

The Effectiveness of Digital Marketing Strategies in Attracting Generation Z in the Era of Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in attracting the attention of Generation Z, a demographic group that is very familiar with technology and social media. Strategy digital marketing effectively attracts the attention of Gen Z in the social media era by understanding their unique characteristics, such as appreciating brand value and impact, emphasizing authenticity and personalization, and being proficient in using technology. With the AIDA theory approach and the concept of influencer and content marketing, this study analyzes the most successful platforms, content, and digital approaches in building engagement with Gen Z. This research was conducted by a mixed-method, using questionnaires and interviews. Results show that authentic approaches, the use of micro-influencers, as well as short, interactive content such as TikTok videos and Reels are highly effective in reaching and influencing Generation Z. By understanding Gen Z's digital behavior and using the right digital marketing strategy, businesses can increase brand awareness, increase engagement, and ultimately increase sales. Therefore, the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in attracting the attention of Gen Z depends heavily on the ability of businesses to understand adaptation to their needs and preferences..

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The global shift toward digital technology has profoundly transformed the business landscape, altering how brands communicate with consumers. Marketing has evolved from static advertisements to dynamic, interactive experiences, particularly on digital platforms. One of the most critical outcomes of this transformation is the rise of digital natives—consumers who have grown up with the internet as a natural extension of their environment. Generation Z represents the vanguard of this evolution. Comprising individuals born between 1997 and 2012, Gen Z is characterized by its familiarity with smartphones, high-speed internet, and social media applications from an early age.

Unlike Millennials, who witnessed the transition from analog to digital, Gen Z's entire life experience has been shaped by digital tools. They are known for multitasking across devices,

engaging with rich multimedia content, and demanding fast, personalized interactions with brands. Moreover, their values tend to reflect a heightened awareness of social, environmental, and political issues, prompting them to support brands that demonstrate purpose and authenticity.

These behavioral and ideological shifts demand a fundamental reevaluation of marketing strategies. Traditional media such as print, radio, and even television have seen diminishing returns with this group. Instead, platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube dominate Gen Z's attention. As such, marketers must understand not only where to reach them but how to communicate effectively through formats and narratives that resonate with their preferences and expectations.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the vast amount of content Gen Z consumes, they are also the most adept at filtering out noise. Banner blindness, ad-blocking tools, and low tolerance for intrusive ads make this demographic uniquely challenging to reach. Marketers often rely on outdated models or superficial engagement tactics that fail to account for Gen Z's behavioral complexity.

While many brands have transitioned to digital marketing, only a fraction have succeeded in building meaningful relationships with Gen Z audiences. The core issue lies in the mismatch between the values and preferences of Gen Z and the strategies employed by marketers—especially those that lack authenticity or attempt to co-opt youth culture without understanding it. Therefore, there is an urgent need to identify which digital marketing strategies genuinely appeal to Generation Z and result in not only attention but lasting engagement and loyalty.

1.3 Objectives and Scope

This research aims to explore how digital marketing strategies can effectively attract and engage Generation Z in the current social media landscape. It seeks to examine the general behavioral patterns, preferences, and platform usage habits of Gen Z consumers, as well as the relevance of visual content, influencer collaboration, and brand authenticity in shaping their responses to digital campaigns.

The scope of the study is limited to social media users in Indonesia aged between 15 and 26 years. The research focuses primarily on commonly used platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, and does not include other forms of digital marketing such as search engine or email advertising.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Related Work

Digital marketing enables two-way interaction between brands and consumers through online platforms such as social media, websites, and mobile applications (Kotler & Keller, 2016). These platforms have become essential for reaching Generation Z, who prefer interactive, visual, and fast-paced content. Studies show that Gen Z engages more with brands that reflect authenticity, creativity, and social values (Alyani et al., 2025).

Influencer marketing, particularly involving micro-influencers, has proven effective due to their relatability and trustworthiness (Erwin et al., 2023; Sinha, 2022). Similarly, storytelling and content marketing help brands build emotional connections, especially when delivered via short-form videos on platforms like TikTok and Instagram (Putra et al., 2021; Rys et al., 2024). Despite these findings, the integration of traditional marketing models like AIDA into modern digital strategies remains underexplored, particularly within the Indonesian Gen Z context.

