



University of Wales
Trinity Saint David
LONDON

Master of Business Administration

Module Name: Dissertation

Module Code: LCMB7035

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Date of Submission: 29 May 2026

Research Title

*The Influence of Social Media Marketing on Generation Z Consumer
Purchase Intention in the UK Fashion Industry: The Mediating Role of
Trust and Brand Engagement*

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Almighty Allah for the strength, patience and opportunity to successfully complete this dissertation. I express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor for their on-going guidance, feedback, encouragement and academic assistance during this research process. They offered valuable constructive comments and experienced guidance in the accomplishment of this research. I am also grateful to my lecturers and academic staff for imparting knowledge, support and motivation during my academic career. Their advice has been a significant factor in my academic and research skills development.

Many thanks to all the respondents who took part in the survey and gave information for this research. This study was not possible without their cooperation and time. I would also like to thank my family and friends for their constant encouragement, emotional support and understanding throughout the completion of this dissertation. They were able to keep me motivated and focused during tough times. Finally, I would like to acknowledge all authors, researchers, and scholars whose published works contributed significantly to the completion of this study.

**Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation
Declaration Form.**

I Badsha Fahad declare that this dissertation has been composed by myself, that the work contained herein is entirely my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification, in whole or in part, except as specified.

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Date: 29-05--26.....

Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the effects of social media marketing on the purchase intention among Generation Z consumers in the fashion industry in the UK and the mediating role of consumer trust and brand engagement. This study examined the relationship between influencer marketing and user-generated content, visual communication, Instagram marketing, TikTok marketing, and consumer interaction online and consumer purchasing behaviour. A positivist philosophy and quantitative research design were used, with 103 Generation Z consumers in the UK being used as the primary data collection. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and mediation analysis in MS Excel were used to analyse the data collected. The results showed that social media marketing has a significant and positive effect on purchase intention of Generation Z consumers.

The result of regression analysis indicated that there was strong positive correlation between social media marketing and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.865$), social media marketing and brand engagement ($\beta = 0.900$), and social media marketing and consumer trust ($\beta = 0.862$). The mediation analysis also validated that consumer trust and brand engagement partially mediate the relationship between social media marketing and intention to buy. The findings also revealed that online influence, reviews, visual content, transparency, and interactive communication are important factors affecting the online buying behavior of the users. The study builds on previous research by using the Social Media Functionality Honeycomb Model in the context of the UK fashion industry. Specifically, the results validated the significance of sharing, conversations, identity, and online relationships as drivers of consumer trust, emotional connection, and consumer buying among Gen Z consumers. The study calls on UK fashion brands to intensify their collaborations with authentic influencers, encourage user-generated content, communicate more transparently with consumers and invest more in short-form videos in Instagram reels and TikTok to boost consumer engagement and intention to buy online.

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Chapter 1.0: Introduction

Social media has become an important marketing instrument for brands through digital technologies. Generation Z uses these platforms as a channel to learn more about products and interact with brands. The UK fashion brands must know how it affects their purchasing behaviour. Through trust and brand engagement, this paper will examine the impact that social media marketing has on purchase intention.

1.1 Background

Social media marketing is a strategic application of online resources to build relationships, market brands, and impact consumer behaviour by means of interactive content and communication (Khurdei et al., 2023). Purchase intention, which is influenced by psychological factors in the consumer behaviour theory that include trust and perceived value, as well as brand engagement, is influenced and built and strengthened within the social media context, especially among Generation Z consumers. There has been a significant digital shift in the UK fashion industry, and social media platforms have become the focus of the marketing communication strategies (Nash, 2019). The consumers who are the most active on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat are Generation Z, those born between 1997 and 2012, and use these platforms not only to be entertained but also to discover products and interact with the brands (Rezek, 2022). Marketing through social media has become essential in determining consumer perceptions, their level of engagement, and ultimately, in making buying decisions. The survey conducted by YouGov (2025) showed that 66 per cent (two of three) of consumers in the UK Generation Z rely on social media as a source of information to research a brand before they buy one. By contrast, merely 35% of the older generations use social media to research brands, which indicates that digital platforms are the main focus of the fashion shopping experience of Generation Z.

