

Predictive Marketing Regarding Brand Awareness of Gen Z: Brand Equity, Digital Media Content or Emotions Lead to Purchase?

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Abstract

This article investigates the effect of brand awareness, brand equity, digital media content and emotions on purchase intention of Gen Z. The scope of study is focused on people born in the period 1997 - 2012 or Gen Z in North Macedonia. The answers are retrieved from an online questionnaire, delivered to 444 responders. The data is analyzed using regression model. The findings show that all the independent variables, such as: brand equity, brand awareness, digital media content and emotions are positively related to the dependent variable, which is purchase intention. Thus, we concluded that brand awareness, brand equity, digital media content and emotions have a positive impact on purchase intention of Gen Z.

Keywords: generation Z, brand equity, brand awareness, digital media content, emotions

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Introduction

Marketing is a vital component of any business and the way customers engage with businesses is the key factor. Beside the four pillars, such as: product, price, promotion and place, other elements are added to the complex system of marketing. With the development of technology, a new phenomenon known as "digital marketing" has emerged, wherein activities are carried out both offline and online using a variety of digital devices. In this phenomenon content marketing (CM) is the crucial element (Mafas and Kuppusamy, 2019). On the other hand, beside CMs' advancement, social media is becoming a role shaping factor in the marketing, especially amongst younger generation.

Generation Z (people who were born in the period 1997-2012) is one of the mostly affected by those changes and advancements. Since they have never lived without Internet, the way they behave while make decisions is very important to be understood. They are considered to be the future's leading buying force with specific characteristics. Their dollars are their daily concerns, because for young generations that have to face high inflation rates and extremely rising prices on daily bases, coming to good savings is a serious concern. The retail landscape will start to change as Gen Z's preferences and behaviors gain more economic clout. Gen Z is expected to be 40% of the work and buying force in the years to come. Thus, companies have to keep up with this sophisticated generation's evolving tastes if they hope to be in the running for their money. This is particularly true in a world where Gen Z is starting to place a higher priority on sustainability. Moreover, Generation Z consumers are interesting because they desire to express themselves, often through their buying behavior and purchases (Ismail et al., 2019). They have no compromise on quality and are the only one generation that value quality over price. If a company's product does not rely on quality, Gen Z does not give another chance. On the other side, Gen Z is likely to behave emotionally while purchasing. This is very evident when they make a buying decision that may be influenced from Internet or purchase something to make an impact to their social network.

Beside all the above, Internet has created a win-win situation for all the associated parties and physical internet promises great task (Steele, 1996). Internet has created a platform for the marketers to decide on the segmentation (Dadzie et al., 2005). Many options are offered to personalize a targeted group's preferences, making it easier to engage with them. In those labyrinths, marketer's task is crucial.

Based on all those factors, using predictive marketing tools combined with digital content and relationship marketing approaches (brand awareness and brand equity), can make the studies more significant. Marketing strategy benefits greatly from predictive analytics since it is essential for proactive and preventive strategies. Marketers have a strong tool at their disposal to improve decision-making using predictive analytics and they may now identify which clients are worth pursuing and which market scenario is most likely to occur. Additionally, they can determine which marketing initiatives and tactics have the best chance of succeeding before implementing them, greatly lowering the chances of failure.

To address these issues, this study explores the key factors that may lead to purchase intention of a targeted group (Generation Z).

This study aims to fill a gap in the literature by giving real time updated information about the key factors that lead Gen Z to purchase, with specific focus on Gen Z in North Macedonia. Moreover, it is the first study in North Macedonia that is focused on this specific targeted group.

To go deeper into these analyses, the following of this study consists of: Section 2 gives a brief Literature review and Hypothesis development, Section 3 goes in details

about Research Methods used in the study and their analysis, the 4th Section will describe the results, whereas the 5th one will give a short conclusion.

