

## **Conceptualizing The Social Media Marketing Factors And Its Influences On Generation Z Users Intention To Play Mobile Games**

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**Abstract:** The Generation Z segment is consumers born in the mid-1990s and to the late 2000s and is given relatively high importance by marketers. Generation Z consumers are interested in staying away from traditional face-to-face communications with peers, family, and friends; and are mostly engaged with mobile phones, laptops, tablets, games consoles, and similar electronic modes. In addition, Generation Z has less opportunity to play games outside the home due to urbanization and lifestyle issues, and they are more likely to engage themselves in social media, video games, and digital entertainment, which leads them to build a social network. Thus, generation Z has emerged as the high-potential consumer and is targeted by marketers of the gaming industry. There are various studies on social media marketing and the purchase intention of consumers with interesting findings. However, this study is novel in its approach. It presents a unified theoretical framework for understanding how social media marketing factors influence Gen Zer's perception and Intention to play mobile games. Thus, this study would add value to the literature and fill the gap in digital marketing literature with special reference to the gaming industry.

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing (SMM); perceptions; behavioral intention; mobile games; Generation Z.

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### **1. Introduction**

The game developers and the mobile game companies are striving hard and targeting their booming market. There were around 2.4 million mobile gamers worldwide at the end of 2019. Hence, the mobile game companies started focusing on augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies to offer more modernized games to compete with their rivals. Statistics mentioned that the mobile game market is bigger than the other markets such as PC games, PlayStation, and X box. Mobile games dominate 50 percent of the revenue in the global digital gaming industry. Earlier, the mobile game market was predicted to grow 3 percent a year, which was expected to reach 57 billion USD by 2024 Kaplan, & Haenlein, (2010). Newzoo senior market analyst's recent report stated that the global gaming market would generate a \$159.3 billion revenue in 2020 Field Level Media. (2020). Due to the growing number of users and the profit generated through advertisements, mobile game companies are more curious about developing new modern games. Smartphone users and usage hours grew drastically in 2020 due to the pandemic lockdown. This situation led to the sudden unpredictable rapid growth in the mobile gaming industry. In mobile gaming, there are equal opportunities for both free and paid games. They are easy to download and play. It does not require any special knowledge or skills, and it comes with a user-friendly tutorial. The users play these mobile games as a stress buster to relax, and there is no requirement for any additional gadgets such as PlayStation and gaming consoles Kaplan, & Haenlein, (2010). The marketing term 'Generation Z' refers to the category of individuals born around 1995, and other terms used for this group are the Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001), Post Millennial Oblinger, and Oblinger, (2005), The New Silent Generation (Saldik, 2007), and the Generation Z born after 2001 to present is the time categorization presented by Reeves and Oh, (2008). The many other terms and definitions of Gen Z exist according to the marketing and research categories Bassiouni, and Hackley, (2014). Generation Z market segment, born with access to the internet and Wi-Fi, are the most active smartphone users.

According to (Gentina, 2020), the Gen Zers are the generation of digital natives and creative generation valuing collaborative consumption. The McKinsey report (Kim et al., 2020) [9] pointed out that Gen Zers grew up with social media and never knew a world without the internet. "Across APAC (Asia-Pacific Region), almost a third of Gen Zers spend six hours or longer a day on their phones, a considerably higher share than millennials (22 percent) and Gen Xers (10 percent)". The significant influence for Generation Z in brand decisions comes from social media and online websites. The APAC Gen Zers highly rely on social media, and they are aware of how to engage with it. Playing online/mobile games has become a part of Gen Zers' digital consumer culture Bassiouni, & Hackley, (2014), as like social media. They used to share the information about the games with their friends, schoolmates, and colleagues and embed the gaming activities in their everyday lives. They also actively search for information about games in social media and application stores. Online marketers consider these Gen Zers as potential consumers. Because, Generation Z has less opportunity to play games outside the home without or less supervision by parents due to lifestyle issues; and they are more likely to engage themselves in social media, video games, and digital entertainment, which leads them to build a social network. Thus, generation Z has emerged as

a potential consumer and is highly considered by marketers of the gaming industry. Numerous studies focused on social media marketing and consumers' purchase intention and came up with interesting findings. Thus, this study aims to build the conceptual framework to analyze the effect of social media marketing factors with specific attention on Gen Z user's Intention to play mobile games.