The theoretical basis of this study is the Social Media Functionality Honeycomb Model created by Jan H. Kietzmann et al. (2011) that theorises social media as made up of seven interrelated components, namely identity, presence, relationships, reputation, groups, conversations, and sharing. These functionalities are likely to have a significant impact on the fashion industry since fashion consumption is largely associated with the expression of identity and peer acceptance. To Generation Z, the identity influencer, brand reputation, a sense of community, and two-way interactions have a significant impact on trust and involvement with fashion brands.

The change of communication, from traditionally controlled by the brand to consumer-driven, is one of the major ones. The user-generated content refers to reviews, unboxing, and styling posts, which are also a significant aspect of the fashion brand perception. Gen Z consumers tend to believe their friends and real experiences instead of formal advertising, and social media is a good platform where informal and yet effective marketing is possible (Theocharis, 2025). This has made the brands more open and relatable when communicating to keep them relevant and believable.

Influencer marketing has also dominated social media marketing, particularly in the fashion industry. The intermediaries between the brands and consumers are the influencers, such as celebrities and micro-influencers, who display products in their life circumstances, which are relatable to the viewer (Ebulueme & Vijayakumar, 2024). Their capability to establish trust and an emotional bond with the followers goes a long way towards brand visibility and authenticity. The success of influencer marketing, however, is determined by the credibility, consistency, and alignment with the values of the audience, particularly in the case of Generation Z, as they are highly sensitive to fake or overly promotional content.

Another essential point is the interactive nature (live streaming, polls, stories, and direct messaging) since it also adds to the user involvement and engagement (Wang and Wu, 2019). These functions help consumers to connect with the brands, provide feedback, and feel like belonging to brand communities. This degree of engagement enhances emotional attachment and chances of forming long-term relationships with fashion brands.

Moreover, the UK fashion market is highly competitive, and thus the brands need to keep on innovating their online marketing strategies. Due to the aggressive competition that many brands are struggling to win the resource battle, the ability to create strong, believable, and customised social media content has become a crucial success factor (Donnelly et al., 2020). As consumer behaviour is dynamic, understanding how such online interactions can lead to trust, engagement, and purchase intention is the key to achieving stable growth and competitive advantage in the fashion sector.

The activities of social media marketing have a positive impact on brand engagement and purchase intention. Research also shows that trust is the mediating variable between digital marketing and

influencer credibility, which is a significant factor in Generation Z purchasing behaviour (Shahid and Ikram, 2024). Nonetheless, there have not been any empirical studies that have particularly focused on these relationships in the context of the UK fashion industry through primary consumer data. The Generation Z consumers use social media as a source of information on fashion, peer reviews, and influencer recommendations. Although engagement indicators like likes and shares are very popular, the process by which social media marketing is converted into purchase intention, especially through trust and brand engagement, needs to be researched (Matin et al., 2020). Consequently, this research will fill this gap. In the UK fashion market, branding is not limited to the quality of their products but also to symbolic meaning and lifestyle.

1.2 Problem statement

Despite the growing popularity of social media marketing, there is a scarcity of research on how social media marketing affects purchase intention in the UK fashion industry among Generation Z. Previously conducted studies focus on how social media marketing can influence consumer behaviour, and the mediating role of trust and brand engagement is not studied thoroughly (Shahid and Ikram, 2024). In addition, a lot of the studies do not centre on the UK. Therefore, this research will aim to fill this gap by addressing the issue of the impact of social media marketing on purchase intention in terms of trust and brand engagement.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

The research is significant to fashion brands in the UK that would like to optimise their digital marketing strategies. The knowledge of the social media functionalities will optimise the content and influencer strategy because it greatly increases the level of consumer interaction and purchase intent (Ao et al., 2023). The results will present the evidence-based information to augment the returns of the marketing investments and increase the competitive advantage in the UK fashion market.