Literature review and hypothesis development

Gen Z and predictive marketing preface

In the overall population groups, every generation is interconnected in a specific way regarding values, behavior and experience. Generation Z consists of people born in the period 1997-2012. For Gen Z, there are various terms that are coined such as: D (Digital Generation), R (Responsible Generation), PostMillennials, Facebook Generation, Digital Natives, Switchers, Dotcom Kids, Net Generation, iGeneration, Zoomers, and others. Gen Z is a target group of people who are in constant connection with the World Wide Web, primarily communicate through the internet, and desire new and interesting stimuli and experiences (Entina et al., 2021). Concurrently, social media's pervasiveness in Gen Z culture is what sets them apart from other generations (Nikiel, 2019). On these networks, they seek immediate approval and recognition for their desires. On the other side, in professional level, they are aware of negative stereotypes that can occur in social networks and in most cases act as real professionals in the work place. Moreover, more than any other generation, Gen Zers are motivated by humanistic values, morality, and ethical behavior. They are also increasingly worried about how humans are affecting the environment (Entina et al., 2021).

Even though not every member of this generation is a workforce yet, a sizable portion of today's consumers belong to this generation. Gen Zers may not be buyers in the traditional sense (i.e., minors who still rely on their family), but they have a big say in what their parents buy (Puiu, 2016 and Zamir, 2019).

The role of marketers in these cases is to predict what should be done, what activities should be taken by businesses and what consequences may derive from Gen Z way of behaving, in order to have them as customers and enlarge the percentage of market share.

Marketers and businesses should be aware of the potential customers and must predict their intention. They should assist each group of customer particularly from pre-sales through sales and post-sales service through multichannel engagements ranging from digital marketing to the sales force. Predictive analytics can assist marketers in deciding what action to take next in each step, such as: do a product demo, send out more marketing materials etc.

In predictive marketing activities, the development of AI should be seriously considered. Automated and customized shopping experiences are made feasible for customers by AI and machine learning tools. AI constantly collects information on customer behavior; including when and how they shop, as well as what they are seeking for in a good or service. The intricacy of AI and the potential to humanize it have also grown in significance. Because of this ability, artificial intelligence (AI) plays a crucial part in predictive marketing, an approach that leverages consumer analytics to forecast and deliver meaningful and relevant customer experiences throughout the customer life cycle, all while increasing customer loyalty and profits (Avinash, 2021). AI has genuinely developed into a cutting-edge tool that gives marketers a competitive advantage. AI can gain insights from vast amounts of consumer and business data, involving not only numeric but also text, voice, image, and facial expression data (Davenport et al., 2019). It follows that AI is a game changer and that, in the current competitive marketing environment, a company that

leverages its AI system to its fullest advantage will have a financial advantage over rivals.

Brand awareness

Brand awareness is the ability of a potential buyer to recognize and recall a brand as part of a particular product category (Tritama and Tarigan, 2016). Many studies have been conducted to examine whether brand awareness is amongst most influencing factors that leads to loyalty and repeated purchase intention. For example, according to Alamro and Rowley (2011), brand preference is antecedent to brand awareness. The awareness antecedent was further divided into two groups: controlled and uncontrollable communication. They discovered that in order to increase brand preference, brand promises must be fulfilled. Marketers use advertising extensively and frequently to position their goods and services in the minds of consumers and to introduce, recall, and remind them of them. Aravindakshan and Naik (2011) concluded that advertisements remain in consumers' memories for a period of three weeks after they are discontinued. In the process by which marketers create value, channel members are also crucial.

According to Radder and Huang (2007), advertising has a more significant influence in raising brand awareness for high participation items than it does for low involvement products. Consequently, no matter what kind of product or group of generation is taken into consideration, brand awareness and brand perception are crucial while deciding to purchase or not a product or service. Based on this statement, we develop the first hypothesis:

H1: Brand awareness is positively related to purchase intention of Gen Z.

Brand equity

Closely related to brand awareness stands brand equity. In a way they are correlated to each other, making the relationship to the product or service much tighter. Thus, they increase the loyalty to a particular brand. According to Aaker (1991), brand equity is a collection of assets and liabilities connected to the brand, name, and symbol, which can raise or lower the value that the good or service offers to the business and/or to clients. A number of studies have been carried out regarding the development of brand equity dimensions, which include overall quality and choice intention (Agarwal and Rao, 1996), as well as dimensions of brand awareness and brand image (Hamzaoui-Essoussi et al., 2011), brand image and brand loyalty (Yasin et al., 2007; Yoo et al., 2000).

