

Decoding Generation Z Purchase Intention: The Impact of Brand Awareness, Brand Equity, Digital Media Content and Emotions

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Abstract

Background: This study investigates the impact of brand awareness, brand equity, digital media content, and emotions on the purchasing intentions of Generation Z in North Macedonia, those born between 1997 and 2012. **Objectives:** This study aims to analyse the underlying factors to be considered when developing effective strategic marketing planning for Generation Z. It will use predictive marketing tools to develop strategic, data-driven, and timely planning frameworks based on the study's findings. **Methods:** An online survey was conducted with a sample of Macedonian citizens. A SEM analysis was performed to examine the relationships among the variables. **Results:** The findings show that purchase intention positively correlates with all independent factors, including brand equity, brand awareness, and digital media content. **Conclusion:** According to the results, Generation Z consumers' purchasing decisions are highly influenced by brand recognition, brand equity building, digital media content, and emotions.

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

JEL classification: M31, D12, L81

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Introduction

Marketing is an essential part of any business, and the most important factor is how customers interact with enterprises. The intricate marketing system is augmented by additional components beyond the four pillars of product, price, promotion, and place. As technology has advanced, a new phenomenon called "digital marketing" has surfaced, in which various digital devices are used to conduct activities both offline and online. Content marketing is increasingly recognised as a central mechanism through which firms create, distribute, and leverage valuable content to engage and influence consumers (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). In addition to CM development, social media is increasingly influencing marketing, particularly among younger consumers.

Those born between 1997 and 2012, or Generation Z, are among the groups most impacted by these developments. Since they have never lived without the Internet, it is crucial to understand how they make decisions. With certain traits, they are seen as the most important drivers of future purchasing power. Their dollars are their everyday worries, as younger generations struggle to save money amid high inflation and sharply rising prices. As Generation Z's tastes and habits become more economically influential, the retail scene will begin to shift.

As Generation Z begins to enter the labour market, the importance of gaining a deeper understanding of its distinctive characteristics has grown significantly (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021). In the upcoming years, Generation Z is anticipated to make up 40% of the workforce and purchasing power. Therefore, if businesses want to stay competitive, they must adapt to the changing preferences of this sophisticated generation. This is especially true in a world where Generation Z is increasingly prioritising sustainability. They are the only generation that prioritises quality over cost and never compromises on quality. Generation Z would not give a company another chance if its product did not depend on quality. Generation Z, on the other hand, is prone to making emotional purchases. This is particularly clear when they buy something to influence their social network or when they make a purchase that may have been affected by the Internet.

In addition, the Internet has benefited all parties involved, and the physical Internet offers enormous potential. The Internet has given marketers a platform to choose how to segment their audience (Dadzie et al., 2005). It is easier to interact with a specific audience when there are numerous options to customise their preferences. The role of the marketer is vital in those mazes.

Given all those factors, the findings may become more significant if predictive marketing techniques are used in conjunction with digital content and relationship marketing strategies (brand equity and brand awareness). Predictive analytics plays a major role in marketing strategy since it is necessary for proactive and preventive tactics. With predictive analytics, marketers can make better decisions by identifying which clients are worth pursuing and which market conditions are most likely to materialise. They can also assess which marketing campaigns and strategies are most likely to be successful before putting them into action, significantly reducing the likelihood of failure.

To address these issues, this study examines the factors that may influence a targeted group's (Generation Z) intention to purchase. This study, focusing on Generation Z in North Macedonia, seeks to fill a gap in the literature by providing up-to-date, real-time insights into the key factors influencing their purchasing decisions. Furthermore, this study is the first of its kind in North Macedonia to concentrate on this particular target population.

The study is structured as follows to explore these analyses in greater depth: Section 2 presents a concise literature review and outlines the development of the hypothesis. Section 3 details the research methods and their analysis. The findings are described in Section 4, while Section 5 concludes the study with a summary.