## 2. Literature Review

The internet and electronic commerce are growing tremendously, and companies are often upgrading their marketing strategies according to the lifestyle and changing consumer behavior. One strategy is marketing products or services through social media, a more powerful tool as it reaches the target population in seconds. For example, an individual usually uses his smartphone in everyday life, but now, in the present situation of Covid-19, most of the businesses have been transformed to do their business online by either using a website or social media. Therefore, it increases individuals' smartphone usage in a day, and they have to use their phone to study, work, or even kill time. Whenever these individuals take their smartphone to do something, they are highly prone to open any social media applications like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Line, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Twitter, Renren, PengYou, or other social media applications at least once a day. (Tuten, 2020) stated that the average internet user spends two hours a day on and uses eight different social media applications. There are high possibilities to see information regarding products or services through advertisements, promotional deals, notifications, invitations, links, reviews, friends, family, and discussion groups. Such marketing communications will lead an individual to check the information about a product or service to learn more about them. Using Social Media for marketing also applies to the mobile gaming industry. Though there are also some in-built or pre-installed games on smartphones, mobile game marketers regularly use the strategies or marketing moves to attract more users for increasing revenue through in-built game advertisements. The smartphone user is more likely to pass through the information about mobile games in any social media applications, as most of the applications use advertising for revenue generation. For example, on video-sharing platforms, we can see many advertisements in between, even in the 15 minutes videos. Not only advertisements, but the marketers also use several factors to influence user intention through Social Media. Those factors are discussed below in the perspective of Gen Zers user intention with special reference to mobile games.

### 2.1 Social Media

The earlier studies found there is a limited understanding of the definition of Social Media. People give more importance to the word 'Media' rather than the word 'Social.' Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated that there are various types of Social Media platforms. However, there is no systematic way to categorize various types of Social Media applications (Huang, et al., 2016) analyzed the differences between old media and new media. The new Media possesses media richness and social relationships, which is superior to email. They indicated "social media is not a completely differentiated communication channel from the existing media, but it indicates that new media have evolved by borrowing and remodeling the form of old media through reciprocal innovations." Their study found that the three new Social Media platforms, Wechat, Weibo, and Renren, are superior to old media in information seeking and remediation in China. Lange-Faria and Elliot (2012) stated that social media's ideological concept allows many users access to the internet to 'share, collaborate, and update web content.' The authors referred to social Media as the web applications that enable users to post and share content. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined Social Media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content." The authors also cited the various definitions for the two components, 'Social' and 'Media,' and classified Social Media by combining the dimensions in a tabular format. They classified social media by two elements "social presence/media richness" and "self-presentation/self-disclosure." They explained that the "collaborative projects and blogs are usually text-based with a limited exchange. Such content communities and social networking websites allow text-based communication, sharing pictures, videos, and other media forms. Whereas virtual game and social worlds scored highest as they replicate all the dimensions of face-to-face interactions in a virtual environment."

### 2.2 Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing is part of Digital Marketing. (Tuten, 2020) defined Social Media marketing as "the utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that value for an organization's stakeholders." The author also pointed out the four social media zones: social community, social publishing, social entertainment, and social commerce. Subramani and Rajagopalan (2003) stated that online social networks are an essential source of information that influences consumers to use the products and services. Social media marketing is distinct from the traditional form of marketing as it involves consumers and interacts with them in a two-way means of communication. Thus, it fosters brand promotion and engages consumers more effectively to better understand their needs and offer value to the consumers faster.