According to Kotler et al., (2021), "Most brand equity is being created when brands are being endorsed by Generation Y and Z – with their cool factor and digital savvy". Gen Z is influencing its parents Baby boomers and Generation X in many purchase decisions, involving them in the purchase intention process. What should companies do is to find a balance amongst two main goals: offer maximum of values in the present and positioning brands in the future (Kotler et al., 2021).

According to the facts mentioned above, we can develop the following hypothesis:

H2: Brand equity is positively related to purchase intention of Gen Z.

Digital media content

The digital media content refers to the various sources of digital media, such as: social networks, websites or other Internet driven components that may have an impact in decision making through their contents. Since to Gen Z we can also refer as "digital native", it indicates that they are the most influenced generation by Internet and

overall digital content. The primary source they interact through these contents is non-doubtfully social networks, such as: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Tik Tok and LinkedIn. Online social networks describe a range of online information sources that are produced, started, shared, and utilized by customers who want to educate one another about goods, services, brands, individuals, and topics (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2004). They are shaping the way people behave, their lifestyle, the way they purchase and even think. Since they have such an influence, a new phenomenon has arisen named as Influencer marketing. Influencer marketing places a strong emphasis on using influencers to spread a brand's message to the intended audience. Social media influencers have become a dynamic third-party endorser in the era of the ubiquitous Internet (Freberg et al., 2011). Using a variety of online social networks, including Facebook, social media influencers on platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube are a great way to notify online followers about new products and special offers (Markethub, 2016). According to Liu et al. (2012), social media influencers usually communicate with their followers by providing them with up-to-date information on a frequent basis.

Consumers frequently view messages promoted by social media influencers as more trustworthy and captivating, which is supported by surveys taken by 82% of followers, whose customers are said to be more inclined to heed the advice of their favorite influencers (Talaverna, 2015). Due to their friendliness in establishing a rapport with customers, social media influencers are seen as more credible, trustworthy, and knowledgeable when used in conjunction with celebrity endorsement promotion strategies (Berger et al., 2016), particularly for businesses catering to younger generations, such as Gen Z. Based on a Nielsen marketing survey, influencer marketing produces "returns on investments" (ROI) that are 11 times higher than those of digital marketing (Tapinfluence 2017). Additionally, e-WOM has an important role in shaping Gen Z's preferences. When consumers want to buy products online, in most cases they look for online reviews and comments from other consumers' experiences before they decide to purchase products from online stores (Zeqiri et al. 2023). Thus, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H3: Digital media content is positively related to purchase intention of Gen Z.

