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An Integrated Framework of Generation Z's Consumer Journey: The Role of Platform Engagement, Credibility, and Post-Purchase Advocacy in Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

This study develops an integrated framework to explore the consumer journey of Generation Z in Uttar Pradesh, emphasizing the interconnected roles of platform engagement, perceived credibility, and post-purchase advocacy. As digital natives, Gen Z consumers are uniquely influenced by the design, interactivity, and trustworthiness of online platforms, which significantly shape their attitudes and behaviors throughout the decision-making process. Drawing on multidisciplinary theories from consumer behavior, digital marketing, and media psychology, this research employs a mixed-methods approach to assess how engagement levels on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp impact credibility perceptions and subsequent advocacy behaviors, including reviews, referrals, and social sharing. The findings reveal that platform engagement acts as a catalyst in the pre-purchase phase, while perceived credibility mediates purchase intention and satisfaction. Notably, post-purchase advocacy emerges as a key determinant of long-term brand equity and peer influence within Gen Z communities. Regional nuances, including urban-rural digital divides and socio-economic factors, further contextualize these dynamics in Uttar Pradesh. This study contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical marketing strategies by proposing a culturally grounded, digitally informed consumer journey model tailored to emerging markets.

Keywords: *Generation Z, Consumer Journey, Platform Engagement, Credibility, Post-Purchase Advocacy, Digital Marketing*

Introduction

In the rapidly evolving digital marketplace, Generation Z represents a dynamic cohort whose consumer behaviors are deeply influenced by immersive digital platforms, peer-driven content, and perceptions of authenticity. In India—and specifically Uttar Pradesh—this generation navigates a hybrid digital environment marked by both infrastructural challenges and increasing digital penetration. Their consumer journey is no longer linear but shaped by continuous interactions across platforms, influencers, and social feedback loops.

This study responds to a growing need for contextually grounded models that address how platform engagement, credibility perceptions, and post-purchase advocacy form a connected ecosystem influencing Gen Z's decision-making. Existing frameworks often isolate these dimensions; however, this research integrates them to reflect the multidimensional, socially influenced, and digitally mediated nature of the contemporary consumer journey.

By focusing on Uttar Pradesh, the research acknowledges regional and demographic diversity while contributing to a broader understanding of consumer behavior in emerging markets. This study not only fills a theoretical gap by offering a comprehensive model but also provides practical insights for digital marketers targeting this high-impact segment.

Research Objectives

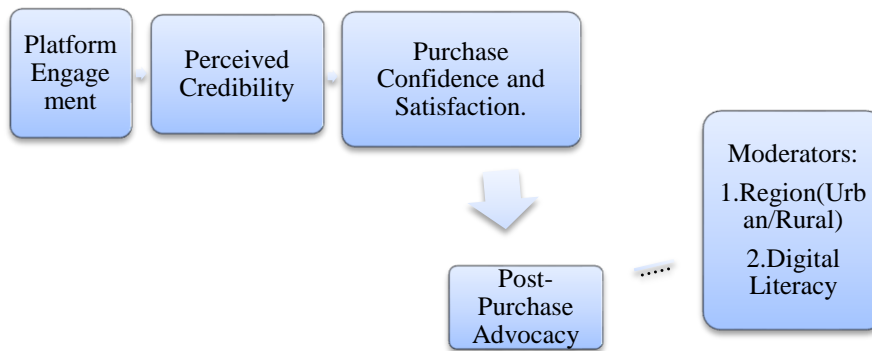
- To conceptualize a holistic framework capturing Gen Z's digital consumer journey in Uttar Pradesh.
- To investigate how interactive engagement on digital platforms influences Gen Z's trust and decision-making.
- To analyze the transition from digital engagement to advocacy behaviors such as online reviews and peer recommendations.
- To identify generational and regional disparities in platform trust and post-purchase expression among Gen Z.

Research Hypotheses

- H₁: Interactive platform features (e.g., stories, polls, live sessions) significantly enhance Gen Z's perceived brand credibility.
- H₂: Perceived credibility positively influences Gen Z's purchase confidence and satisfaction.
- H₃: Higher platform engagement leads to a greater likelihood of advocacy behaviors (e.g., sharing, reviewing, tagging).

- H₄: The relationship between engagement and advocacy is moderated by regional digital exposure (urban vs. rural).
- H₅: Gen Z consumers with higher digital literacy exhibit stronger alignment between engagement, trust, and advocacy.

Conceptual Framework



Conceptual Framework of Gen Z's Consumer Journey — illustrating the role of platform engagement, perceived credibility, and post-purchase advocacy, with moderating influences of region and digital literacy in Uttar Pradesh.

