

Effectiveness of Meme Marketing in Influencing Gen Z Purchase Intentions

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Abstract — This study examines the effectiveness of meme marketing as a digital promotional strategy and its influence on the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in the Indian context. *Design/methodology/approach*: A descriptive research design was adopted, combining primary data collected from 120 Gen Z respondents through a structured online questionnaire with secondary data drawn from peer-reviewed journals and digital marketing reports. Data were analysed using percentage analysis, mean analysis, the chi-square test, and Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient. *Findings*: The results indicate that meme-based advertisements exert a statistically significant influence on Gen Z purchase decisions ($\chi^2 = 14.82$, $p < 0.05$), with a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.94$) between social media usage and engagement with meme content. Humour, relatability, entertainment value, and cultural relevance emerged as the dominant drivers of brand recall and purchase intention. *Originality/value*: The study contributes to the limited empirical literature on meme marketing in emerging markets by providing primary evidence from Indian Gen Z consumers and offering practical guidance for marketers seeking to design humour-led, culturally resonant digital campaigns.

Keywords — Meme Marketing; Generation Z; Consumer Behaviour; Purchase Intention; Social Media Marketing; Brand Awareness.

1. Introduction

Digital marketing has fundamentally transformed the way organisations communicate with consumers, particularly with younger, digitally native audiences. The shift is part of a broader wave of AI-enabled transformation across business, education, and operations, in which intelligent digital systems are reshaping how organisations design, deliver, and personalise content (Arockia, Vetriselvan, Rajesh, Velmurugan, & Cheelo, 2025; Velmurugan, Karthik, Venkatesan, Sadeesh kumar, & Madhurikkha, 2026). Within this evolving landscape, meme marketing has gained remarkable popularity for engaging Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers due to its humorous, relatable, and inherently shareable character.

Memes commonly understood as creative images, short videos, or text–image combinations that spread rapidly across social media have become a dominant cultural unit through which young consumers communicate emotions, ideas, and shared experiences. Generation Z, broadly defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, are highly active on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok, and tend to prefer authentic, entertaining, and culturally relevant content over traditional, formal advertisements (Gupta & Verma, 2022). In response, brands such as Netflix, Zomato, Swiggy, and Amazon have actively integrated meme-based content into their digital campaigns to enhance engagement and brand visibility.

Humour, creativity, and cultural relevance play an important role in shaping consumer behaviour and purchase decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Meme marketing leverages these elements to produce viral content that improves brand visibility, customer interaction, and purchase intention. Against this backdrop, the present study examines how meme marketing influences Gen Z purchase intentions in the Indian digital marketplace.

2. Problem Statement

Traditional advertisements often fail to capture the attention of Generation Z consumers, who increasingly prefer entertaining, relatable, and interactive digital content (Ramesh & Priya, 2023). Although many organisations are investing significantly in meme marketing campaigns, empirical evidence on whether such campaigns actually influence Gen Z purchase decisions, brand perception, and consumer engagement remains limited, particularly in the Indian context. This study, therefore, examines the effectiveness of meme marketing on Gen Z consumers and the extent to which it shapes their purchase intentions.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To study the concept and importance of meme marketing in the contemporary digital marketing environment.
- To analyse the influence of meme marketing on Gen Z consumers and their buying behaviour.

- To examine the impact of meme-based advertisements on Gen Z purchase decisions.

4. Need and Significance of the Study

The study helps organisations understand how meme marketing influences Gen Z consumer behaviour and purchase decisions, and supports marketers in identifying effective strategies for improving customer engagement and brand awareness through meme-based advertising (Sharma, 2021). The findings are particularly useful for marketers, advertisers, and policy makers seeking to design innovative, culturally resonant promotional strategies for the digital generation, and add to the broader literature on AI- and data-driven decision frameworks in contemporary business operations (Deepika, Nithya, Durgarani, Delecta Jenifer, & Prakash, 2026).