Literature review and hypothesis development

Generation Z

Across the population as a whole, every generation is interconnected in specific ways regarding values, behaviour, and experience. Generation Z consists of people born between 1997 and 2012. For Generation Z, various terms have been coined, such as Digital Generation, R (Responsible Generation), Post-Millennials, Facebook Generation, Digital Natives, Switchers, Dotcom Kids, Net Generation, iGeneration, Zoomers, and others. Generation Z is a target group of people who are constantly connected to the World Wide Web, primarily communicate online, and desire new and interesting stimuli and experiences (Entina et al., 2021). According to research, Gen Z's values, perspectives, and thought processes differ significantly from those of other generations (Weerarathne et al., 2023).

Concurrently, social media's pervasiveness in Generation 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 hand, at a professional level, they are aware of negative stereotypes that can occur in social networks and, in most cases, act as real professionals in the workplace. More than any other generation, Generation Zers are motivated by humanistic values, morality, and ethical behaviour. They are also increasingly worried about how humans are affecting the environment (Entina et al., 2021). Gen-Z has grown up in an increasingly globalised world, suggesting they are likely to have a more comprehensive and international outlook than other generations (Stevanovski et al., 2024).

Even though not every member of this generation is in the workforce yet, a sizable portion of today's consumers is. Generation Zers may not be buyers in the traditional sense (i.e., minors who still rely on their families), but they have a big say in what their parents buy (Puiu, 2016; Yasin et al., 2023).

The role of marketers in these cases is to predict what should be done, which activities businesses should take, and what consequences may result from Generation Z's behaviour, in order to have them as customers and increase market share.

Marketers and businesses should be aware of potential customers and predict their intentions. They should assist each group of customers, from pre-sales through sales to post-sales service, through multichannel engagements ranging from digital marketing to the sales force. Predictive analytics can help marketers decide which action to take next at each step, such as conducting a product demo or sending more marketing materials.

In predictive marketing activities, the development of AI should be seriously considered. AI and machine learning tools enable automated, customised shopping experiences for customers. AI constantly collects information on customer behaviour, including when and how they shop, and what they are seeking in a product or service. The intricacy of AI and the potential to humanise it have also grown in significance. Because of this ability, artificial intelligence (AI) plays a crucial part in predictive marketing. This approach leverages consumer analytics to forecast and deliver meaningful, relevant customer experiences throughout the customer life cycle, thereby increasing customer loyalty and profits (Naz & Kashif, 2025). AI has truly become 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., 2020). 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 recognise and recall a brand within a particular product category (Tritama & Tarigan, 2016). The extent to which a consumer can identify a brand across various contexts indicates brand awareness, which is associated with the robustness of the brand node or trace in cognitive memory (Keller, 2013).

Many studies have examined whether brand awareness is among the most influential factors in loyalty and repeat purchase intention. For example, according to Alamro and Rowley (2011), brand preference is an antecedent of brand awareness. The awareness antecedent was further divided into two groups: controlled and uncontrollable communication. They discovered that to increase brand preference, brand promises must be fulfilled. Marketers use advertising extensively to position their goods and services in consumers' minds and to introduce, recall, and remind them of them. Aravindakshan and Naik (2011) concluded that advertisements remain in consumers' memories for 3 weeks after discontinuation. In the process by which marketers create value, channel members are also crucial.

According to Radder and Huang (2008), advertising has a greater influence on raising brand awareness for high-participation items than for low-involvement products. Consequently, regardless of the product or generation, brand awareness and brand perception are crucial in deciding whether to purchase a product or service. Based on this statement, the first hypothesis was developed:

- *H1: Brand awareness is positively related to the purchase intention of Generation Z.*

Brand equity

Closely related to brand awareness is brand equity. In a way, they are correlated with each other, making the relationship with 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 associated with the brand, name, and symbol, which can raise or lower the value the good or service offers to the business and its clients. Several studies have been carried out regarding the development of brand equity dimensions, which include overall quality and choice intention (Agarwal & Rao, 1996), as well as dimensions of brand awareness and brand image (Hamzaoui-Essoussi et al., 2011), brand image and brand loyalty (Mohd 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". Generation Z influences its parents, baby boomers, and Generation X in many purchase decisions, shaping their purchase intentions. Companies should find a balance between two main goals: delivering maximum value in the present and positioning brands for the future (Kotler et al., 2021). According to the facts mentioned above, the following hypothesis is developed:

- *H2: Brand equity is positively related to the purchase intention of Generation Z.*