2.2 Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on digital marketing, three critical gaps justify this study:

1. **Local Context Underrepresentation:** Most studies on Gen Z and digital marketing focus on Western markets, with minimal attention given to Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, which has one of the highest rates of social media usage in the world. Understanding how cultural context influences Gen Z's digital preferences is essential for global marketing adaptation.
2. **Limited Integration of AIDA in Modern Platforms:** While the AIDA model is a foundational concept in marketing, its application in modern digital platforms—especially short-form video and influencer content—has been underexplored. This study contributes by applying AIDA in the context of TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.
3. **Insufficient Focus on Strategy Execution:** Previous studies often emphasize what Gen Z likes, but few offer actionable strategies that brands can adopt. This research bridges the gap between consumer preference analysis and tactical marketing design, offering a roadmap for digital engagement using real-world data.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

a. Research Design

The study adopts a **quantitative, descriptive research design**. This design was chosen for its ability to capture and summarize the behavioral patterns and preferences of a large group of

respondents in a structured manner. It allows for the collection of measurable data that can be analyzed statistically to identify trends and correlations.

b. Sampling Technique

A **purposive sampling** method was employed to ensure the relevance of respondents to the research objectives. Respondents were selected based on specific criteria:

1. Belonging to Generation Z (age range: 15–26 years)
2. Active social media users (minimum 3 times per week)
3. Following or interacting with influencers or branded digital content
4. Currently residing in Indonesia

This method ensured that only participants with adequate exposure to digital marketing content were included in the study.

c. Sample Size

A total of **100 respondents** were selected. Although relatively small, this sample size is considered sufficient for exploratory purposes, especially within a focused demographic and geographic scope.

d. Sampling Criteria and Rationale

The study used **purposive sampling**, a non-probability method appropriate for research targeting a specific, well-defined group—in this case, Indonesian members of Generation Z with active digital engagement. The criteria for inclusion were as follows:

1. **Age between 15 and 26 years** → This range aligns with commonly accepted definitions of Generation Z (born 1997–2012), ensuring demographic relevance to the research focus.
2. **Active use of social media (minimum 3 times per week)** → Frequency of use was used as a proxy for familiarity and exposure to digital marketing content. Respondents with low or no activity were excluded to maintain data quality.
3. **Ownership of a TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube account** → These platforms represent the dominant digital ecosystems where Gen Z engages with branded content. Their inclusion ensures the sample reflects actual marketing environments.
4. **Past exposure to influencer or brand content** → Respondents were required to have seen or interacted with influencer or promotional content in the past three months, to ensure they could provide informed responses.
5. **Residing in Indonesia** → The study seeks to understand localized behaviors, so geographic relevance was necessary to align with the research scope.

Implementation: These criteria were embedded into the **first section of the questionnaire** as screening questions. Only respondents who met all criteria were allowed to proceed with the full survey, thereby ensuring that all data collected were contextually valid.

e. Instrument Development

Data were gathered through a **structured online questionnaire**, distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire was divided into the following sections:

1. Demographic information (age, gender, location)
2. Social media usage behavior
3. Content preferences and attention triggers
4. Interaction with influencer and brand content
5. Attitudes toward authenticity, storytelling, and visual content
6. Actions taken in response to digital marketing (e.g., following, sharing, purchasing)

Each section was composed of multiple-choice, Likert scale, and yes/no questions to allow for quantifiable analysis.

3.2 Analysis Techniques

Explain Once data collection was complete, results were processed using **descriptive statistical analysis**. Percentages, frequency distributions, and cross-tabulations were employed to identify patterns in:

- Platform preference (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube Shorts, etc.)
- Types of content that capture attention and drive interaction
- Trust levels toward micro- and macro-influencers
- Conversion behaviors triggered by different content formats

These insights were mapped onto the **AIDA model**:

- **Attention:** What initially grabs Gen Z's focus?
- **Interest:** What makes them stay engaged?
- **Desire:** What builds emotional or aspirational connection?
- **Action:** What motivates them to follow, share, or purchase?

