

ANALYSIS OF GENERATION Z CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARD BRANDS BASED ON SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT AND BRAND TRUST

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Abstract. *The evolution of social media has transformed the way brands communicate information, build relationships, and capture consumer attention. For Generation Z, digital content serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a basis for assessing a brand's credibility, relevance, and character. This article aims to analyze how social media content and brand trust influence the formation of consumer attitudes among Generation Z in Indonesia. The study employs a qualitative, literature-based approach by examining theories of marketing, consumer behavior, and trust, as well as relevant scholarly articles, particularly those published between 2021 and 2026. Secondary data was analyzed thematically by grouping findings into themes related to content characteristics, trust formation, attitudes toward brands, and platform and consumer contexts. The literature synthesis indicates that content that is relevant, informative, consistent, and perceived as authentic can help consumers evaluate brands more positively. However, visual appeal or the intensity of promotion does not automatically lead to a positive attitude if the message is perceived as excessive, lacking transparency, or at odds with the consumer's experience. Brand trust emerges as an interpretive mechanism that helps consumers assess whether the claims in the content are credible. This conceptual finding emphasizes that the relationship between content, trust, and attitudes is not mechanical; product context, prior experiences, source credibility, and social interactions also influence consumer interpretation. This article contributes by integrating social media content and brand trust into a qualitative explanation of consumer attitudes, while also identifying the need for further empirical research in Indonesia. As it is literature-based, this article does not statistically estimate the magnitude of these effects.*

Keywords: *Generation Z, Social Media Content, Brand Trust, Consumer Attitudes, Digital Marketing.*

1. BACKGROUND

Social media has become an integral part of the contemporary marketing landscape. Brands use platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube to convey product information, demonstrate product usage, respond to questions, and foster conversations among consumers. This shift means that marketing communication is no longer entirely controlled by companies. Consumers can compare brand claims with user reviews, comments, creator content, and personal experiences. As a result, attitudes toward brands are shaped through the interaction between messages produced by companies and social information circulating in the digital space.

Generation Z is an important group to study because they have grown up with digital devices and encounter brand content in their daily activities. However, familiarity with technology does not mean that all members of Generation Z passively accept promotions. They can enjoy entertaining content while simultaneously questioning claims that seem exaggerated. Attention-grabbing content may increase brand awareness, but more enduring attitudes require an evaluation of the brand's benefits, credibility, consistency, and the experience it provides. Therefore, the number of views or interactions cannot be treated as direct evidence that consumers hold positive attitudes.

In this context, brand trust plays a crucial role. Trust is linked to the belief that a brand is reliable, delivers on its promises, and does not unintentionally mislead consumers. On social media, trust can be built through transparency, consistent responses, evidence of product use, and alignment between communication and real-world experiences. Conversely, manipulative content, reviews that appear inauthentic, or poor responses to complaints can erode trust. Thus, content and trust must be addressed together, rather than as standalone marketing elements.

Wijoyo, Nadi, and Rodhiah (2026) examined the effectiveness of digital advertising and the relevance of ads in the online shopping behavior of Generation Z in Indonesia. The study highlights the importance of digital message relevance in the context of consumer behavior. However, online shopping or spending behavior is not synonymous with consumer attitudes toward a brand. Attitudes are evaluations that can be positive, negative, or ambivalent, whereas a purchase is one possible behavioral response. Distinguishing these concepts is crucial to ensure that analyses do not conflate attention, trust, attitudes, purchase intent, and purchase decisions.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 Consumer Attitudes Toward Brands

Consumer attitudes can be understood as a comprehensive evaluation of an object relevant to the consumer—in this article, a brand. This evaluation may involve beliefs about attributes and benefits, feelings that arise when interacting with the brand, and a tendency to approach or avoid the brand. Attitudes are not the same as actual behavior. Consumers may like a brand but not purchase it due to budget constraints, availability, or

mismatched needs. Conversely, occasional purchases do not necessarily indicate a strong or loyal attitude.