Digital media content

Digital media content refers to various sources, such as social networks, websites, and other Internet-driven platforms, that may influence decision-making through their content. Generation Z, often referred to as "digital natives," is widely recognised as the generation most significantly influenced by the Internet and digital content. According to Um (2023), the majority of consumers' decision-making processes are initiated in the online environment, as potential buyers engage with social media recommendations and assess website evaluations. The primary way they interact with this content is undoubtedly through social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, TikTok, and LinkedIn. This type of media has evolved into a platform available to everyone with an internet connection (Salmiah et al., 2024). Online social networks are a range of online information sources produced, created, shared, and utilised by customers who want to educate one another about goods, services, brands, individuals, and topics (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004). They shape how people behave, their lifestyles, how they purchase things, and even how they think. Since they have such an influence, a new phenomenon has arisen: influencer marketing. Influencer marketing emphasises leveraging influencers to spread a brand's message to its 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. According to Liu et al. (2012), social media influencers typically communicate with their followers by frequently providing up-to-date information. According to earlier studies (Carr & Hayes, 2014; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), some customers view social media influencers as more trustworthy than businesses when making purchase decisions. Thus, according to some studies, by 2020, the market value of influencer marketing as a marketing communications format had increased to between \$5 and \$10 billion.

Based on Auxier and Anderson (2021), since its initial launch in 2010, Instagram has experienced rapid growth, attracting leading brands and businesses due to its substantial user base of one billion monthly active users and 500 million daily active users. Statista (2021) reports that the two predominant age demographics on Instagram are Generation Z, accounting for 25.7% of the platform's users and encompassing individuals aged 18 to 24, and Generation Y (Millennials), comprising 31.4% of users and including those aged 25 to 40. Instagram's capacity to engage users, facilitate communication, and enable content sharing is a key element of social commerce, making it a highly attractive platform for marketers (Hazari & Sethna, 2023).

According to Rusbult et al. (1999), consumers have a long-term perspective on partnerships that they hope to rely on and develop in the future. Additionally, they have psychological attachments to their relationships because the benefits of remaining in the relationship are mutually reinforcing, making the positive aspects inseparable (Li et al., 2006).

Consumers tend to perceive social media influencers as credible and trustworthy sources, which increases the effectiveness of their recommendations and the persuasive impact of sponsored content (Lou & Yuan, 2019). 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, particularly for businesses catering to younger generations, such as Generation Z. Influencer marketing relies on individuals who have established credibility and a loyal audience on social media, enabling them to shape

followers' attitudes and behavioral intentions through authentic and relatable content (Ki et al., 2020). Additionally, e-WOM has an important role in shaping Generation Z's preferences. When consumers want to buy products online, in most cases, they look for reviews and comments from other consumers' experiences before deciding to purchase from online stores (Zeqiri et al., 2023). Thus, the following hypothesis is put forward:

- *H3: Digital media content is positively related to the purchase intention of Generation Z.*

Emotions

One important consequence of mood is emotion, which has a big impact on how consumers make decisions (Joo Park et al., 2006). A feeling or emotion is a temporary construct associated with a specific situation or object (Arianty et al., 2024).

Since Generation Z is closely tied to the Internet and is highly influenced by influencers, product match-ups with celebrities, and impulse purchases, emotions often influence their purchase intentions, meaning emotions are often derived from media content. Customers' impulsive purchasing behaviour is highly likely to be influenced by social media celebrities with whom they have a strong connection as endorsers, based on prior experiences (Brown et al., 2012; Li et al., 2006; Poddar & Donthu, 2013).

According to some studies, Generation Z uses Instagram around 5 times a day, primarily to scroll for interesting content related to shopping habits (Chen, 2018; Vițelar, 2019). It is estimated to often lead to impulsive reactions. It is crucial to recognise the significance of impulse buying in research on consumer behaviour. According to research, the average UK resident spends about £200 a month on impulsive purchases, with an estimated £18,393 spent on fashion throughout a lifetime (Hall, 2018). Aiming to express themselves, Generation Z is found to make impulse purchases in fashion, especially clothes.

