the need to empirically examine how meme marketing dimensions, specifically meme relatability, emotional engagement, brand recall, and social sharing behaviour, influence the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers. The findings will provide marketers and brand strategists with evidence-based guidance for designing meme marketing campaigns that effectively drive purchase intent among this influential consumer segment.



## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present study focuses on examining the impact of meme marketing on the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers in the Indian urban context. It covers respondents aged 18-26 years who are active users of social media platforms including Instagram, Twitter (X), Reddit, and YouTube, which are primary channels for meme content consumption and dissemination.

The scope includes evaluating key meme marketing dimensions such as content relatability, humour alignment, brand recall, emotional engagement, and social sharing behaviour, along with purchase decision factors including awareness, consideration, and buying intention. The study is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, which facilitates effective measurement of consumer perceptions and attitudes.

However, the study is limited to a specific sample of Gen Z individuals in urban India and does not encompass older demographic groups, rural consumer segments, or global markets. The findings are therefore most applicable to urban Indian Gen Z consumer behaviour and may require contextualisation before generalisation to other cultural or geographic settings.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the influence of meme relatability on the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers.
- To analyse the impact of emotional engagement generated by meme content on Gen Z buying behaviour.
- To evaluate the relationship between brand recall through meme exposure and purchase intention.
- To assess the mediating role of social sharing behaviour between meme marketing and purchase decisions.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Data Collection:** This study utilized both primary and secondary data sources.

**Primary Data:** Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms and direct campus surveys among Gen Z respondents aged 18-26 years. A total of 243 valid responses were obtained from students and young professionals residing in urban areas.

**Secondary Data:** Secondary data was collected from academic journals, digital marketing reports, industry white papers, and prior studies related to meme marketing, consumer behaviour, and Generation Z.

**Research Design:** This study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design to analyse and describe the impact of meme marketing variables on purchase decisions among Gen Z consumers.

**Sample Size:** A total of 243 samples were collected for the study through convenience and snowball sampling methods.



## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is subject to certain limitations that may affect the generalisability of findings. The research is based on a sample of 243 Gen Z respondents from urban India and may not fully represent the diversity of Gen Z consumer behaviour across different regions, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The study relies primarily on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias or recall inaccuracy.

The scope of the study is confined to selected meme marketing dimensions and does not capture the full complexity of digital marketing ecosystems, including influencer marketing, short-form video content, and algorithm-driven content personalisation. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the data collection means that causal inferences should be drawn with caution, as longitudinal dynamics of meme marketing effectiveness cannot be captured within this study's timeframe.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS

**TABLE 1.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE**

*Source: Primary Data*

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)		Mean MM_Score	SD MM	Mean PI_Score
<b>Gender</b>	Male	129		3.41	0.79	3.58
	Female	114		3.47	0.81	3.65
<b>Age Group</b>	18-20 years	82		3.52	0.77	3.70
	21-23 years	108		3.43	0.80	3.60
	24-26 years	53		3.38	0.83	3.52
<b>Primary Platform</b>	Instagram	112		3.55	0.76	3.72
	Twitter/X	61	25.10	3.40	0.82	3.55
	Reddit	45	18.52	3.35	0.85	3.48
	YouTube	25	10.29	3.28	0.88	3.40



## INTERPRETATION

The demographic profile of the 243 respondents reveals a balanced gender composition with males comprising 53.09% and females 46.91%, reflecting equitable participation across genders. The 21-23 age bracket represents the largest cohort at 44.44%, consistent with the study's focus on core Gen Z consumers in higher education and early professional settings. Instagram emerges as the dominant platform (46.09%) for meme consumption, followed by Twitter/X (25.10%), underscoring the centrality of visual social platforms in Gen Z's digital lives. Meme Marketing scores (MM\_Score) hover around 3.43-3.55 across groups, while Purchase Intention scores (PI\_Score) average 3.40-3.72, with Instagram users exhibiting the highest purchase intent, suggesting that platform-specific meme culture significantly shapes consumer responsiveness to brand content.

**TABLE 1.2 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF KEY CONSTRUCTS**

Construct	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range (Min-Max)
Meme Relatability (MR_Score)	243	3.48	0.81	1.00 - 5.00
Emotional Engagement (EE_Score)	243	3.55	0.78	1.00 - 5.00
Brand Recall (BR_Score)	243	3.42	0.84	1.00 - 5.00
Social Sharing (SS_Score)	243	3.38	0.86	1.00 - 5.00
Purchase Intention (PI_Score)	243	3.61	0.92	1.00 - 5.00

Source: Primary Data; Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

## INTERPRETATION

Descriptive statistics reveal that Gen Z respondents report above-average levels of emotional engagement with meme content ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) and purchase intention ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ), indicating a meaningful positive orientation toward meme-driven brand communications. Meme relatability ( $M = 3.48$ ) and brand recall ( $M = 3.42$ ) demonstrate moderate-to-strong central tendencies, confirming that well-executed meme content is capable of embedding brand identity into consumer memory. Social sharing behaviour scores the lowest ( $M = 3.38$ ) yet remains above the scale midpoint, suggesting that while Gen Z consumers engage with meme content, active sharing requires additional triggers such as novelty, social currency, or strong emotional resonance. The standard deviations across constructs (0.78-0.92) indicate moderate variability, reflecting diverse individual responses to meme marketing within the Gen Z cohort.