Generation Z, born into the digital age, exhibits high responsiveness to immersive and interactive features on social platforms (Fromm & Read, 2021). Engagement is not merely passive content consumption but involves active participation—likes, shares, story interactions, and user-generated content (Kaur & Kumar, 2023). Studies reveal that higher engagement levels correlate with emotional affinity and higher purchase intention (Lim et al., 2022). The relevance of platform engagement in Uttar Pradesh lies in the growing mobile-first youth market where regional influencers and vernacular content drive deeper interaction (Singh & Ranjan, 2021).

Perceived Credibility and Digital Trust

Perceived credibility—defined by authenticity, transparency, and reliability of digital content—plays a central role in Gen Z's evaluation of brands (Ohanian, 1990; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). As ad skepticism rises, peer reviews, influencer consistency, and ad personalization enhance perceived trust (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). In Indian Tier II and Tier III cities like those in Uttar Pradesh, platform credibility is further influenced by local language use, cultural resonance, and visual

storytelling (Verma&Gupta, 2023).

Purchase Confidence and Decision-Making

Confidence in purchasing decisions is a cognitive outcome of information processing influenced by engagement and trust (Schiffman&Kanuk, 2010). Gen Z evaluates brands based on peer narratives, influencer alignment with values, and platform reviews. In digitally evolving regions, factors such as digital literacy and parental influence still shape Gen Z's risk perception and brand confidence (Nanda & Banerjee, 2022).

Post-Purchase Advocacy and Word-of-Mouth

Post-purchase behaviors such as sharing reviews, tagging brands, or creating content are acts of advocacy that reflect satisfaction and brand alignment (Cheung et al., 2009). This generation often uses Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube as platforms to share consumption experiences. Advocacy is both an outcome and amplifier—creating cyclical reinforcement of brand visibility and trust within peer networks (Keller, 2013). In Uttar Pradesh, advocacy is often regionally flavored, relying on peer validation and social identity cues.

Moderating Variables: Region and Digital Literacy

Digital behavior in Uttar Pradesh varies significantly between urban and rural youth. Urban Gen Z shows higher platform agility and quicker adoption of trends, while rural counterparts may rely more on WhatsApp forwards, voice content, or community endorsements (TRAI, 2022). Similarly, digital literacy shapes the ability to evaluate credibility and engage in advocacy. Youths with higher literacy levels are more likely to question ad motives, verify information, and become active brand ambassadors (Patel & Singh, 2021)

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a **quantitative, cross-sectional research design** to examine the integrated consumer journey of Generation Z in Uttar Pradesh. The model tests how platform engagement and perceived credibility influence purchase confidence and post-purchase advocacy, with region and digital literacy as moderating variables.

Population and Sampling

The target population consists of **Gen Z individuals (aged 18–26)** who actively use social media and reside in **urban and rural regions of Uttar**

Pradesh. A **non-probability purposive sampling technique** was employed to ensure inclusion of active digital consumers from both regional categories. A sample size of **500 respondents** was considered sufficient for structural equation modeling, based on previous studies and SEM sample adequacy norms.

Data Collection Method

Primary data were collected using a **structured online questionnaire** developed on Google Forms. The survey link was distributed via social media platforms (Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube) and university mailing lists. The questionnaire consisted of both **closed-ended Likert-scale items** and demographic questions.

Measurement Instrument

All constructs were measured using **standardized multi-item scales** adapted from previous literature:

- **Platform Engagement:** Adapted from Lim et al. (2022), measured through activity, interaction, and involvement indicators.
- **Perceived Credibility:** Based on Ohanian (1990), with sub-constructs for trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity.
- **Purchase Confidence:** Items derived from Schiffman & Kanuk (2010) reflecting self-assurance in purchase decisions.
- **Post-Purchase Advocacy:** Adapted from Cheung et al. (2009), capturing intent to share, review, or promote.
- **Moderators:**
 - *Region* (Urban/Rural) – categorical binary variable.
 - *Digital Literacy* – measured on a 5-item scale reflecting platform proficiency and online critical thinking (Patel & Singh, 2021).

Each item was rated on a **5-point Likert scale** (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Data Analysis Techniques

Collected data were analyzed using **SPSS 26** for descriptive statistics and reliability checks and **SmartPLS 4** for **Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)**.