According to Djafarova and Bowes (2021), impulsive purchasing is common among Generation Z customers (41%), Millennials (34%), and Generation X (32%). The nature of impulsive buying is very complex. In identifying the most relevant literature on impulsive buying, we found that *The Buying Impulse*, by D.W. Rook (1987), serves as a foundational work in this area. Impulsive buying is more than merely an impulsive purchase, according to Rook (1987) (p. 191). As a result, impulsive purchasing is a complicated psychological phenomenon that differs greatly from logical consumer behaviour (Rook, 1987, p. 191). Rook (1987) describes impulsive purchase as "occurring when a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately" in order to grasp this phenomenon. Hedonistically complex, the buying drive can lead to emotional turmoil. Additionally, impulsive purchases are likely to happen with little consideration for the repercussions (Rook, 1987, p. 191).

The emotional turmoil that leads to purchases can be considered pure impulsive purchases. Pure impulse buying occurs when a customer purchases new goods, deviating from their typical purchasing habits (Bhakat & Muruganantham, 2013). On the other side, several smoother types of impulsive buying may lead to planned purchases (Prastiwi & Iswari, 2019), reminders (Chan et al., 2017), fashion-oriented (Joo Park et al., 2006) or suggestions (Chan et al., 2017) oriented purchases.

Generation Z wants the newest trend at maximum speed. The stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model in psychology describes how environmental stimuli (S) can affect an individual's emotional state (O), which, in turn, elicits a response (R) (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). This idea was further refined for use in customer behaviour and retail strategy research. SM has a significant impact on impulsive buying (Al-

Zyoud, 2018; Chen, 2018), especially in younger generations like Generation Z. As a result, the following hypothesis is proposed:

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

Methodology

Data collection

This study uses primary data collected through an online questionnaire administered from October 2023 to January 2024. According to G*Power, the study should have had a sample of 90 respondents. The questionnaire was closed when the number of respondents reached 444. The questionnaire was shared on three public and public-private university students' online platforms (including undergraduate and postgraduate students), three high schools' online social groups, and broadly on online social networks like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. All responders received assurances that their information would be kept confidential. The questionnaire consists of 26 questions, 4 of which are demographic questions giving information about responders' age range, gender, occupation and country of living; the following 22 questions are Likert scale questions/statements with different question options for every variable and five answering options for all of them: Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Table 1 gives information about the 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%

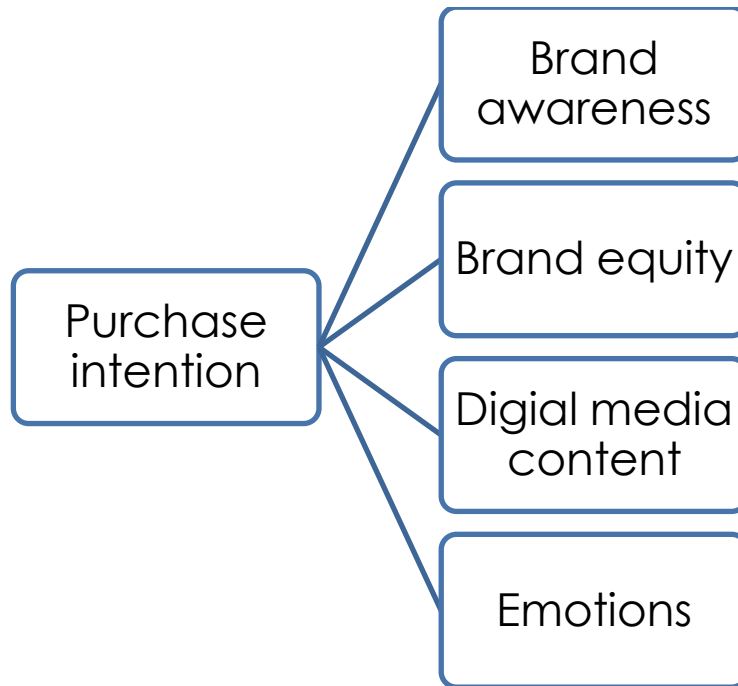
Source: Authors' work

To understand the rationale for using a specific method for data collection and analysis, the authors delved deeper into the literature. It was found that qualitative research best fits those topics. To obtain a contextualised understanding of the behaviours, attitudes, and motives of Generation Z in the United Kingdom, qualitative research was conducted (Hennink et al., 2020). A large portion of the consumer behaviour listed above relies on qualitative research. Some approaches (Chen, 2018; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019; Nash, 2019) are justified because they identify topics previously unconsidered for study and offer fresh perspectives on the issue (Nash, 2019). It fosters a deeper comprehension that cannot be achieved with quantitative techniques (Malhotra, 2014).