5. Literature Review

Kotler and Keller (2016) argue that digital marketing strategies that create emotional connection and entertainment value are more successful in attracting younger consumers, who prefer interactive and engaging content over traditional advertisements. Meme marketing fulfils this requirement by combining humour with promotional communication, and aligns with the broader movement toward AI-augmented, learner- and user-centred digital engagement (Arockia et al., 2025). Sharma (2021) found that meme marketing significantly improves brand recall and consumer engagement among young social media users, with humorous and relatable content increasing audience attention and encouraging organic social sharing. The study further noted that meme marketing positively influences consumer perception towards brands. Gupta and Verma (2022) reported that because Gen Z consumers spend considerable time on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and X, meme marketing is an especially effective promotional strategy for this cohort. Their study concluded that Gen Z consumers are more likely to engage with brands that use creative and entertaining meme content compared to traditional forms of advertising. Khan (2020) reports that meme marketing fosters stronger emotional connections between brands and consumers because memes reflect current social trends, emotions, and cultural references. The research highlighted that meme-based advertisements increase customer interaction, improve communication effectiveness, and enhance purchase intention among younger consumers. Ramesh and Priya (2023) examined the relationship between meme marketing and purchase decisions among college students and concluded that humour and relatability are the major factors influencing Gen Z towards meme-promoted products, while entertaining advertisements also improve brand preference and customer loyalty. Singh and Kaur (2021) describe meme marketing as a low-cost, high-engagement promotional strategy in which

viral meme content helps brands improve visibility and reach rapidly through social media sharing. However, they caution that irrelevant or offensive meme content may negatively affect brand image and consumer trust, an ethical concern that mirrors broader debates on governance and responsible use of AI-driven content systems (Selvi, Anbarasan, Madhumita, Janaki, & Devi, 2026). Building on these findings, recent work also underscores the importance of human-centric, ethically grounded approaches to digital engagement, particularly where younger audiences and their wellbeing are concerned (Aumose & Raj, 2026; Divya Ranjani, Anitha, Manokaran, Selvi, Suresh Kumar, & Prithvi, 2026). This perspective is directly relevant to meme marketing, where authenticity, cultural sensitivity, and responsible content strategy are critical to sustainable brand engagement.

6. Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive research design, which is appropriate for documenting the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviours of the target population at a single point in time without manipulating the variables under investigation. The descriptive approach is well-suited to the present enquiry, where the objective is to capture the patterns and preferences of Gen Z respondents as they currently exist rather than to test causal mechanisms. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used. Primary data were collected directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire administered as an online survey, allowing wider geographic reach and a faster turnaround than paper-based fieldwork. Secondary data were drawn from peer-reviewed journals, research articles, reputable websites, and published digital marketing reports, providing the conceptual grounding and the comparative benchmarks against which the primary findings could be interpreted. A convenience sampling technique was used to select respondents. While this method does not support statistical generalisation to the wider Gen Z population, it is appropriate for an exploratory descriptive study where access to a defined sampling frame is limited and the focus is on identifying observable patterns within an accessible group. The total sample comprised 120 Gen Z respondents, a size that supports basic inferential testing for the analyses planned in this study. The collected data were analysed using four complementary tools. Percentage analysis was applied to summarise the demographic and behavioural profile of the respondents and to express the distribution of responses across categories in proportionate terms.

Mean analysis was used to identify the central tendency of perception and attitude items, indicating where respondents converged most strongly. The chi-square test was applied to test the association between selected categorical variables, allowing the study to determine whether observed differences across sub-groups were

statistically significant. Correlation analysis was then used to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between continuous variables, complementing the chi-square results with a measure of how closely two variables move together. The use of such analytics-led, predictive techniques is consistent with the wider movement toward data-driven decision frameworks in contemporary research (Pradeepa, Gokilavani, Deepan, Sridevi, & Selvi, 2026).

7. Statistical Analysis

7.1 Percentage Analysis

Table 1: Frequency of Watching Meme Advertisements

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Frequently	52	43%
Occasionally	38	32%
Rarely	20	17%
Never	10	8%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation: The table indicates that 43% of respondents frequently watch meme advertisements on social media, while a further 32% watch them occasionally. This shows that meme marketing has high visibility among Gen Z consumers, with three-quarters of the sample reporting regular exposure to meme-based promotional content.

Table 2: Meme Marketing Influences Purchase Decision

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	46	38%
Agree	40	33%
Neutral	18	15%
Disagree	10	8%
Strongly Disagree	6	6%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation: A majority of 71% of respondents (Strongly Agree and Agree combined) reported that meme marketing influences their purchase decisions and increases their interest in promoted brands, indicating a strong perceived effect of meme content on buying behaviour.