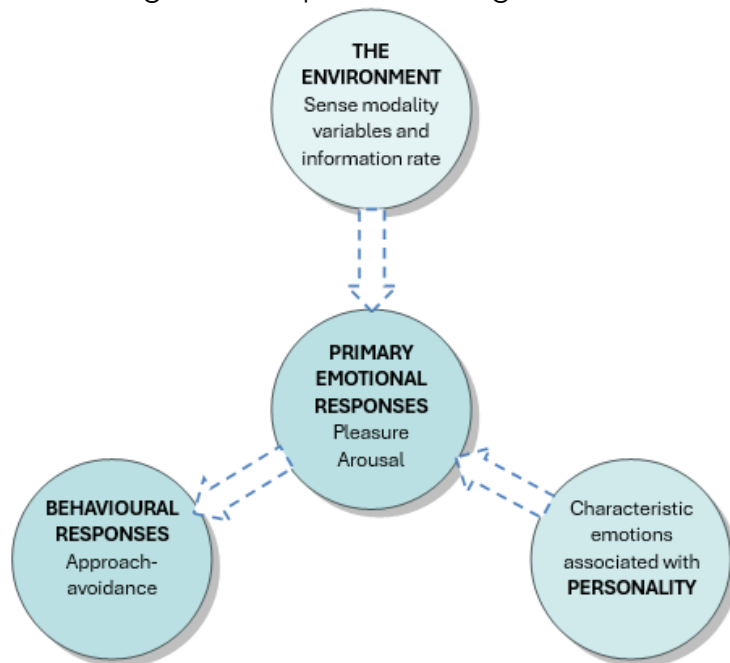
Emotions

Since, Gen Z is highly affected by influencers, product match-up with celebrities and impulse purchases; it means that their purchase intention is influenced by emotions in a lot of cases. According to some studies, Gen Z uses Instagram for around five times a day only to scroll for interesting contents related to shopping habits (Chen, 2018; Emmanuel, 2019; Vitelar, 2019). It is estimated that often it can lead to impulsive reaction. It is crucial to recognize the significance of impulse buying in research of consumer behavior. According to a research, the average person in the UK spends about £200 a month on impulsive purchases, with an estimated £18,393 spent on fashion over the course of a lifetime (Hall, 2018). Aiming to express them, Gen Z is found to make impulse purchases on fashion, especially clothes.

According to Djafarova and Bowes (2021), impulsive purchasing is common among Generation Z customers (41%), Millennials (34%), and Generation X (32%). Generation Z wants what is newest trend in a maximum of speed. The stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model in psychology describes how different environmental elements might function as stimuli (S) that affect an individual's emotional state (O), which in turn elicits an individual's reaction (R) (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). As a result, this model

proposes that human responses to stimuli follow three steps: stimulus, organism, and response. Figure 2 shows the SOR paradigm.

Figure 1
Stimulus-Organism-Response Paradigm



Source: Mehrabian and Russell, 1974, p.12

This idea was further refined for use in customer behavior and retail strategy research. SM has a significant impact on impulsive buying (Al-Zyoud, 2018; Chen, 2018), especially to younger generations like Gen Z. As a result, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Emotions are positively related to purchase intention of Gen Z.

Research methods

Data collection and scales

This study uses primary data retrieved from an online questionnaire, delivered by online social networks. According to G Power software, the study should have had a sample of 90 responders, but in order to minimize errors, we closed the questionnaire answering options by 444 responders. All responders received assurances that the confidentiality of their information would be maintained. The questionnaire consists of 29 questions, 4 of which are demographic questions giving information about responders age range, gender, occupation and country of living; the following 25 questions are Likert scale questions/statements with 5 options for every variable and five answering options: Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly disagree. Table 1 gives information about responders' demographic profiles.

Table 1
Demographic profile

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Birth year		
1997-2001	180	41.1%
2002-2007	208	46.4%
2008-2012	56	12.5%
Gender		
Female	364	81.1%
Male	80	17.9%
Occupation		
Primary school student	28	7.1%
High school student	188	42%
University student	132	29.5%
Full – employed	100	22.3%
Part – time employed	40	8.9%

Source: Author's calculation

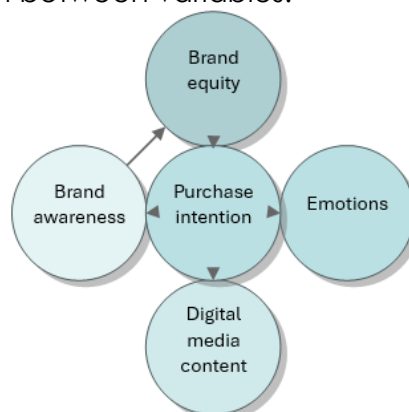
To understand the rationality over using a specific method for collecting data and analyzing them, we went deeper into literature and found for those topics qualitative researches fit best. We found that in order to obtain a contextualized understanding of the behaviors, attitudes, and motives of Generation Z in the United Kingdom, qualitative research was carried out (Hennink et al., 2020). A large portion of the consumer behavior literature listed above makes use of qualitative research. Some approaches (Chen, 2018; Djafarova and Trofimenko, 2019; Nash, 2019), which are justified since they identify topics that were previously unconsidered to be studied and provide fresh perspectives on the issue (Nash, 2019). It creates deeper comprehension that cannot be obtained using quantitative techniques (Malhotra, 2014).