Research model

Based on a literature review and qualitative interviews with members of Generation Z, a model comprising five variables was developed. Purchase intention (PI) is the dependent variable; brand awareness (BA) is the first independent variable; brand equity (BE) is the second independent variable; digital media content (DMC) is the third independent variable, and Emotions (EMT) is the fourth independent variable. Figure 1 shows the variable's interaction.

Figure 1
Research model



Source: Authors' work

Next, as shown in Table 2, the research instrument is presented in detail.

Table 2
Research instrument

Construct	Code	Item
Brand awareness	BA1	I remember brands more easily when they post on social media.
	BA2	I am more likely to purchase from brands that use personalised recommendations.
	BA3	I like to purchase products from socially responsible brands.
	BA4	I more easily remember products from brands that use "green" ideology.
	BA5	I usually do not think twice when I have to purchase a product from my favourite 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 though its price has gone up.

	BE3	I would more likely wait for my favourite brand to be back in stock rather than replace it with a new product.
	BE4	I would always purchase the brand I am used to, even if it has similar characteristics to a cheaper brand.
Digital Media Content	DMC1	Digital media content plays an important role in which brand I decide to follow and use.
	DMC2	Digital media content plays the most important role in my decision to purchase.
	DMC3	Social media content plays an important role in shaping my preferences.
	DMC4	Brands that post digital content on their social media platforms draw my attention.
	DMC5	I like following brands on social media that provide informative digital content.
	DMC6	Social media content from influencers heavily influences what I decide to purchase.
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 aligns with my personal preferences rather than a trend.
	EMT3	I would purchase a trendy brand, even if it costs more than a less famous competitor.
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 their products and do not compromise quality to cut costs.
	PI3	I tend to purchase brands that offer value to me.
	PI4	I prefer to purchase brands that are loyal, transparent, and provide accurate information about their products.
	PI5	I prefer to stay loyal to my favourite brand whenever I purchase a product.
	PI6	I intend to purchase brands that continuously introduce innovations.

Source: Authors' work

Most of the construction items utilised in this study were adapted from prior research examining purchase intentions among young populations. However, certain items were developed by the authors, drawing on their perceptions of the specific requirements for investigating Generation Z's purchase intentions in North Macedonia.

Results

Data analysis

In this study, data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in Smart PLS4. The model analyses have been used to examine the relations between the independent and dependent variables, factor loadings, construct reliability, validity, and the p-values for each variable. According to Zeqiri et al. (2020), when evaluating the convergent validity of reflective constructs, the average variance extracted (AVE)

and the outer loadings should be examined. Moreover, Hair et al. (2017) suggest that 0.708 is a universally acceptable value for outer loadings. Therefore, convergent validity is assessed by Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and factor loadings.

Table 3 contains all the data on Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted.

Table 3
Construct reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand awareness	0.951	0.954	0.963	0.838
Brand equity	0.957	0.957	0.969	0.885
Digital media content	0.939	0.939	0.961	0.891
Emotions	0.821	0.854	0.917	0.847
Purchase intention	0.962	0.963	0.969	0.840

Source: Authors' work

According to Ursachi et al. (2015), in social science research, Cronbach's Alpha should be around 0.6, indicating that the results of this study are acceptable. This study's results range from 0.821 to 0.962, well above the recommended range for the social sciences. Furthermore, the internal consistency of the variables ranges from 0.854 to 0.963, exceeding the general threshold of 0.7. Composite reliability values range from 0.917 to 0.969, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. The AVE values range from 0.838 to 0.891, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). To assess discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) has been used, with results not exceeding 0.85 (Hair et al., 2017). Based on the study results, only one case yields a result of 0.877, which is higher than the recommended value of 0.850. Table 4 has the results of the HTMT ratio.