The attitude approach helps explain why consumer judgments are not determined solely by product features. Identity, social symbols, experiences, and the way a brand communicates all contribute to its meaning. Keller and Swaminathan (2020) emphasize the importance of brand knowledge in the formation of brand equity. In the context of social media, content can add to or alter the associations stored in consumers' memories. However, the associations formed are not always positive: content can strengthen a brand's appeal, but it can also raise suspicion if it does not meet expectations.

2.2 Social Media Content as a Marketing Stimulus

Social media content includes material created by brands, creators, customers, and communities. Content can be informative, entertaining, interactive, educational, testimonial, or directly promotional. This article views content not merely as a visual format, but as a message with specific characteristics that is interpreted by consumers within a social context. The five relevant analytical dimensions are relevance, information quality, authenticity, interactivity, and consistency.

Relevance refers to how well the message aligns with the audience's needs and interests. Information quality encompasses clarity, accuracy, and sufficient detail to evaluate a product. Authenticity refers to the impression that content is presented honestly and is not created solely to manipulate perceptions. Interactivity is evident through the brand's responses to questions and comments. Consistency concerns the alignment of messages across content as well as the alignment of promotional claims with the product experience. These five dimensions serve as synthetic categories for analysis, not statistical scales tested in this article. A systematic review by Rapezzi (2026) on brand language in social media emphasizes that language choices and forms of communication are an important part of how brands interact with their audiences. Lu et al. (2026) also highlight the role of algorithmic recommendations, creator content, authentic reviews, and immersive experiences in the consumer journey on TikTok. Both perspectives demonstrate that the impact of content cannot be separated from how messages are packaged, who delivers them, and how the platform distributes them.

2.3 Brand Trust

Brand trust refers to consumers' willingness to rely on a brand based on the expectation that the brand will fulfill its promises and act in a predictable manner. Trust must be distinguished from the credibility of a message and trust in the source. A consumer may trust a particular creator but not necessarily trust the brand being promoted. Consumers may also assess factual information as true without having a strong connection to or trust in the brand.

In social media communication, trust can be built through repeated experiences, service consistency, transparency, complaint handling, and alignment between promises and reality. Conversely, the use of exaggerated claims, the concealment of important information, or defensive responses to criticism can undermine trust. Zhang et al. (2023), through a systematic review of trust in social media, demonstrate that the concept of trust has various definitions and objects. This reinforces the need for this journal to specifically define that its focus is on trust in brands, with social media content as one of the contexts in which it is formed.

A study by Ramadhani and Prasasti (2023) examines the role of brand trust in the relationship between social media marketing activities and purchase intent for local brands undergoing global expansion. This study is relevant because it links digital activities and trust, but its outcome variable is purchase intention and its design is quantitative. This article expands on the conceptual discussion by focusing on consumer attitudes and the interpretive mechanisms that can explain why trust emerges or weakens.

2.4 Generation Z in the Indonesian Context

Generation Z is often understood as a group that is familiar with digital technology, short-form video, online interactions, and rapid communication. However, generational categories should not be used to assume that all individuals share the same preferences. Differences in income, region, education, product usage experience, community, and product category can shape distinct responses. Therefore, this article uses Generation Z as a demographic context, not as a singular explanation for consumer behavior.

In the Indonesian context, social media serves as a space for seeking information, entertainment, recommendations from friends, and brand comparisons. Content from

local brands can gain legitimacy through consumer experiences and community conversations. At the same time, viral trends do not always guarantee product quality. Consumers can distinguish between the popularity of content and a brand's credibility, especially if they encounter conflicting reviews or experiences that do not align with promotional claims.

2.5 Comparison with Previous Research

Previous research reveals three trends. First, quantitative studies examine the relationship between social media marketing activities, trust, brand image, purchase intent, or brand equity. Second, systematic review studies map broader themes and identify conceptual fragmentation. Third, studies on specific platforms such as TikTok show that platform features and creator content can shape how consumers discover and evaluate brands. These three approaches complement one another but address different questions.