Approach

Based on literature review and qualitative interviews conducted to members of Gen Z, we developed a model which consists of five variables, of which:

- Purchase intention (PI) is the dependent variable
- Brand awareness (BA) - the first independent variable
- Brand equity (BE) - the second independent variable
- Digital media content (DMC)- the third independent variable and
- Emotions (EMT) - the fourth independent variable.

Figure 2
below shows the interaction between variables.



Source: Author's work

Data analysis and results

In this study, data has been analyzed using STATA 18.0. Table 2 below shows the construct items of the questionnaire.

Table 2
Construct items

Brand awareness	BA1	I more easily remember brands that post on social media.
	BA2	I am more likely to purchase from brands that use personalized recommendations.
	BA3	I like to purchase products from brands that are socially responsible.
	BA4	I more easily remember products from brands that use "green" ideology.
	BA5	I usually don't think twice when I have to purchase a product from my favorite brand.
Brand equity	BE1	I always purchase a brand which is proven to be the most qualitative.
	BE2	I always purchase the same brand even if its price has gone higher.
	BE3	I would more likely wait for my favorite brand to be back on stock, rather than supersede it with a new product.
	BE4	I would always purchase the brand I am used to, even if it has similar characteristics with a cheaper brand.
	BE5	I would rather pay more when my favorite would add value to the brand, rather than being price-sensitive.
Digital Media Content	DMC1	Brands that post digital content on their social media platforms draw my attention.
	DMC2	I like following brands on social media that provide informative digital content.
	DMC3	Social media contents through influencers highly affect what I decide to purchase.
	DMC4	Social media content plays an important role in shaping my preferences.
	DMC5	Digital media content has an important role on which brand I decide to follow and use.
Emotions	EMT1	I am very likely to purchase a brand if it is a global trend for my generation.
	EMT2	I am more likely to purchase a product if it is my personal preference, and not a trend.
	EMT3	I would like to purchase a product which is used by celebrities I follow.
	EMT4	I would purchase a brand which is trendy, even if it has a higher price than its competitor which is not very famous.

	EMT5	I would purchase a product which is an ad-hoc decision and use it only once or twice, or even only for a photo post.
Purchase intention	PI1	I intend to purchase brands that are on social media and offer high quality content.
	PI2	I intend to purchase brands that offer added value to its product, and do not weaken the quality to cut off the costs.
	PI3	I have a tendency to purchase brands that offer value to me.
	PI4	I prefer to purchase brands that are loyal and transparent with correct information about products.
	PI5	I prefer to stay loyal to my favorite brand whenever I purchase a product.

Source: Author's work combined with validated construct items from previous researches

We have used multiple regression analyses to examine the relation between the independent and dependent variables, their standard deviation and the p values for each value. According to STATA 18.0, the total summarize of the regression variables is as follows on Table 3.

Table 3
Summarize of variables

Variable	Observations	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Age range	444	1.720721	.6742095	1	3
Gender	444	.1801802	.384771	0	1
Occupation	444	2.747748	.9917808	1	5
BA	444	3.425225	.4569935	2.2	4.4
BE	444	3.390991	.6590984	2.2	5
DMC	444	3.441261	1.047293	1.92	5
EMT	444	2.947748	.6352827	1.8	4.8
PI	444	3.61982	.5527391	2	4.8

Source: Author's calculation

Regression

Next, we analyze the regression model, according to which, Purchase intention of Gen Z is influenced by: Brand awareness, Brand equity, Digital Media Content and Emotions. The formula below shows the regression model:

$$\gamma (PI) = \beta^0 + \beta^1(BA) + \beta^2(BE) + \beta^3(DMC) + \beta^4(EMT) + \varepsilon$$

According to this equation:

- γ is the dependent variable represented by the purchase intention
- β^0 is the intercept term

- $\beta^1(BA)$ is the independent variable represented by brand awareness
- $\beta^2(BE)$ is the independent variable represented by brand equity
- $\beta^3(DMC)$ is the independent variable represented by digital media content
- $\beta^4(EMT)$ is the independent variable represented by emotions
- ε represents the error term.

Table 4 has the statistical data about the regression analyses.