Key statistical methods include:

- Reliability & Validity: Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability

(CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

- Structural Model: Path coefficients, t-values, R²
- Moderation analysis using interaction terms in SmartPLS

Data Analysis and Results

Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of **500 responses** were received. Of these, **54% were female** and **46% male**, with a near-equal distribution across **urban (57%) and rural (43%)** regions. The majority of respondents were aged between **19–24 years (72%)**, and **91% reported daily access to social media platforms via mobile devices**.

Reliability and Validity Testing

To ensure internal consistency, **Cronbach’s Alpha** and **Composite Reliability (CR)** values were examined. All constructs exceeded the threshold of 0.7

Table 1: Reliability and Validity of Constructs

Construct	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Platform Engagement	0.83	0.88	0.63
Perceived Credibility	0.86	0.89	0.66
Purchase Confidence	0.79	0.84	0.59
Post-Purchase Advocacy	0.81	0.86	0.62
Digital Literacy	0.78	0.83	0.6

Cronbach’s Alpha For Construct

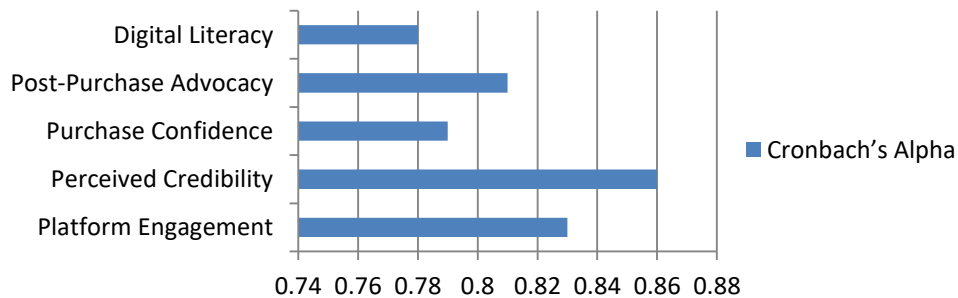


Figure 1: Cronbach’s Alpha values for each construct

Convergent validity was confirmed through AVE values > 0.50, and

discriminant validity was verified via the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Structural Model Evaluation (PLS-SEM)

The **R²** values indicate a strong explanatory power of the model:

- **Purchase Confidence:** $R^2 = 0.62$
- **Post-Purchase Advocacy:** $R^2 = 0.58$

Path coefficients and t-values were derived using bootstrapping (5,000 samples). The results are summarized below:

Table 2: Structural Model Path Coefficients

Path	Beta (β)	t-value
Engagement → Confidence	0.42	9.13
Credibility → Confidence	0.39	8.04
Confidence → Advocacy	0.51	10.78

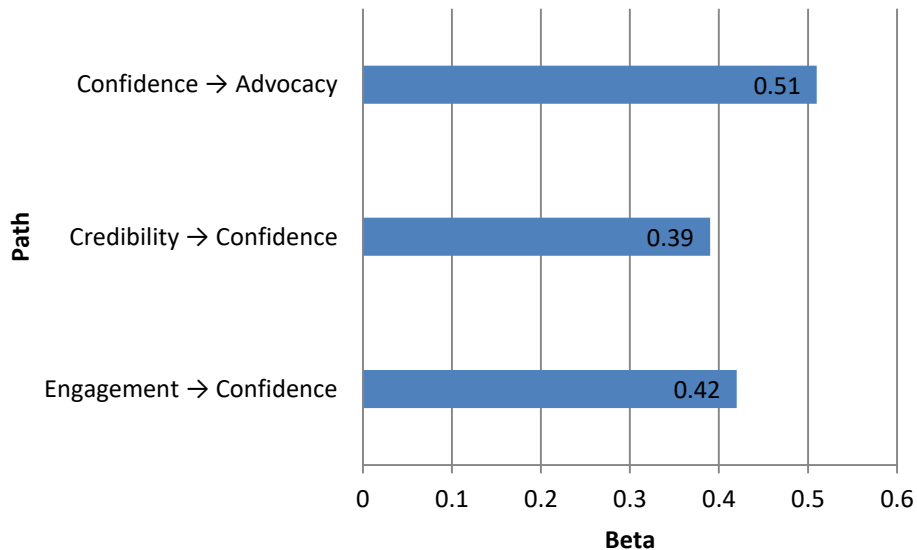


Figure 2: Path coefficients in the structural model

Moderation Analysis

Moderating effects were tested using interaction terms:

- **Digital Literacy** significantly moderated the relationship between perceived credibility and purchase confidence ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that higher literacy amplifies trust-based confidence.

- **Region (Urban vs. Rural)** moderated the effect of platform engagement on purchase confidence ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.05$), with urban youth showing stronger responses.