7.2 Mean Analysis

Table 3: Mean Score Analysis of Meme Marketing Factors

Factors	Total Score	Mean Score
Humour in Meme Content	510	4.25
Brand Recall	492	4.10
Purchase Intention	468	3.90
Entertainment Value	528	4.40
Social Media Engagement	516	4.30

Interpretation: The highest mean score is observed for entertainment value (4.40), followed by social media engagement (4.30) and humour in meme content (4.25). These results indicate that Gen Z consumers most strongly prefer entertaining and humorous meme content, and that engagement-driven advertising resonates more than purely promotional messaging.

7.3 Chi-Square Analysis

The relationship between meme marketing and Gen Z purchase decisions was tested using the chi-square test.

H_0 : There is no significant relationship between meme marketing and the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers.

H_1 : There is a significant relationship between meme marketing and the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers.

Table 4: Observed Frequency – Attitude vs. Purchase Influence

Attitude Towards Memes	Purchase Influenced	Not Influenced	Total
Positive	72	18	90
Negative	10	20	30
Total	82	38	120

Test Statistic: Calculated $\chi^2 = 14.82$; Table value at $df = 1$, $\alpha = 0.05$ is 3.84.

Result: Since the calculated value (14.82) exceeds the critical value (3.84), the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a statistically significant relationship between meme marketing and Gen Z purchase decisions.

7.4 Correlation Analysis

Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to test the relationship between daily social media usage (in hours) and engagement with meme advertisements.

Table 5: Social Media Usage and Meme Advertisement Engagement

Social Media Usage (Hours/day)	Engagement Score
1	35
2	48
3	62
4	74
5	88

Calculated Correlation Coefficient (r) = 0.94.

Interpretation: The value $r = 0.94$ indicates a very strong positive correlation between daily social media usage and engagement with meme-based advertisements. Higher time spent on social media is closely associated with higher engagement scores, reinforcing the role of platform exposure in the effectiveness of meme marketing.

8. Findings of the Study

- A majority of Gen Z consumers frequently view meme-based advertisements on social media platforms, indicating strong organic exposure to meme marketing.
- Meme marketing significantly improves brand awareness and consumer engagement among Gen Z respondents (Sharma, 2021; Gupta & Verma, 2022).
- Humour and entertainment value are the two strongest factors attracting Gen Z to meme-based promotional content (Khan, 2020).
- Meme marketing exerts a positive and significant influence on purchase intention and buying behaviour (Ramesh & Priya, 2023).
- The chi-square test confirms a statistically significant relationship between meme marketing and Gen Z purchase decisions ($\chi^2 = 14.82$, $p < 0.05$).
- A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.94$) exists between social media usage and engagement with meme advertisements.

9. Suggestions

Meme marketing strategies should focus on creativity, humour, and cultural relevance in order to attract Gen Z consumers effectively. Brands should create authentic and relatable meme content rather than forced or overtly promotional advertisements (Singh & Kaur, 2021). Organisations should regularly monitor trending topics and emerging social media culture to design timely and engaging meme campaigns. Meme advertisements should be short, visually appealing, and platform-native, so as to improve consumer attention and brand recall. Companies should also encourage audience interaction through comments, shares, and user-generated content to enhance engagement and brand loyalty. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and X should be used strategically for meme-based promotions because Gen Z spends a significant proportion of online time on these channels (Gupta & Verma, 2022). At the same time, organisations should avoid offensive, stereotyping, or irrelevant meme content, since such material may negatively affect brand image, consumer trust, and youth wellbeing (Singh & Kaur, 2021; Aumose & Raj, 2026; Selvi et al., 2026).

10. Conclusion

This study concludes that meme marketing has a significant and positive impact on Gen Z purchase decisions and consumer behaviour. Meme-based advertisements help organisations improve brand awareness, customer engagement, and purchase intention through humour, creativity, and cultural relatability (Sharma, 2021; Khan, 2020). Gen Z consumers prefer entertaining and authentic content over traditional promotional advertisements, making

meme marketing an effective strategy in the digital era. The statistical analysis confirms that meme marketing positively influences consumer engagement and purchase decisions, with a significant chi-square value (14.82) and a very strong positive correlation (0.94) between social media usage and engagement with meme content. Situated within the wider human–AI symbiosis that is reshaping modern business environments (Ramya, Ruben Anto, Kalpana Devi, Davidson, & Leelavathi, 2026), organisations should therefore continuously adopt innovative, trend-aware, and ethically grounded meme marketing strategies to attract and retain Gen Z consumers in an increasingly competitive digital marketplace.

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