For example, Ramadhani and Prasasti (2023) examine the relationship between brand trust and purchase intention; Vidyanata et al. (2024) analyze social media marketing activities and brand equity for fashion products in the context of Generation Z; Khairunnisa and Gumay (2025) discuss social media marketing activities, brand trust, brand image, and purchase intention in e-commerce; while Wijoyo et al. (2026) focus on the effectiveness of digital advertising and Generation Z's online spending. This difference in focus indicates that consumer attitudes should not be equated with equity, intention, or expenditure. From a methodological perspective, survey studies can test the magnitude and significance of relationships, while qualitative literature reviews can elucidate recurring patterns of meaning, conceptual boundaries, and possible mechanisms. This article does not claim that qualitative approaches are superior to quantitative ones. Both address different questions. The contribution of this article is an interpretive synthesis that links content characteristics to brand beliefs and evaluations, while also identifying conditions under which these relationships may not be straightforward.

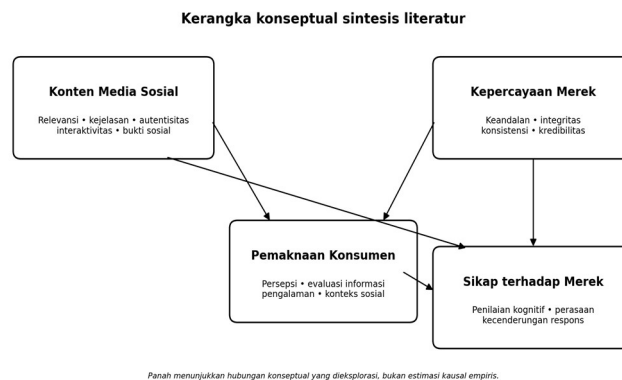
Table 1. Comparison of Previous Studies

Source	Main Focus	Relevant Approaches/Findings	Positioning in Relation to This Article
Ramadhani & Prasasti (2023)	Social media marketing activities, brand trust, purchase intent.	Quantitative survey; linking social media activity and trust to purchase intent	This article focuses on attitudes, not purchase intentions
Vidyanata et al. (2024)	Social Media Marketing and Brand Equity for Gen Z Fashion Products	The Context of Generation Z and Fashion Brands in Indonesia	This article highlights the processes of meaning-making and belief
Zhang et al. (2023)	The Concept and Antecedents of Trust in Social Media	A systematic review reveals a variety of definitions and objects of belief	Distinguishing between trust in a source/platform and trust in a brand
Khairunnisa & Gumay (2025)	Social media marketing activities, trust, brand image, purchase intent	Generation Z Survey in the Greater Jakarta Area	Placing consumer attitudes as a distinct conceptual focus
Hartati et al. (2025)	Social Media Activity and Brand Trust	The meta-analysis reported a generally positive association, with context acting as a moderator	Emphasizing that context can limit the consistency of relationships
Wijoyo et al. (2026)	The Effectiveness of Digital Advertising and Ad Relevance on Generation Z's Online Spending	The Indonesian Context: A Focus on Online Shopping Behavior	Distinguishing between purchasing behavior and brand attitudes
Lu et al. (2026)	TikTok and Gen Z Consumer Decisions	A systematic review; highlighting cognitive and affective pathways of trust	Adapting platform insights to synthesize consumer attitudes

Source: Compiled by the author based on the cited publications.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this article positions social media content as a communicative stimulus, consumer meaning-making as a process of interpretation, brand trust as an assessment of a brand's reliability, and consumer attitudes as an evaluation of the brand. This framework is not intended to be a tested causal model. It serves as a tool for organizing the literature and formulating an empirical research agenda.