In addition, the study also has both scholarly and practical implications because it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the topic of digital consumer behaviour and the effectiveness of social media marketing. Despite the existing literature on the effects of social media, the present study does not have any research that will integrate trust and brand engagement as the mediating variables in the UK fashion industry (Donnelly et al., 2020). This research will therefore provide

a clearer understanding of the processes involved that will enable purchase intention of Generation Z. The outcomes of the work as a manager will allow the fashion marketers to create more specific and data-infused strategies that will appeal to consumer expectations and online behavioural patterns. Besides, awareness of the transformation of online communication to the actual purchasing decision can serve to spend marketing funds more effectively and increase the effectiveness of campaigns (Theodorakopoulos and Theodoropoulou, 2024). Hence, the study is very significant to scholars and business experts seeking to enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing.

1.4 Aim

The study aims to evaluate how social media marketing can drive consumer purchase intention among Gen Z in the UK fashion sector, and how two mediating variables, trust and brand engagement, can impact the relationship between the two.

1.5 Objectives

- To explore the application of social media marketing by UK fashion brands.
- To examine how social media marketing influences brand engagement among Generation Z consumers.
- To examine the impact of social media marketing on consumer trust.
- To establish whether there is a mediation of trust and brand engagement between social media marketing and purchase intention.

1.6 Research Questions

1. What is the role of social media marketing in stimulating the purchase intention of Generation Z in the UK fashion industry?
2. What is the impact of social media marketing on brand engagement among Gen Z consumers?
3. How is social media marketing related to consumer trust?
4. Do trust and brand engagement mediate the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention?

H1: Social media marketing has a significant positive effect on brand engagement and consumer trust among Generation Z consumers in the UK fashion industry.

H2: Brand engagement and consumer trust significantly mediate the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers in the UK fashion industry.

1.7 Dissertation Structure



Figure 01: Dissertation Structure

This dissertation aims to examine the influence of social media marketing by UK fashion brands on the purchase intention of Generation Z buyers. The research phases are set up into six divisions to provide a clear picture of the research process. Chapter 1 (Introduction) gives the context, background, aim, objectives, questions, and rationale. Chapter 2 (Literature Review) is a critical reflection of the theories and studies on social media marketing, trust, and engagement by Generation Z. Chapter 3 (Methodology) elaborates on the research design, data collection, and sampling. Chapter 4 (Results) presents an analysis of survey data, whereas Chapter 5 (Discussion) presents the analysis of the results in terms of purpose and literature. The final chapter (Chapter 6- Conclusion and Recommendations)) gives evidence-based recommendations to the fashion brands in the UK to improve social media marketing tactics and influence purchase intent.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to critically examine the current academic research on the impact of social media marketing on consumer behaviour, in particular, on Generation Z in the UK fashion industry. This review is organised around the aim and objectives of this research project, which include the effects of social media marketing on purchase intentions and the effects of trust and brand engagement. The recent studies have increasingly recognised the influence of social media on consumer attitudes, engagement, and intentions. However, researchers have also observed differences in the findings of studies across other contexts, particularly with young consumers (Generation Z).

2.2 Definitions of Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) has been the topic of many marketing publications in recent times, and opinions vary on its definition. For instance, Dwivedi et al. (2021) described social media marketing as the process of promoting the products and services using interactive communication, content marketing and engagement via social media platforms. It's a great definition that highlights the need for interaction and engagement in the modern marketing landscape. Likewise, Appel et al. (2020) considered social media marketing as a shift from business communication to consumer communication that involves consumers in creating and disseminating brand information. This is one of the main distinctions of social media marketing from other types of advertising, they pointed out, which makes it risky. Meanwhile, Agarwal et al. (2020) proposed that social media marketing is a tactic that combines digital media, data analytics and user generated content to impact consumer perception and behavior. This definition emphasizes analytical and technical aspects of SMM more, focusing on the use of analytics. Although the definitions differ slightly, they all emphasise that social media marketing is a relational approach, rather than a promotion approach, and one that involves interaction, engagement and co-creation.

2.3 Critical Review of Social Media Marketing

There have been numerous research studies that have examined the effect of social media marketing on consumers. Marketing through social media has been reported by Dwivedi et al. (2021) to be interactive and real-time, which enhances brand awareness and customer engagement.