Table 4
Heterotrait-monotrait ratio

	Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)
Brand equity - Brand awareness	0.797
Digital media content – Brand awareness	0.545
Digital media content – Brand equity	0.733
Emotions – Brand awareness	0.768
Emotions – Brand equity	0.705
Emotions – Digital media content	0.689
Purchase intention – Brand awareness	0.877
Purchase intention – Brand equity	0.776
Purchase intention – Digital media content	0.604
Purchase intention – Emotions	0.754

Source: Authors' work

Next, based on the results in Table 5, the factor loadings, means, standard deviations, t-tests, and p-values for each construct have been analysed.

Table 5
Factor loading, t value and p value

	Factor loading	T value	P value
BA1	0.886	74.527	<0.001
BA2	0.952	143.426	<0.001
BA3	0.899	63.538	<0.001
BA4	0.945	135.856	<0.001
BA5	0.892	83.393	<0.001
BE1	0.928	84.88	<0.001
BE2	0.945	116.737	<0.001
BE3	0.961	190.143	<0.001
BE4	0.929	118.583	<0.001
DMC4	0.941	143.824	<0.001
DMC5	0.943	133.453	<0.001
DMC6	0.948	161.903	<0.001
EMT1	0.901	62.763	<0.001
EMT2	0.939	139.271	<0.001
PI1	0.849	50.62	<0.001
PI2	0.925	99.952	<0.001
PI3	0.931	131.091	<0.001
PI4	0.948	209.581	<0.001
PI5	0.949	102.376	<0.001
PI6	0.893	57.503	<0.001

Source: Authors' work

Note: Constructs DMC1, DMC2, DMC3 and EMT3 are removed because of low factor loadings and general results

As the results show, the factor loadings range from 0.886 to 0.961, which are higher than the general recommended value of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2017). The p-value for every factor is less than 0.001.

Next, the study's hypothesis was tested using the bootstrap technique, which provides coefficients and p-values for each hypothesis. As recommended by Hair et al. (2017), analyses of the coefficients, standard deviations, t-tests, and p-values are conducted (Table 6).

Table 6
Coefficients, T test, p values

	Coefficients	T test	P values
H1: Brand awareness -> Purchase intention	0.604	17.982	0.000
H2: Brand equity -> Purchase intention	0.158	3.248	0.001
H3: Digital media content -> Purchase intention	0.077	2.006	0.045
H4: Emotions -> Purchase intention	0.117	2.629	0.009

Source: Authors' work

First, Brand awareness has a coefficient of 0.604, indicating a positive effect on the PI and high significance (p-value < 0.001, t-test = 17.982). According to this result, the first hypothesis is supported, indicating that Brand awareness has a positive effect on the purchase intention of Generation Z. This result also supports the study by Chi et al. (2009), which found that Brand awareness positively affects purchase intention.

Second, Brand equity has a coefficient of 0.158, indicating a positive relationship with Generation Z's purchase intention and is statistically significant (p -value = 0.001; t -test = 3.248). Based on this result, the second hypothesis can be supported: brand equity positively affects the purchase intention of Generation Z.

Moreover, the coefficient of 0.077 for Digital Media Content indicates that this variable has a positive effect on PI. This result is statistically significant (the p -value is 0.045 and the t -test is 2.006), giving the possibility to accept the third hypothesis of this study, according to which Digital Media Content has a positive effect on purchase intention of Generation Z. This result supports the findings of Poturak and Softic (2019), according to which Digital Media Content is one of the factors that influences the purchase intention. Finally, based on the results, Emotions appear to be a very important factor influencing the Purchase intention of Generation Z. Their coefficient is 0.117, indicating that emotions have an impact on purchase intention and are a statistically significant factor (p -value = 0.009, t = 2.629). Based on this, it can be concluded that the fourth hypothesis of this study can be supported, which states that Emotions have a positive effect on the purchase intention of Generation Z. The outcomes substantiate the conclusions drawn by Bagozzi et al. (2016), whose research similarly delineated that affective states exert a favourable impact on consumers' propensity to engage in purchase behaviours.