Table 4
Statistical data about the regression analyses

SOURCE	SS	DF	MS
MODEL	35.8937081	4	8.97342703
RESIDUAL	99.4518775	439	.226541862
TOTAL	135.345586	443	.305520509

F(4, 439)	39.61
Prob > F	0.0000
R-squared	0.2652
Adj R-squared	0.2585
Root MSE	.47596

PI	Coefficient	Std.error	t	P> t	[95% conf.interval]
BA	.2167331	.0538335	4.03	0.000	.1109297 .3225365
BE	.2159703	.0382556	5.65	0.000	.1407835 .2911571
DMC	.0847466	.0217238	3.90	0.000	.042051 .1274422
EMT	.1688142	.039397	4.28	0.000	.091384 .2462444
_cons	1.35585	.1943099	6.98	0.000	.9739567 1.737743

Source: Author's own calculation based on Stata 18

According to the regression analyses, the R-squared is 0.2652, which means that all the independent variables that have been integrated in the model, describe the purchase intention of Gen Z for around 26%. The rest are other variables that have not been included in the model, or a wider sample of population that might increase the R-squared.

First, Brand awareness has the coefficient .2167331 (s.e. .0538335), which mean that it positively affects the PI and has high significance (p value is 0.000, t test 4.03). According to this result, we can conclude that we can accept the first hypothesis,

based on which Brand awareness has a positive effect on purchase intention of Gen Z. This result also supports the studies of Chi et al. (2009) and Jalivand et al. (2011), according to which Brand awareness positively affects purchase intention.

Second, Brand equity has the coefficient 0.2159703 (s.e. .0382556), which indicate positively relation to purchase intention of Gen Z and is statistically significant (p value is 0.000 and t test is 5.65). Relying on this result, we conclude that we can accept the second hypothesis, according to which Brand equity has a positive effect on purchase intention of Gen Z. In alignment with the outcomes presented here, Senthilnathan (2012) also found in his research that brand equity notably influences consumers' willingness to make a purchase.

Moreover, the coefficient of .0847466 (s.e. .0217238) for Digital Media Content indicates that this variable has a positive effect on PI. This result is statistically significant (p value is 0.000 and the t test is 3.90), giving us the possibility to accept the third hypothesis of our study, according to which Digital Media Content has a positive effect on purchase intention of Gen Z. This result supports the findings of Poturak and Softic (2019), according to which Digital Media Content is one of the most affecting factors to purchase intention.

Lastly, based on the results, Emotions appear to be very important factor that influence Purchase intention of Gen Z. Their coefficient is .1688142 (.039397), meaning that emotions have an impact on purchase intention and are a statistically important factor (p value is 0.000 and the t test appears to be 4.28). Based on this, we can conclude that we can accept the fourth hypothesis of this study, according to which Emotions have a positive effect on purchase intention of Gen Z. The outcomes substantiate the conclusions drawn by Bagozzi et al. (2016), whose research similarly delineated that affective states exert a favorable impact on consumers' propensity to engage in purchase behaviors.

Discussion

Theoretical contributions

This study aims to analyze the relations between the brand awareness, brand equity, digital media content and emotions on purchase intention of Generation Z. This study makes a novel theoretical contribution by being the first study of this kind to examine the behavioral tendencies of Generation Z within the specific socio-cultural environment of North Macedonia.

Limitations and further research

Since this study is limited only to Gen Z and is focused more in North Macedonia, to enhance the comprehensiveness of this study, the inclusion of a more diverse participant pool with more countries would be advantageous. Such an approach would facilitate comparative analyses of Generation Z behavior across different cultural contexts, thereby enabling an exploration of potential variations within the same generational cohort across distinct cultural landscapes. Further investigations may include more countries and more generation cohorts, in order to have unique results about every generation and their characteristics.

Conclusion

The study focuses on examining the relationship between brand awareness, brand equity, digital media content and emotions with purchase intention. The study is focused exclusively on Generation Z, giving information from primary data sources retrieved from online questionnaire.

According to the study, we came to conclusion that all the factors that have been object of study have a positive impact on purchase intention of Gen Z. In summary, we came to conclusion that brand awareness, brand equity, digital media content and emotions have a positive impact on purchase intention of Gen Z.

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