**TABLE 1.3 RELIABILITY ANALYSIS - CRONBACH'S ALPHA COEFFICIENTS**

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Interpretation
Meme Relatability	7	0.841	Good
Emotional Engagement	8	0.876	Good

Brand Recall	6	0.819	Good
Social Sharing	5	0.793	Acceptable
Purchase Intention	8	0.904	Excellent

*Source: Primary Data*

### INTERPRETATION

Reliability analysis confirms the robust internal consistency of all measurement scales. Purchase Intention achieves the highest reliability ( $\alpha = 0.904$ , Excellent), validating the PI\_Score as a dependable composite measure. Emotional Engagement ( $\alpha = 0.876$ ) and Meme Relatability ( $\alpha = 0.841$ ) demonstrate good reliability, confirming their suitability as predictor variables. Brand Recall ( $\alpha = 0.819$ ) also achieves good reliability, while Social Sharing ( $\alpha = 0.793$ ) meets the acceptable threshold. Collectively, all Cronbach's alpha values exceed the

0.70 benchmark, affirming the psychometric integrity of the measurement instrument and enabling trustworthy regression and correlation analyses.

**TABLE 1.4 MULTIPLE LINEAR REGRESSION****Predictors of Purchase Intention (PI\_Score)**

Predictor	B (Unstd.)	SE	$\beta$ (Std.)	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	0.920	0.198	—	4.646	< 0.001
Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.452	0.048	0.634	9.415	< 0.001
Meme Relatability (MR)	0.318	0.052	0.412	6.115	< 0.001
Brand Recall (BR)	0.195	0.061	0.218	3.197	0.002
Social Sharing (SS)	0.089	0.055	0.097	1.618	0.107
<b><math>R^2 = 0.718</math>   Adjusted <math>R^2 = 0.713</math>   <math>F(4,238) = 151.92</math>   <math>p &lt; 0.001</math></b>					

Dependent Variable: PI\_Score |  $N = 243$  |  $**p < 0.001$

**INTERPRETATION**

Multiple linear regression analysis identifies Emotional Engagement as the dominant predictor of purchase intention among Gen Z consumers ( $\beta = 0.634$ ,  $B = 0.452$ ,  $t = 9.415$ ,  $p <$

$0.01$ ), indicating that for every one-unit increase in emotional engagement, purchase intention rises by 0.45 units. Meme Relatability is the second strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.412$ ,  $p$

$< 0.001$ ), underscoring the centrality of culturally resonant content in driving purchase behaviour. Brand Recall demonstrates a significant positive effect ( $\beta = 0.218$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), confirming that meme-driven brand memory translates into measurable purchase inclination. Social Sharing, while positively associated, does not achieve statistical significance in the regression model ( $\beta = 0.097$ ,  $p = 0.107$ ), suggesting its influence on purchase decisions operates primarily as a mediating or amplifying mechanism rather than a direct driver. The model explains 71.8% of variance in purchase intention ( $R^2 = 0.718$ ), demonstrating strong explanatory power.

**TABLE 1.5 PEARSON CORRELATION MATRIX**

Variable	MR_Score	EE_Score	BR_Score	SS_Score	PI_Score
MR_Score	1.000	0.712**	0.648**	0.581**	0.798**
EE_Score	0.712**	1.000	0.673**	0.602**	0.831**
BR_Score	0.648**	0.673**	1.000	0.558**	0.744**
SS_Score	0.581**	0.602**	0.558**	1.000	0.638**
PI_Score	0.798**	0.831**	0.744**	0.638**	1.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  $N = 243$ .