### 2.3 Social Media Marketing and Intention to Use or Purchase Intention

Social media has changed how society communicates and modifies their perceptions and attitudes (Duffett, 2015) consumers highly use social media and adopt products and services based on social media influences. Several studies analyzed the impact of social media or social networks on consumers purchasing decisions. Af Ekenstam, (2009) found that social networks influence the rate of the market adopting new products. Darban and Li (2012) analyzed the impact of online social networks on consumers' purchasing decisions. The study found that online social networks impact every step of consumers' purchasing decision process as it is convenient to people, consumers spend more time on it, and Facebook's features allow consumer interaction with the supermarkets directly and also, they can see the other consumers comments and interact with them in supermarkets' Facebook pages. (Nan, 2016) identified the factors that impact viewers' Intention to purchase the products or services recommended by social media influencers. The five themes that emerged from the study are social media influence, electronic word of mouth, social media influencer, and social media influencer's effect on purchase intention and gender. The study by (Funde., 2017) analyzed the social media factors impacting mobile devices' purchase intention amongst Working Generation Y in South Africa. The study results reported that online engagement significantly affects purchase intention. Kwahk and Kim (2017) stated that consumers are more likely to make purchase decisions similar to others as they consider others' judgments and behaviors as key sources of information while making their purchase decisions. Consumers also alter their prior beliefs and decisions based on the information provided by other members through social media. The knowledge and information are disseminated or transferred in social networks. Their study's major findings indicated that social Media demonstrates a higher level of informational social influence on affecting trust in online vendors and consumers' visit intentions. Martínez-Navarro and Bigné, (2017) found that enjoyment and credibility influence marketer-generated content's value, leading to behavioral responses. The authors also pointed out that immediate online interaction between marketers and users helps marketers reach consumers in real-time. Toor, Husnain, and Hussain (2017) found in their study that social network marketing is significantly related to consumer purchase intention. Their study also reported that consumer engagement partially mediates the relationship between social network marketing and consumer purchase intention.

(Laksamana., 2018) found that there is a positive relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. (Oeawpanich., 2018) found that the social media factors such as social identity, altruism, telepresence, e-word-of-mouth, advertising, ease of use, and usefulness have a moderately significant relationship with online purchase intention. In contrast, the factor of trust has a strong significant relationship with online purchase intention. (Teo De Wen., 2019) analyzed the antecedents of consumer's attitudes towards social media influencers and their impact on purchase intention. Their findings revealed that the social media influencer informativeness, entertainment provided, source credibility, source attractiveness, and product matchup have a significant relationship with consumers' attitudes and positively impact their purchase intention. (Suprpto., et al 2020) found that social media advertising indirectly affects consumer purchase intention through consumer perceptions. (Kostov., 2020) analyzed the impact of social media marketing on consumer behavior. The author stated that advertising on Social Media affects consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Thus, marketers may plan their strategies accordingly to attract and retain consumers. (Tresa Sebastian et al. 2021) explored YouTube visitors' opinions towards advertisements and their influences on purchase decisions. The authors identified the four major themes in this study, viz. The relevance of the advertisement, disinterest, subjective distress, and information and entertainment. Shankar, Inman, Mantrala, Kelley, and Rizley, (2011) mentioned that "As more shoppers are using social media and rely on them for making shopping decisions, promotion through these media has become important."

### 2.4 Studies on Online Games

The study by (Yee., 2006) developed an empirical model for understanding player motivations in online games. The author presented the ten motivation sub-components under three major factors (achievement, social, and immersion) (Koo., 2009) analyzed the effect of experiential motives such as concentration, enjoyment, escape, and epistemic curiosity on Intention to play online games. The study found that the players intend to play a particular online game if they perceive that the game provides benefits such as perceived enjoyment, escape, and social affiliation. The study results indicated that escape was the most influential factor affecting user intention, followed by perceived enjoyment and social affiliation. Rauschnabel, and Tom (2017) found that hedonic, emotional, and social benefits and social norms drive consumer intentions to play mobile augmented reality games, whereas physical risks (excluding data privacy risks) hinder consumer reactions. The authors further stated that "consumers' attitudes toward playing mobile AR games are mostly driven by the level of enjoyment they receive and the image that playing a particular game conveys to other people." The study also reported that nostalgia, the flow experience, and the physical activity from playing the game contribute to a positive association with the attitude toward playing Pokemon Go.

In contrast, the risk of being injured/hurt while playing the game decreases this attitude to play the game. Goltermann studied the factors affecting mobile game loyalty and In-app purchase intention. The study results revealed that hedonic outcome expectations, utilitarian outcome expectations, and connectedness positively influence mobile game loyalty. Reasonable price and mobile game loyalty positively influence in-app purchase intention. Wicaksana and Syah (2020) studied the relationship between the integrated value of purchasing game items on purchase intentions of games and found a significant relationship. The authors developed the integrated value factor based on the consumption theory and consists of enjoyment, character competency value, visual authority value, and monetary value.