3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Type and Design

This journal employs a qualitative approach using a literature review and thematic synthesis design. The data analyzed consist of scientific publications and books that discuss social media marketing, consumer attitudes, brand trust, Generation Z, and digital consumer behavior. This approach was chosen because the journal's objective is to understand and integrate concepts, rather than to measure the magnitude of statistical effects.

3.2 Data Sources and Literature Criteria

Data sources include scientific journal articles, systematic reviews, and relevant academic books. Priority is given to literature from the 2021–2026 period, but foundational works that remain conceptually important may still be used. Sources were selected based on their relevance to one or more key concepts, the clarity of bibliographic information, and their contribution to the research questions. Journals that only discuss

digital behavior in general without a clear connection to brands or consumer attitudes were not used as primary sources.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through bibliographic documentation. The information recorded included the author, year, research objective, context and platform, methods, concepts studied, key findings, limitations, and relevance to the article's research questions. This information was then compared to identify similarities, differences, and areas that had not been adequately explained.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis was conducted thematically in four stages. (1) Reading the publications and noting relevant concepts and findings. (2) Preliminary coding of themes related to social media content, brand trust, consumer attitudes, the Generation Z context, and research methods. (3) Comparing themes across publications to identify consistent patterns and differing findings. (4) Developing a conceptual synthesis that explains the interrelationships among themes and the limits of their application. Interpretations are distinguished from the original empirical findings to avoid giving the impression that the article contains its own interview or survey data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Social Media Content and Consumer Evaluation

A synthesis of the literature indicates that discussions of social media content and consumer attitudes can be grouped into four main themes: content characteristics, the trust-building process, evaluation of attitudes toward brands, and contextual conditions. These themes are interrelated but cannot be treated as strictly linear stages. Consumers may already have trust in a brand before viewing specific content, or they may critically evaluate the content due to past negative experiences.

This section summarizes the main themes emerging from the reviewed literature, including content relevance, authenticity, message consistency, and the role of brand trust in consumer evaluation. The first theme is the distinction between attention and evaluation. Content that is humorous, trend-driven, or visually striking can capture attention, but that attention alone is not enough to foster a positive attitude. Attitudes

require interpretation: Does the message help consumers understand the benefits? Are the claims plausible? And does the brand appear to understand the audience's needs? In other words, engagement metrics can serve as indicators of response to content, but they cannot be used on their own to draw conclusions about the quality of consumer attitudes. Message relevance is crucial because consumers are faced with a heavy flow of information. Content that aligns with the audience's needs, situation, and language is more likely to be processed as useful information. However, relevance also has a sensitive side. Personalization that is too aggressive or feels intrusive can cause discomfort. Therefore, digital strategies must balance relevance with respect for privacy. The findings of Wijoyo et al. (2026) regarding ad relevance in the context of Generation Z's online spending support the importance of ensuring message relevance, but should not be interpreted as direct evidence that all relevant content automatically improves brand attitude. The quality of information also distinguishes content that is merely entertaining from content that aids in decision-making. Information regarding benefits, usage instructions, price, materials, limitations, or after-sales service can reduce uncertainty. In higher-risk product categories, specific and verifiable information may be more important than entertainment. In categories related to identity and lifestyle, aesthetics and symbolic relevance may take precedence. In other words, the effectiveness of content characteristics depends on the product category and consumer objectives.

Authenticity cannot be built solely through casual language or the use of popular trends. Consumers can assess whether content provides balanced information, acknowledges a product's limitations, and communicates promotions transparently. Content that only highlights advantages without providing essential information risks being perceived as manipulative. Similarly, testimonials that appear too uniform or fail to explain the context of use can raise doubts, even if they look professional.

Consistency between content and experience is a test of a brand's credibility. Strong promises can set high expectations, but when the quality of the product or service falls short, disappointment can shift attitudes. Conversely, simple content that aligns with the consumer experience has the potential to gradually build trust.

Therefore, the quality of marketing is not only judged by its ability to generate attention but also by its ability to maintain consistency between communication promises and actual experiences.