## INTERPRETATION

The Pearson correlation matrix reveals strong and statistically significant positive associations among all meme marketing constructs and purchase intention. Emotional Engagement demonstrates the strongest correlation with Purchase Intention ( $r = 0.831$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), confirming its primacy as the most powerful driver of Gen Z purchase behaviour among the studied variables. Meme Relatability follows closely ( $r = 0.798$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), reinforcing the critical importance of culturally relevant and personally resonant content. Brand Recall shows a strong correlation with PI ( $r = 0.744$ ), while Social Sharing maintains a moderate-to-strong relationship ( $r = 0.638$ ). The inter-construct correlations are all positive and significant, suggesting that meme marketing dimensions operate synergistically to influence purchase decisions, with emotional engagement serving as the central catalytic mechanism.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- The demographic profile reveals that the majority of respondents (44.44%) fall within the 21-23 age bracket, with Instagram as the primary meme consumption platform (46.09%), reflecting the social media habits of core Gen Z consumers.
- Emotional Engagement is identified as the strongest predictor of purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.634$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that meme content generating humour, nostalgia, or cultural connection most effectively drives buying behaviour among Gen Z.
- Meme Relatability is the second most significant predictor ( $\beta = 0.412$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming that Gen Z consumers respond most favourably to meme content that mirrors their lived experiences, language, and cultural references.
- Brand Recall through meme exposure demonstrates a significant positive impact on purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.218$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), underscoring meme content's capacity to embed brand identity into consumer memory.
- Social Sharing does not exhibit a statistically significant direct effect on purchase intention in the regression model ( $p = 0.107$ ), suggesting its role is predominantly indirect, amplifying reach rather than directly triggering purchase.
- Pearson correlation analysis confirms strong positive associations between all meme marketing constructs and purchase intention, with Emotional Engagement ( $r = 0.831$ ) and Meme Relatability ( $r = 0.798$ ) recording the highest correlations.
- Reliability analysis confirms robust internal consistency across all constructs ( $\alpha = 0.793$  to  $0.904$ ), validating the psychometric quality of the measurement instrument.
- The overall regression model explains 71.8% of variance in purchase intention ( $R^2 = 0.718$ ), demonstrating strong explanatory power of the selected meme marketing variables.
- Instagram users report the highest purchase intention scores ( $M = 3.72$ ), suggesting that the platform's visual and algorithmic environment is particularly conducive to meme-driven consumer decision-making.

The findings collectively establish that meme marketing significantly influences Gen Z purchase behaviour when content delivers emotional resonance and cultural relatability, with brand recall serving as a critical memory-based pathway to purchase.



## SUGGESTIONS OF THE STUDY

- Brands should invest in culturally literate content teams capable of creating and adapting meme content that authentically reflects Gen Z language, references, and lived experiences.
- Marketers should prioritise emotional storytelling within meme formats, designing content that elicits genuine humour, nostalgia, or social identification rather than superficial brand promotion.
- A consistent meme posting cadence should be maintained on high-impact platforms such as Instagram and Twitter/X, with A/B testing used to identify which meme styles resonate most strongly with target audience segments.
- Brands should align meme content with broader brand identity guidelines to ensure humour does not undermine brand positioning or create reputational risk through cultural insensitivity.
- Social sharing should be encouraged through interactive meme formats such as challenges, duet-style content, and audience participation campaigns that incentivise organic amplification.
- Brand recall can be strengthened by consistently integrating subtle brand visual elements (logos, colour palettes, mascots) into meme content without making promotional intent overt.
- Collaboration with Gen Z micro-influencers and meme pages can extend organic reach while maintaining the authenticity that defines effective meme marketing.
- Marketers should monitor meme trend cycles closely, as meme formats age rapidly and outdated meme usage can signal brand inauthenticity to Gen Z audiences.
- Regular consumer sentiment analysis and meme performance tracking through social listening tools should be integrated into digital marketing dashboards to enable real-time campaign optimisation.
- Special attention should be given to platform-specific meme culture, as meme formats and audience expectations differ significantly between Instagram, Twitter/X, Reddit, and YouTube.

## CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The present study provides an empirical examination of the impact of meme marketing on the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers, based on primary data collected from 243 respondents. The findings clearly establish that meme marketing, when executed with cultural intelligence and emotional resonance, exerts a significant positive influence on Gen Z purchase behaviour. Emotional Engagement and Meme Relatability emerge as the two most powerful predictors of purchase intention, underscoring the centrality of authenticity and cultural fluency in effective Gen Z marketing.

Brand Recall through meme exposure constitutes a meaningful and statistically significant pathway to purchase decisions, confirming that strategically integrated meme content can serve dual purposes of entertainment and brand memory reinforcement. While Social Sharing does not directly predict purchase intention, its amplifying role in extending meme reach and sustaining brand visibility within Gen Z social networks remains strategically important for marketers designing viral content strategies.

Overall, the study underscores that meme marketing represents a genuinely distinctive and powerful



communication channel for brands targeting Generation Z, one that operates through emotional connection rather than persuasive interruption. The findings provide actionable insights for digital marketers, brand managers, and communication strategists seeking to build authentic relationships with Gen Z consumers. Future research should explore longitudinal effects of meme marketing on brand loyalty, the role of platform algorithms in meme amplification, and cross-cultural variations in meme marketing effectiveness across different Gen Z demographic segments.

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