According to the authors comments, likes and sharing can enable interaction and engagement. Appel et al (2020) concurred, stating that social media marketing allows brands to become more authentic and accessible to customers, which subsequently can cause positive attitudes to the customers. They also observed that UGC contributes to brand image development along with its credibility which is much higher than ads. This emphasises the importance of electronic word-of-mouth. But Tafesse and Wien (2018) asserted that there is no relationship between social media engagements and consumer behaviour. They added that engagement, like likes and shares, could be passive. This suggests a disconnect between social media engagement and consumer actions. Similarly, Yadav and Rahman (2018) asserted that the content is the key factor in social media marketing that it must be of good quality, relevant, and credible.

However, too promotional or misleading content can help to diminish trust and tarnish the brand's image, they added. This implies content strategies are important. Based on this research by Djafarova & Bowes (2021) on Generation Z, it is observed that social media marketing is effective towards this segment as they are technologically savvy. They stated that Generation Z consumers are more likely to trust influencer and peer reviews, rather than ads. The authors also said that this generation is highly analytical and prefers authenticity, so products that appear to be commercialised and fake can have a negative effect.

Lou and Yuan (2019) also talked about the role of influencer marketing and mentioned that influencers can enhance brand credibility and trust if their marketing activities are deemed authentic. The authors concluded that influencer marketing is successful when the influencer's brand image aligns with the company. They added that over-commercialisation can adversely impact credibility. Hajli et al. (2020) highlighted communities and argued that social media marketing allows the development of interactive communities for sharing customer experiences.

Social media marketing, including the use of influencers, interactive content, and campaigns, is widely deployed by UK fashion brands to enhance brand awareness and brand engagement. These are particularly effective with Generation Z consumers, who rely on social media for product and brand information. The literature shows that social media marketing also positively affects brand engagement and trust, as social media interactions and brand transparency foster emotional and trust connections. However, it can have a positive indirect influence on purchase intention, as trust and engagement are crucial factors to bridge online interactions with purchase behaviour.

2.4 Brand Engagement

Brand engagement has been recognised as an important term in online marketing with reference to the consumer interactions with the brand. There are different definitions of brand engagement, but it relates to both psychological and behavioural factors. For instance, Satar et al. (2024) defined brand engagement as consumers' psychological attachment and brand engagement behaviour (for example, likes, shares, comments, and co-creations). Similarly, Cuesta-Valiño et al. (2024) emphasised that brand engagement is not only behavioural engagement but also related to an emotional and cognitive engagement that impacts the long-term relationship between consumers and the brand. These conceptualisations suggest that engagement is not just behavioural but related to consumer attitudes and feelings.

Additionally, Hollebeek (2011) defined brand engagement as a multidimensional and multi-faceted construct including cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements. This perspective highlights that consumers do not passively consume content - they think about the brand, feel about the brand, and engage in behaviours that show a consumer's brand loyalty or interest. This is critical in social media marketing in the context of engagement with users and brands through engaging content forms in platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat.

In a critical assessment, several authors have recognised the merits and limitations of the brand engagement construct. Kumar and Pansari (2016) pointed out that online engagement provides markers such as likes and shares that enable marketers to monitor interest in real time. However, they also recognised that these indicators might not represent actual psychological engagement and consumer behaviour in terms of purchasing. This is particularly so for Gen Z, as consumers may engage with the content (e.g., scrolling, viewing) passively without forming purchase intentions.

But, according to Nget al. (2020), emotional engagement is crucial as it facilitates trust and brand loyalty. They discovered that emotional engagement is more predictive of purchase intention than is behavioural engagement. It aligns with the concept of Gen Z consumers being driven by authenticity, storytelling and fit in marketing messages. Many studies, however, don't differentiate between behavioral (likes, shares) and emotional (advocacy, repurchases) engagement, cautioned Dwivedi et al. (2021), but noted that more nuanced engagement approaches warrant further research. They point out that social media platforms can incentivise low effort engagement which

can make it difficult to quantify the success of a brand but cannot necessarily lead to sales. It is crucial for UK brands to understand the importance of this for fashion brands, and how they use influencer marketing strategies and 'viral content' to promote engagement. In addition, they highlighted the brand engagement's contextuality and the role of the platform affordances, content and motives of users in shaping the brand engagement.