### 3. Concept Development

Based on the literature review, it is evident that social media marketing affects the consumers' purchase intention. There are limited studies in the gaming industry that analyzed the Intention to play or purchase the games with the influence of social media marketing. Thus, this study attempts to draw attention by a unified conceptual framework to understand social media marketing factors affecting Gen Z users' Intention to play mobile games.

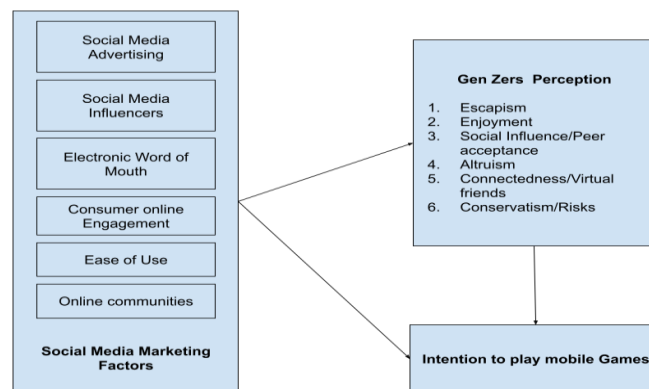


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

#### 3.1 Social Media Marketing factors and Intention to play mobile games

Numerous studies studied the impact of social media marketers and purchase intentions. (Funde., 2017) used electronic word of mouth (EwOM) and Online engagement as major social media marketing factors to analyze its impact on purchase intentions. Consumer engagement is referred to as the existence of a consumer's interactive, co-creative experiences with a specific brand. According to Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan(2012), customer engagement is all about the customer-organizational relationships, stresses the interaction on uses or experiences with potential or existing customers, or events or activities conducted by the organizations. Either the consumer engagement could be provider-initiated or consumer-initiated. Thus, online consumer engagement is consumer-company interactions, sharing and exchanging knowledge, information, beliefs, and experiences with other consumers, participating or supporting online events and activities. (Hennig-Thurau, et al.2004) referred to "eWOM communication as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet." Electronic word of mouth (EWOM) refers to the online reviews or comments or likes or shares made by other consumers, which is considered an essential source of information that influences consumers' purchase intentions. The reviews or comments target a brand or service provider, which may be positive or negative. The primary objective is to share or pass the information to other consumers/friends/communities/companies in an electronic mode. EWOM can build or damage the reputation of a brand or company. (Teo De Wen 2019) studied the impact of social media influencers on consumers' attitudes and purchase intention; the study found a significant positive impact on purchase intention. The author mentioned that the influencers use different social media platforms to maximize the product/service exposure, and they work closely with the companies to influence consumers' purchase intention. Thus, social media influencers can influence consumer's attitudes and perceptions positively. (Suprpto, Et al., 2020) found that social media advertising significantly influences purchase intentions through consumer perceptions. The authors added that social media advertising is an essential tool used to reach broader markets, and the purchase intention arises as the content of advertising is displayed in various formats like pictures, videos, and the contents like riddles. Example: While watching an online video, we may happen to see an advertisement for mobile games, food and beverages, and other services. Social media advertisements are usually more attractive, interesting, engaging, and reach broader markets. (Oeawpanich., 2018) stated that ease of use is "the extent that the individuals do not need much skill and are easy to operate."

The author found that ease of use has a moderate relationship with purchase intention. Ease of use refers to the usage by individuals without any hassle or difficulties. Haron and Razzaque (2008) stated that "As the online relationships expand, more consumers tend to group in various virtual communities to form their social networks." Thus, "online communities" refer to groups of individuals who join together and build a strong relationship to share and exchange knowledge and information about the products or services. These virtual communities share a common desire and interests. (Balakrishnan, et al., 2014) found that online marketing communications, specifically E-WOM, online communities, and online advertisement, effectively promote brand loyalty and purchase Intention through company websites and Social Media platforms. Thus, this indicated that Social Media marketing serves as an important tool to reach more comprehensive, younger generation consumers.