Table 7

Determination of coefficients, predictive relevance and the effect size

	R^2	Q^2
PI	0.75	0.748
		F^2
BA -> PI	0.498	
BE -> PI	0.029	
DMC -> PI	0.011	
EMT -> PI	0.024	

Source: Authors' work

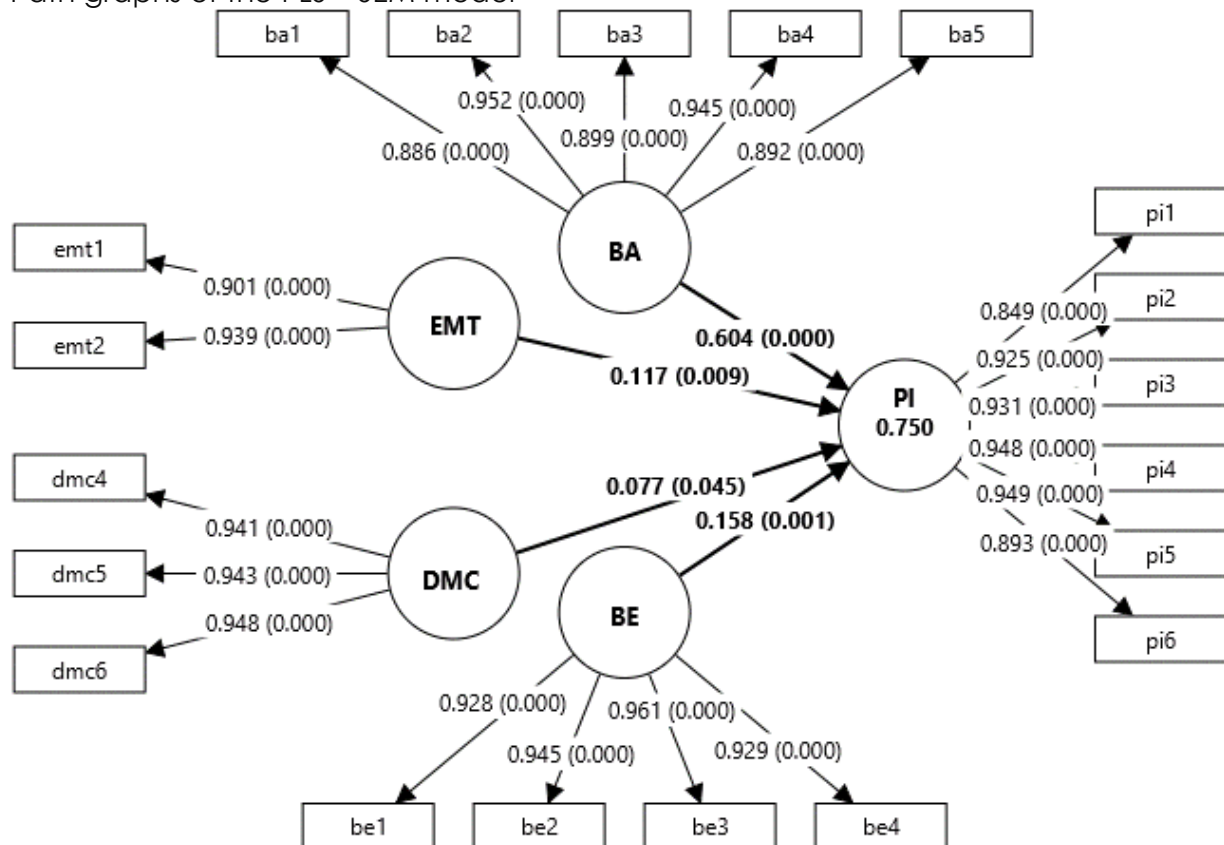
Note: R^2 - R-squared, Q^2 - Q-squared, F^2 - F-squared, PI – purchase intention, BA – brand awareness, BE – brand equity, DMC – digital media content, EMT - emotions.

Figure 2 shows the model, including the path graphs for all variables, their constructs, and data on factor loadings, coefficients, and p -values. As noted above, constructs DMC1, DMC2, DMC3, and EMT3 are removed from the model due to low factor loadings. Lastly, the R-square (coefficient of determination), the predictive relevance Q-square, and the effect size (F-square) have been analysed (Table 7).