They added that Gen Z is more prone to engage with short-form video content, hence the rise of TikTok and Instagram Reels in fashion marketing. This indicates a need for brand to customize engagement strategies based on the platform. The other factor that the existing literature emphasises is the connection between brand engagement and social identity. Dessart et al. (2015) suggested that brand engagement is utilitarian and symbolic, like identification expression and social identity. This is especially applicable to fashion marketing, where people wear clothes and brands to express their identity, lifestyle and status. This substantiates the strong symbolic and emotional motivation behind branding in UK fashion.

2.5 Consumer Trust

Trust has always been known to play a crucial role in consumer behaviour when it comes to digital marketing, particularly in terms of online purchase decisions. Consumer trust has been defined as trust in a particular brand or information source as being trustworthy, honest, and competent, by Ozdemir and Sonmezay (2020). Likewise, Morgan and Hunt (2021) argued that trust is a relational factor of marketing exchanges and that it reduces the perceived risk and uncertainty of the purchase decision (Wu et al., 2020; Kim and Kim, 2021). These definitions emphasise trust as a psychological state of comfort that enables consumers to engage with brands in the face of uncertainty in the digital environment.

Likewise, Yang and Battocchio (2021) noted that trust in the social media environment is heavily influenced by brand authenticity and transparency. They highlighted the idea that customers will be more trusting of brands that are responsive to consumer feedback and suggestions, as well as being consistent across multiple channels. This highlights the importance of a two-way communication approach. Di Domenico et al. (2021) noted that trust in the social media environment may be low and susceptible to being manipulated by negative reviews, misleading information, or an impression of manipulation in marketing. Particularly for Gen Z users, who are bombarded with a large amount of information and may be more susceptible to the feedback of

their peers and the "viral" influence of others. The author pointed out that trust in online settings is dynamic. On the other hand, Gu et al. (2021) highlighted the role of risk mitigation in trust development, arguing that trust is developed when customers perceive brands will deliver what's promised. This aligns with YouGov's (2025) report that social media reviews are a major factor for UK Gen Z consumers in deciding on a purchase. One common issue highlighted in the literature is perceived vs actual trust. Pasaribu et al. (2024) proposed that while consumers may express trust in surveys or engagement activities, this may not translate to a sale. They suggested investigating trust through mediating factors such as engagement and value to understand consumer behaviour.

2.6 Purchase Intention

This is a widely researched concept in consumer behaviour and marketing to predict future purchases. Kim and Lee (2023) stated that purchase intention is an individual's intention or preparedness to buy a certain product or service in the near future. Likewise, Li and Peng (2021) argued that purchase intention is a consumer's tendency to choose a product according to their attitudes, preferences, and marketing communications. These perspectives highlight that purchase intention is not incidental but a deliberate psychological process influenced by various factors. Online, purchase intention is influenced by online interactions, social media interactions, and electronic word-of-mouth. Mabkhot and Piaralal (2024) found that social media marketing plays an essential role in improving purchase intention by increasing brand awareness and shaping consumer perceptions through interactive content. They noted that visual aesthetics, celebrity endorsements, and consumer reviews and ratings result in higher purchase intention. This is particularly relevant in the fashion industry, where appearance and fashion trends play an important role in purchasing.

Similarly, Harrigan et al. (2021) explained that online, purchase intention is also affected by perceived brand credibility and trust. They stated that purchase intentions are enabled by brand credibility and social proof. This has to do with the social proof factors such as likes, comments, and influencer recommendations, which are crucial for Gen Z consumers. However, other researchers have noted that purchase intention doesn't always translate to purchase behaviour. Khan et al. (2023) stated that although in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, intention is a strong predictor of behaviour, other factors such as price, availability, and so on may influence the intention-behaviour relationship. Therefore, purchase intention should not be considered as an

action. In addition, Liu et al. (2025) argued that in social media environments, purchase intentions are often characterised by impulsive behaviours. They argued Gen Z is more susceptible to the effects of rapidly changing trends, peer pressure, and influencer marketing (which may lead to impulsive purchase intention). But the intention is likely to be short-lived and fleeting without trust and brand engagement. Further, Reena and Udit (2020) discussed the role of social media advertising, which they claimed personalised advertising and targeted marketing have a significant role in enhancing purchase intention as it resonates with consumers' interests and behaviours. They noted that personalising content through the use of AI, such as on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, increases visibility of fashion products, thus resulting in purchase intention.