**Hypothesis 1:** Social media advertising significantly affects the Intention to play mobile games.

**Hypothesis 2:** Social media influencers significantly affect the Intention to play mobile games.

**Hypothesis 3:** Electronic word of mouth significantly affects the Intention to play mobile games.

**Hypothesis 4:** Consumer online engagement significantly affects the Intention to play mobile games.

**Hypothesis 5:** Ease of use significantly affects the Intention to play mobile games.

**Hypothesis 6:** Online communities significantly affect the Intention to play mobile games.

### 3.2. Social Media factors, Gen Zers Perception, and Intention to play mobile games

The Gen Zers perception was identified based on the literature review, which elucidates the concept perceptions to play online games and the characteristics of Gen Zers. The six perception elements of Gen Zers were identified, namely, escapism, enjoyment, social influence/peer acceptance, altruism, connectedness/virtual friends, and conservatism/risks. (Yee., 2006) referred to escapism as "Using the online environment to avoid thinking about real-life problems." Escapism refers to the individuals relaxing themselves from the stress or pressures in real life or killing boredom. (Rauschnabel et al., 2017) refer to enjoyment as "the degree to which users perceive playing mobile games as enjoyable." Peer acceptance is "crucial to Gen Z where they need to belong and fit in (Williams and Page, 2011)." They love to see and hear the way others are doing things. Social influence/peer acceptance is referred to as where the user believes that his peer group expects him or her to play the same game (Rauschnabel et al., 2017). Based on the extensive review, the authors Kwahk and Kim (2017) found that social influence is classified as normative influence and informational influence; normative influence is referred to as self-compliance of the individual to meet the group commitments informational influence is associated with knowledge. (Oeawpanich, M. 2018) referred to altruism as the behavior based on "the attitude and beliefs that the people will benefit from the help and support each other in the future, and they might even if they are not related." Thus, Gen Zers tend to react immediately in sharing their knowledge and react to the suggestions from the online communities or social media marketing. The term connectedness/virtual friends are about "how the user feels connected to other users through the mobile game." It helps to connect with other people (Rauschnabel et al., 2017). Example: There is a chat option in mobile games, and individuals feel connected and make virtual friends. Thus, Goltermann stated that connectedness influences purchase Intention for mobile games. Thus, Gen Zers are highly influenced by virtual friends (Williams and Page, 2011). The Gen Zers are very conservative and concerned about privacy issues and data security risks. Thus, it is reported to negatively influence behavioral Intention (Rauschnabel et al., 2017). The Intention to play mobile games is that the users may probably be interested in downloading or buying and playing the game based on the influences of social media marketing and their perceptions.

**Hypothesis 7:** Social media advertising significantly affects the Gen Zers' perceptions towards mobile games.

**Hypothesis 8:** Social media influencers significantly affect the Gen Zers' perceptions towards mobile games.

**Hypothesis 9:** Electronic word of mouth significantly affects the Gen Zers' perceptions towards mobile games.

**Hypothesis 10:** Consumer online engagement significantly affects the Gen Zers' perceptions towards mobile games.

**Hypothesis 11:** Ease of use significantly affects the Gen Zers' perceptions towards mobile games.

**Hypothesis 12:** Online communities significantly affect the Gen Zers' perceptions towards mobile games.

**Hypothesis 13:** Gen Zers perceptions (escapism, enjoyment, social influence/peer acceptance, altruism, connectedness/virtual friends, and conservatism/risks) significantly affect the Intention to play games.

## 4. Conclusion

This study proposed a unified framework for understanding the social media marketing factors influence on Gen Zers perception and their Intention to play mobile games. Several studies focused on social media marketing factors and their influence on purchase intention; on the other hand, studies analyzed the attitude, perceptions, and motivations to play online games. This study is novel in its approach, which developed a unified, integrated framework for understanding social media marketing influences in Gen Zers' Intention to play mobile games. In reality, Gen Zers used to play mobile games and contribute to the most significant market share in the gaming

industry. Also, the social media marketing growth offers enormous benefits to the gaming industry marketers as it uses different ways to influence the users to play mobile or online games. Thus, this paper explored the concept using a realistic and integrated approach and filled the literature gap. Researchers can adapt the conceptual framework and hypotheses for validation and testing. Researchers from different geo-cultural regions can carry out studies with the conceptual framework and further analysis the prominent factors that influence the users to play mobile games.

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