As seen in Table 7, the R^2 is 0.75, indicating that the Purchase intention of Gen Z is explained by 75% of the variables we have analysed. Moreover, the Q^2 , or predictive relevance, which is an SEM technique used to assess how well the model predicts the endogenous construct's data points, is 0.748. The output of 0.748 indicates that, based on the model's input data, it predicts and explains the construct's values very well (a value above 0.5 indicates strong predictive relevance). Lastly, the F^2 values indicate the relative effect size of each exogenous construct on purchase intention. Brand awareness shows a large effect on purchase intention ($F^2 = 0.498$), while brand equity ($F^2 = 0.029$) and emotions ($F^2 = 0.024$) show small effects. Digital media content has a very small effect ($F^2 = 0.011$). Therefore, although all four relationships are statistically significant, the substantive contribution of digital media content, brand equity, and emotions is considerably weaker than that of brand awareness.

Figure 2

Path graphs of the PLS – SEM model



Source: Authors' work

Discussion

Theoretical contribution

This study aims to analyse the relationships among brand awareness, brand equity, digital media content, emotions, and Generation Z's purchase intention. It makes a novel theoretical contribution by being the first study of this kind to examine Generation Z's behavioural tendencies within the specific socio-cultural environment of North Macedonia.

Although existing studies informed this model's construction and selection of constructs, novel constructs emerged directly from interviews with members of Generation Z during the scanning phase of this study. This represents a significant contribution to the literature on purchase intention among Generation Z consumers. Furthermore, to address potential methodological assumptions and enhance the robustness of data analysis, the results have been re-analysed using Stata 18.0, in addition to the analysis conducted in Smart PLS4. Notably, the results from both analyses were consistent in terms of hypothesis testing, suggesting that the model is well-specified and that the direct relationships between the variables are strongly supported.

From the author's perspective, the findings of this study have paved the way for further theoretical advancements regarding purchase intentions among Generation Z and, more broadly, the younger population. Future literature developments should consider incorporating a broader range of emotional factors and emotion-based predictors that influence various intentions within this demographic, as well as

exploring socialised methods and strategies for managing these emotions. Additionally, the literature would benefit from a more nuanced understanding of purchase intentions, particularly regarding young consumers' commitment to green and sustainable products and services. In the future, literature should be more specific in detailing the underlying mechanisms of purchase intention and provide more empirical evidence on youth engagement with environmentally conscious offerings.

Limitations and further research

Since this study is limited to Generation Z and focused primarily on North Macedonia, enhancing its comprehensiveness by including a more diverse participant pool across more countries would be advantageous. Such an approach would facilitate comparative analyses of Generation Z behaviour across different cultural contexts, thereby enabling exploration of potential variations within the same generational cohort across distinct cultural landscapes. Further investigations may include more countries and more generations to yield unique results for each generation and its characteristics.

Furthermore, this investigation examines the purchase intentions of Generation Z in a broad context; however, during data collection, it became evident that their purchasing behaviours and intentions may vary significantly across product categories. Consequently, future research could benefit from a more targeted analysis of distinct product groups to better understand the nuances of purchase intention within those contexts. For instance, studies could focus on categories such as technology products, perfumes, health-oriented food items, green products or other specific product segments.

Conclusion

The study's main goal is to investigate how brand awareness, brand equity, digital media content, and emotions relate to purchase intention of Generation Z. It uses primary data sources obtained via an online questionnaire and is solely focused on Generation Z. Using Smart PLS4; it has been developed a SEM model to study the effect that brand awareness, brand equity, digital media content, and emotions have on purchase intention.

The study's findings led to the conclusion that every aspect under investigation had a favourable effect on Generation Z's inclination to buy. In conclusion, it was found that Generation Z's purchase intention is positively impacted by brand equity, brand awareness, digital media content, and emotions.

The findings of this study introduce a novel dimension to understanding the emerging trends shaping young consumers' emotions, particularly in relation to purchase intention. The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) and its algorithms should be a focal point for future research, especially for marketers, as these technologies have the potential to shape the development of new products and services significantly. Investigating how AI can predict and influence consumer behaviour, particularly among young consumers, is a critical area for further exploration.

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