A critical appraisal of the literature is that purchase intention is taken as a dependent variable, while it is influenced by multiple factors. Liu et al. (2025) proposed that trust, brand engagement, perceived value, and social influence are critical in predicting online purchase intention. Without them, there is limited insight into the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

2.7 Addressing the Research Objectives and Hypothesis

Objective 1: To explore the application of social media marketing by UK fashion brands

The reviewed literature showed that UK fashion brands are more likely to use social media marketing to impact Generation Z customers. Research in the past showed that Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and Facebook are platforms that product promotion, communication and brand visibility are popular. Dwivedi et al. (2021) and Appel et al. (2020) highlighted that social media marketing enables brands to interact with their consumers using contents that are interactive and engaging to the audience. Other effective methods used to improve customer engagement and brand visibility include user-generated content, influencer marketing and short videos. Additionally, Generation Z consumers are very reliant on social media for fashion inspiration, product discovery, and peer recommendations. Additionally, tailored ads, online reviews and influencer collaborations have been found to have a beneficial effect on consumers' interactions and engagement in the past. They also observed that fashion brands are keen to ensure that they are authentic and transparent to stay competitive in UK fashion market.

Objective 2: To examine how social media marketing influences brand engagement among Generation Z consumers

Literature analysed showed a positive impact of social media marketing on the brand engagement of the Generation Z consumers. Previous studies have reported that social media enable consumers to engage with brands via likes, comments, shares, reviews, and online discussions. Hollebeek (2011) and Cuesta-Valiño et al. (2024) stated that brand engagement encompasses emotional, cognitive and behavioral brand-consumer relationships.

Moreover, the literature suggested that the quality, authenticity and relevance of the content is one of the significant factors in engagement. Emotional engagement is shown to have greater power to influence loyalty and purchase intention than passive engagement such as likes and views (Ng et al., 2020). Also, previous studies revealed Gen Z consumers favor interactive and engaging content, particularly short-form video platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels.

Objective 3: To examine the impact of social media marketing on consumer trust

Literature reviewed showed that social media marketing has a positive impact on consumer trust in the digital environment. Several studies have pointed out that consumers like brands and influencers when the brand is authentic, transparent and reliable. Kim and Kim (2021) and Yang and Battocchio (2021) noted that the factors that can help increase Generation Z consumers' trust are influencer credibility and honest communication.

Furthermore, the literature indicated online reviews and peer recommendations and user-generated content to be important factors in the development of trust. The previous study also showed that the customers like brands that are able to communicate with them consistently and are open when it comes to the social media comments.

Objective 4: To establish whether trust and brand engagement mediate the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention

The reviewed literature showed that trust and brand engagement are two factors indicated as important mediators between SMM and purchase intention. The issue of social media marketing has been tackled by previous studies and these studies have suggested that influencing consumers'

purchasing behaviour directly through social media is not feasible unless there is trust and emotional involvement with the brand.

Shahid and Ikram (2024), and Tyagi et al. (2025), researchers pointed out that trust and engagement lead to an increased relationship between online marketing activities and consumer buying intention. The earlier research also showed three more factors which boost the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies: emotional connection with the brand, online interaction with the influencers, and online authenticity of the influencers. The literature also indicated that the social proof, the recommendations made by influencers and community engagement can greatly influence the trust, engagement, and purchase intentions of the Gen Z consumers.

2.8 Literature Gap

Despite extensive research on social media marketing, brand engagement, trust, and purchase intention, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, most previous research has focused on consumer segments globally or simply on a generic level, rather than Generation Z consumers in the UK fashion industry. While a lot of research has been conducted on influencer credibility and social media engagement, there is little research in the context of UK fashion consumers.

Second, previous research has highlighted the link between social media marketing and purchase intention, but many studies examine trust and brand engagement separately and not as integrated elements. Shahid and Ikram (2024) reported that the role of trust and engagement in mediations is still unclear, particularly in the context of social media engagement and purchase intention. Third, there have been few empirical studies that have used primary data or UK data. This has led to a lack of understanding of consumer perceptions and behaviours in the UK fashion industry. Finally, there is a lack of use of theories like the Honeycomb Model and the RACE model of understanding consumer behaviour. They are not combined with social interactions and outcomes of the customer journey.