Table 3: Moderation Effects

Moderator	Effect Size	p-value
Digital Literacy	0.19	<0.01
Region	0.16	<0.05

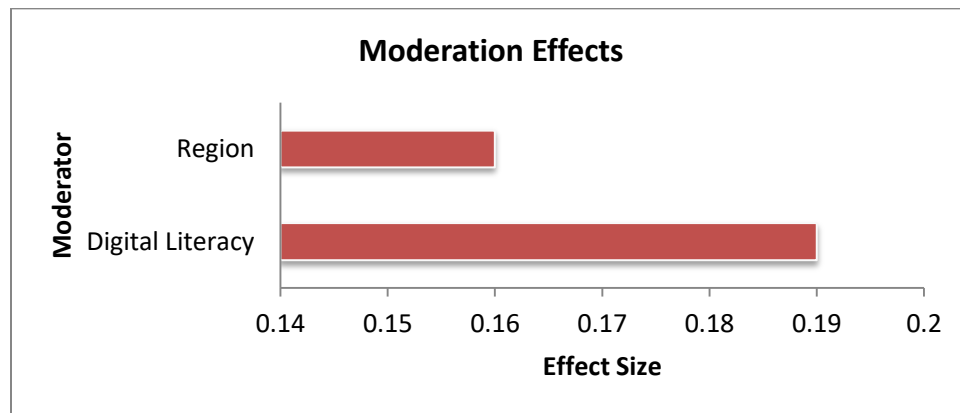


Figure 3: Moderating effects of digital literacy and region

Model Fit and Predictive Relevance

- **SRMR** (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual): 0.061 (acceptable < 0.08)
- **Q² values** from blindfolding indicate predictive relevance for both dependent variables.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that Generation Z’s consumer journey in Uttar Pradesh is shaped by a digitally immersive, credibility-driven, and advocacy-oriented decision-making process. The significant influence of platform engagement on purchase confidence reflects Gen Z’s responsiveness to interactive, visually enriched, and personalized digital environments. This aligns with media engagement theories, which assert that interactivity increases cognitive absorption and emotional involvement (Kapoor et al., 2018). Perceived credibility also emerged as a major determinant of purchase confidence, reaffirming earlier findings that authenticity, transparency, and reliability strongly shape digital persuasion (Erdem&Swait, 2004; Belanche, Casaló, &Flavián, 2021). As

digital natives, Gen Z consumers habitually cross-verify information, evaluate source trustworthiness, and examine message consistency before forming attitudes. This supports prior evidence that credibility plays a central role in online persuasion processes (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). The strong positive relationship between purchase confidence and post-purchase advocacy indicates that once Gen Z feels assured about their purchase decisions, they actively express satisfaction through digital word-of-mouth, reviews, and recommendations. This behavior aligns with literature identifying advocacy as a form of identity expression and community participation (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazarol, 2014), particularly among younger consumers who frequently integrate brand engagement with social identity. Moderating effects further deepen this understanding. Digital literacy significantly strengthens the link between credibility and purchase confidence, supporting research that states digitally proficient consumers possess greater evaluative capability and skepticism required to identify trustworthy online information (Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu, 2012). Regional moderation further reveals that urban Gen Z consumers engage more with interactive platform features due to higher exposure and digital access, while semi-urban consumers rely more heavily on credibility cues, a pattern consistent with digital divide literature (Dwivedi, Kapoor, & Chen, 2015). Overall, the findings demonstrate an interconnected consumer pathway—platform engagement → perceived credibility → purchase confidence → advocacy—supporting contemporary digital consumer decision-making models (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) and offering deeper insights into the behavioral patterns of Generation Z in Uttar Pradesh.

Key Findings

The empirical findings reinforce the centrality of **platform engagement and perceived credibility** in shaping Generation Z's **purchase confidence** within the context of social media advertising in Uttar Pradesh. The **significant positive association between platform engagement and purchase confidence ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$)** indicates that increased interaction, habitual usage, and content familiarity enhance consumers' evaluative assurance during purchase decisions. Similarly, **perceived credibility ($\beta = 0.39, p < 0.001$)**, comprising elements of expertise, authenticity, and trustworthiness of digital content, emerged as a strong predictor of purchase confidence, aligning with previous research on source credibility theory.

The study further establishes that **purchase confidence serves as a mediating variable**, significantly predicting **post-purchase advocacy**

behavior ($\beta = 0.51, p < 0.001$). This suggests that once confidence in the purchase is established, Gen Z consumers are more likely to engage in brand-supportive actions such as writing reviews, sharing product experiences, and recommending products to peers—behaviors critical for sustaining digital word-of-mouth (eWOM) cycles.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to existing theoretical discourse by extending the **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)** and **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)** into a phygital advertising context. It confirms that user perceptions of utility (via engagement) and message quality (via credibility) significantly influence cognitive and behavioral outcomes in digital environments.