This conceptual finding aligns with the importance of distinguishing between trust, credibility, and the honesty of a source, as discussed in the review by Zhang et al. (2023). Consumers may trust a video as a representation of a creator's experience, but the decision to trust a brand still requires further evaluation. For brand managers, this means that the selection of influencers or creators must take into account product fit, transparency in the partnership, and track record—not just the number of followers.

4.2 Brand Trust and Consumer Attitudes

The second theme is the role of trust in helping consumers interpret messages. The same content can be interpreted differently by consumers who have had positive experiences and those who are unfamiliar with the brand. Consumers with positive experiences may view a new post as further evidence of the brand's quality. Conversely, consumers who have been disappointed may perceive similar content as an unconvincing promotional effort. Thus, content does not operate in a vacuum; its meaning is shaped by prior knowledge and experience.

Trust also helps reduce uncertainty, especially when consumers cannot inspect a product in person before purchasing. However, trust should not be treated as an automatic result of posting frequency. Communication that is too frequent but fails to answer consumers' questions can lead to burnout. Conversely, quick, clear, and responsible responses can demonstrate that the brand is willing to stand behind its claims.

In this context, digital services are part of the brand experience, not merely administrative activities.

A study by Ramadhani and Prasasti (2023) links social media marketing activities and brand trust to purchase intent, while Hartati et al. (2025) concluded from a meta-analysis that social media activity has a positive relationship with brand trust, but the role of social media may vary depending on the business context. Both studies support the importance of trust but do not justify the conclusion that trust is always formed in the same way or that trust inevitably leads to positive attitudes. Trust may be limited to

specific aspects—such as product quality—while consumers may still dislike the brand’s communication style.

Attitudes toward a brand should be understood as multifaceted evaluations. Cognitively, consumers assess whether a brand is high-quality, useful, or reliable. Affectively, consumers may feel happy, interested, proud, annoyed, or suspicious. At the behavioral level, consumers may want to seek more information, follow the brand’s account, recommend it, avoid it, or consider a purchase. These three dimensions are interrelated but do not always align. A consumer may rationally evaluate a product as high-quality but dislike the brand’s communication. Another consumer may enjoy the content and feel a connection with the creator but remain uncertain about the product’s quality. This conceptual example illustrates that measuring attitudes through a single indicator—such as purchase intent or the number of positive comments—can oversimplify the consumer experience. A qualitative approach helps uncover such ambivalence through consumers’ reasoning and narratives.

In the context of Generation Z, social trends can accelerate brand awareness, but consumer attitudes can also be influenced by independent judgment and community experiences. Viral content can serve as a catalyst for exploration, not the final determinant of evaluation. Reviews from friends or other users can reinforce beliefs, but they can also create conflicting information. Therefore, brand managers should not only measure whether the audience views the content but also understand what the audience believes, doubts, and remembers.

5. CONCLUSION

This journal analyzes how social media content and brand trust relate to the formation of attitudes among Generation Z consumers in Indonesia through a literature review. The discussion shows that content that is relevant, informative, authentic, interactive, and consistent can provide a basis for consumers to evaluate brands. However, these characteristics do not automatically result in positive attitudes because consumer interpretations are influenced by prior experiences, source credibility, product context, and the alignment between the message and reality.

Brand trust serves as an interpretive mechanism that helps consumers assess whether brand communication is trustworthy. Trust must be distinguished from trust in creators or platforms, while attitudes must be distinguished from purchase intent and purchase decisions. These conceptual findings highlight the importance of interpreting consumer responses more comprehensively rather than relying solely on the number of views, interactions, or purchase indicators.

The journal's main contribution is a synthesis framework that links content characteristics, consumer interpretation, brand trust, and consumer attitudes without claiming untested causal relationships. Its limitation is the use of secondary data, with a literature review that still needs to be systematically documented. Future research is encouraged to test this framework through interviews with Generation Z consumers in Indonesia and, if necessary, to combine this with a survey to quantitatively measure the strength of these relationships.

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