Data visualization tools (e.g., bar graphs and pie charts) were used to support interpretation, although detailed graphical analysis is omitted in this paper for brevity.

3.3 Validation

To ensure **reliability and internal consistency**, a pilot test was conducted with a subset of 10 respondents. Their feedback was used to:

- Clarify ambiguous wording
- Adjust the length and sequencing of questions
- Remove questions that yielded repetitive or irrelevant data

Post-pilot, the final instrument was refined to optimize comprehension and reduce respondent fatigue. Additionally, responses were screened to eliminate duplicates and incomplete entries.

While this study did not utilize inferential statistics due to its exploratory nature, its design and validation steps ensure credible and contextually rich results.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings from the questionnaire distributed to 100 Generation Z respondents in Indonesia. The results are structured around the AIDA framework (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action), providing a comprehensive view of how different digital marketing elements influence Gen Z behavior. Each subsection integrates quantitative insights with interpretation to address the research objectives.

4.1 Key Findings

a. Platform Usage Patterns

Respondents were asked to identify the platforms they use most frequently. The results show the dominance of short-form video platforms:

- **TikTok:** 82%
- **Instagram:** 78%
- **YouTube Shorts:** 64%
- **Twitter:** 21%
- **Facebook:** 12%

This confirms earlier findings that Gen Z gravitates toward highly visual, dynamic content formats and prefers mobile-native apps over traditional desktop platforms.

b. Preferred Content Types

Participants were asked to select the types of digital content they found most engaging. The top responses were:

- **Short videos (educational or entertaining):** 85%
- **Product storytelling:** 73%
- **Influencer reviews:** 69%
- **Humorous content (memes, skits):** 58%
- **Interactive content (polls, quizzes):** 50%

This reinforces the need for brands to focus on **concise, creative, and relatable content**, especially content that invites user interaction.

c. Influencer Impact

To evaluate the effect of influencer marketing, several questions explored how respondents perceive and respond to influencers:

- **72%** reported higher trust in micro-influencers than celebrities
- **68%** said they had followed an influencer's recommendation
- **64%** preferred brands that collaborate with influencers
- **59%** felt more connected to brands introduced by influencers

These responses confirm that influencers serve not just as endorsers, but as **bridge figures** who humanize brands and guide product discovery in organic ways.

d. Content-to-Action Triggers

Participants were also asked what factors made them likely to interact with or purchase from a brand online. The most cited triggers were:

- **Authenticity of content:** 80%
- **Alignment with personal/social values:** 67%
- **Visual creativity and aesthetics:** 63%
- **Concise, clear messaging:** 59%
- **Strong call-to-action (CTA):** 51%

This highlights that **emotional and ethical alignment** matters just as much as creative delivery. Gen Z doesn't just buy products—they buy into narratives and missions.

4.2 Interpretation of Results

Discuss The AIDA model provides a structured way to interpret how each stage of the marketing funnel affects Gen Z's decision-making process.

a. Attention

Gen Z's attention is captured most effectively through short-form video content that is visually stimulating and optimized for mobile devices. TikTok and Instagram Reels, which use algorithms to surface popular or personally relevant content, serve as primary attention drivers. Use of trending music, bold visuals, and humor significantly improves initial content visibility. Humor (memes, parody) also ranked highly, indicating that **entertainment remains a major gateway to brand exposure**.

Implication: To earn Gen Z's attention, brands must deliver immediate visual or emotional impact—ideally within the first few seconds of content.

b. Interest

Once attention is captured, **storytelling** becomes key. Gen Z is not easily impressed by product-centric messaging. Instead, they respond better to content that shares personal experiences, shows real product use, or connects to social narratives. Product storytelling—such as “day in the life” videos or behind-the-scenes looks—scored high in this category.

Implication: Brands must sustain interest by making the audience feel like participants in a story, not just consumers of an ad.

c. Desire

Desire is built when the content resonates on a personal or aspirational level. Micro-influencers play a vital role here. Respondents indicated that they are more likely to trust someone who appears relatable and "real" over celebrities or brand representatives. When influencers articulate how a product fits into their daily life or solves a specific problem, they generate stronger emotional engagement.