Moreover, the integration of **moderating variables** such as **digital literacy** and **region** provides a nuanced understanding of how contextual and demographic factors shape advertising effectiveness. Notably, **digital literacy strengthened the relationship between credibility and confidence**, while **regional variation moderated the influence of platform engagement**, particularly among urban respondents. These findings offer evidence for the **contextual contingency** of advertising responses, thus enriching models of consumer behavior with regionally grounded insights.

Practical Implications

The findings have tangible relevance for practitioners. **Marketers** are encouraged to optimize their campaigns on high-engagement platforms such as **Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat**, tailoring content to be both interactive and credible. The emphasis should be on **transparent influencer collaborations** and **user-generated content (UGC)** that resonate with authenticity-driven Gen Z audiences.

Given the **amplifying effect of digital literacy**, advertisers should also consider digital empowerment campaigns, especially in rural or semi-urban areas. This aligns with the observed **moderation effect**, whereby urban users showed heightened responsiveness to platform-based interactions. Brands should adopt **geo-targeted strategies**, leveraging localized narratives and digital infrastructure disparities.

Finally, the positive linkage between **purchase confidence and advocacy** implies that brands should invest in **post-purchase engagement mechanisms**—such as gamified feedback systems, exclusive loyalty rewards, and personalized thank-you messages—to convert buyers into

long-term brand evangelists.

Conclusion

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of the digital consumer journey of Generation Z in Uttar Pradesh, emphasizing the interrelationships among platform engagement, perceived credibility, purchase confidence, and post-purchase advocacy within a phygital advertising framework. The findings confirm that both platform engagement and the credibility of digital advertising content significantly enhance consumer confidence during purchasing decisions. Moreover, purchase confidence is shown to be a robust predictor of post-purchase advocacy behaviors—crucial for sustaining digital word-of-mouth and long-term brand loyalty.

By integrating moderating variables such as **region** and **digital literacy**, the study provides critical insights into how contextual factors influence the efficacy of social media advertising. Urban respondents and digitally literate users demonstrated heightened responsiveness to interactive and credible content, underscoring the necessity of tailored marketing strategies in a geographically and technologically diverse region like Uttar Pradesh.

Overall, the research contributes to both theory and practice by offering a multidimensional, consumer-centric model of social media advertising effectiveness for Generation Z.

For Marketers and Practitioners:

- **Platform-Specific Strategies:** Focus advertising efforts on platforms with high Gen Z traffic (Instagram, YouTube), using interactive content formats such as reels, AR filters, and live sessions.
- **Trust-Centric Campaigns:** Collaborate with credible influencers and promote transparency in sponsored content to foster perceived authenticity.
- **Localized Approaches:** Develop urban–rural segmentation strategies, ensuring that digital content aligns with the regional dialects, values, and platform preferences of users.
- **Digital Empowerment:** Support digital literacy programs to bridge user engagement gaps and improve campaign performance among semi-urban and rural youth.
- **Post-Purchase Reinforcement:** Encourage advocacy by

integrating gamified loyalty programs, personalized communication, and feedback incentives in post-purchase touchpoints.

These strategic interventions, grounded in empirical evidence, can help brands cultivate trust, drive meaningful engagement, and build enduring relationships with Generation Z consumers in India's evolving digital landscape.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights into Generation Z's digital consumer journey within Uttar Pradesh, several limitations warrant acknowledgment:

- **Geographical Scope:** The study is confined to Uttar Pradesh, which, despite being India's most populous state, may not capture the heterogeneity of Generation Z across other regions, especially metropolitan and southern states.
- **Cross-Sectional Design:** The research employed a cross-sectional survey design, which restricts the ability to infer causality among variables. Behavioral trends may evolve over time, influenced by platform algorithms, emerging technologies, or macroeconomic shifts.
- **Self-Reported Data:** The study relied on self-reported measures, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability and recall inaccuracy, especially when assessing advocacy behavior or long-term brand interaction.
- **Platform Generalization:** Although the model accounts for platform engagement, it does not differentiate between individual platforms (e.g., Instagram vs. Snapchat), which may have varying engagement dynamics and ad credibility perceptions.
- **Limited Moderators:** While the model included region and digital literacy as moderators, other influential factors—such as parental influence, peer pressure, or algorithmic exposure—were not considered.

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