Implication: Partnering with micro-influencers who genuinely use and support a brand can foster stronger brand affinity.

d. Action

Calls-to-action must be **clear, timely, and contextual**. Respondents preferred content that led directly to links or next steps, such as:

- “Swipe up to buy”
- “Link in bio”
- “Try this trend using [product]”

Gamified CTAs (quizzes, polls, challenges) also helped bridge the gap between interest and action by **increasing involvement** and reducing commitment friction.

Implication: CTAs should be smoothly integrated into content, maintaining the user experience while prompting action.

e. Summary

The data suggest that Gen Z's responsiveness to digital marketing hinges on three critical pillars:

1. **Platform-native creativity** (matching content to platform trends and behaviors)
2. **Authenticity and relatability** (especially via influencers and user-generated content)
3. **Purpose-driven storytelling** (aligning brand with social causes or identity cues)

These insights provide strong justification for moving beyond conventional advertising frameworks in favor of agile, socially aware, and consumer-participatory strategies.

5. Discussion

This chapter synthesizes the findings presented earlier with broader academic literature and marketing practice. It also addresses the boundaries of the current study and suggests pathways for

continued exploration. The focus remains on translating observed behaviors of Generation Z into actionable insights for digital marketing strategy.

5.1 Comparison with Prior Research

The findings of this study reinforce prior research on Gen Z's digital behavior. Similar to Erwin et al. (2023) and Sinha (2022), this study confirms that micro-influencers are more trusted than celebrities due to their relatability. The preference for short-form video content, emphasized by Rys et al. (2024), is also supported here, with TikTok and Instagram Reels emerging as dominant platforms.

What differentiates this research is its application of the **AIDA model** in analyzing social media engagement among Indonesian Gen Z users. While earlier studies discuss the model conceptually, this study applies it practically, mapping real user preferences to each stage of the AIDA funnel. Additionally, by focusing on a local Indonesian context, this study contributes valuable regional insights to a field often dominated by Western data.

5.2 Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the relatively small sample size (100 respondents) limits generalizability. Second, responses were self-reported and may be affected by bias. Third, the study captures a snapshot in time and may not reflect evolving trends. Lastly, the focus on three major platforms excludes insights from other emerging or regional apps, and no real-time campaign data was tested to observe actual user behavior.

5.3 Future Research

Future studies could expand the sample size and include respondents from more diverse regions and backgrounds. Longitudinal research would help track changing preferences over time. Experimental methods, such as testing real campaign outcomes, could offer stronger behavioral insights. Additionally, exploring newer platforms and the role of AI-driven content personalization could further enrich digital marketing strategies for Gen Z.

6. Conclusion

This study explored effective digital marketing strategies for engaging Generation Z in Indonesia using the AIDA model. Results show that Gen Z prefers short, visually engaging, and authentic content delivered via platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube Shorts. Micro-influencers and storytelling were key in building trust and interest, while clear calls to action encouraged engagement.

The AIDA model helped explain how Gen Z moves from attention to action in digital spaces. This study provides useful insights for marketers aiming to connect with Gen Z, especially in fast-evolving, mobile-driven environments.

7. Recommendation

Marketers aiming to reach Generation Z should focus on short, engaging videos, use micro-influencers to build trust, and deliver authentic content that aligns with Gen Z values. Calls to action should be clear and seamlessly integrated. Staying updated with digital trends and platform features is essential to remain relevant in this fast-changing landscape.

Appendix

Sample Survey Questions

1. What is your age?
2. How often do you use the following platforms weekly? (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, etc.)
3. Which types of digital content do you engage with the most? (Short videos, memes, reviews, etc.)
4. Have you ever purchased a product after seeing it promoted by an influencer?
5. What influences your trust in online content? (Authenticity, aesthetics, brand values, etc.)
6. How likely are you to respond to calls-to-action in online content? (e.g., "Swipe up", "Link in bio")
7. Which qualities do you look for in an influencer?
8. Do you feel that brand content should reflect social or environmental values?

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