2.9 Social Media Functionality Honeycomb Model

The Social Media Functionality Honeycomb Model by Kietzmann et al. (2011) is a widely used theoretical model that explains the functionality of social media and its impact on user-brand relationships. Kietzmann et al. (2011) suggested that the functionality of social media can be dissected into seven building blocks of functionality: identity, conversations, sharing, presence,

relationships, reputation, and groups. The authors found that these elements explain how consumers and companies create, exchange, and receive content online. This model is helpful to consider consumer behaviour because it links social interactions and brand relationships to functional elements of social media.

The model explains how consumers communicate and brand themselves in the context of identity. Giakoumaki and Krepapa (2020) mentioned that social media self-presentation is a critical element for consumer engagement, particularly in the fashion sector, where self-presentation and lifestyle branding play a major role. Similarly, presence is the element that enables social media users to see if other users are online, hence facilitating real-time communication. This feature, according to Cheung et al. (2020), promotes engagement by creating a sense of relationship between brands and their users. The conversational feature highlights user engagement with brands. Kietzmann et al. (2011) observed that social media are both broadcast and conversational media. Likewise, Lin (2022) stated that conversational marketing improves brand responsiveness and brand engagement, particularly among Gen Z consumers who are looking for more real-time communication. Sharing is another element, which is the distribution of information such as images, videos, and links. According to Mohamed (2025), sharing is essential for viral marketing and brand promotion, with users' sharing of user-generated content promoting brand reach. For fashion marketing, sharing is critical for setting trends and influencer marketing.

Reputation is related to the extent to which consumers can identify the reputation or authority of an individual and brand online. The online reviews, influencer reviews, and peer reviews are the factors affecting reputation, resulting in trust, it is seen by Dharma et al. (2019). This is especially crucial for the Gen Z market, who are known for their trust and authenticity. Social media interactions and user communities are used by social connections and communities. Huang et al. (2022) suggested that a sense of community and belonging is important to increase brand loyalty. They noted that in certain categories, such as fashion and lifestyle could help increase brand loyalty and engagement.



Figure 02: Social Media Functionality Honeycomb Model

Source: Kietzmann et al. (2011)

One benefit of the Honeycomb Model is that it offers a framework for social media attributes and social media functions related to consumer behaviour. Cheung et al. (2020) observed that the model is useful for marketers as it identifies the social media features that impact consumer engagement, trust, and brand perceptions. For fashion marketers, this gives the opportunity to create a content marketing strategy that matches the expectations and actions of their customers. But the model has drawbacks. Mushtaq et al. (2021) pointed out that the Honeycomb Model is descriptive rather than predictive, that is, it explains the functions of social media but not their impact on other behaviors, such as purchase intention.

Likewise, Dwivedi et al. (2021) found the model lacks empirical evidence, making it difficult for marketers to prioritise some of the social media functions when marketing products. Today, the Honeycomb Model is still relevant to digital marketing. This emphasis on interaction, identity and community dovetails with the UK fashion industry's Generation Z as they engage with brands and retailers through social media. Therefore, the model offers a valid theoretical basis for the impact of social media features on the customers' trust, engagement with brands and purchase intention.

2.10 RACE Model

The RACE model is a popular digital marketing strategy developed by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), which guides the planning, management and optimisation of digital marketing strategies for companies. RACE represents the four stages of the customer journey online: Reach, Act, Convert, Engage. According to the authors the model aims to help marketers to engage, convert, reach and build customer loyalty through digital communications channels. Especially in the context of social media marketing, as it is in-line with consumer online behaviour. The Reach stage is about creating brand awareness and reaching target audiences with digital media communications, such as social media, search engine optimisation, and influencer marketing.

Mehaq et al. (2025) cited that social media sites such as TikTok and Instagram are convenient to use for reaching the target audience because they offer algorithmic and engaging features. The Act stage is all about capturing the interest of a potential customer in the brand. This can be done by engaging with stories, liking them or watching videos or linking to them. This is a pivotal moment, according to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) as it is the first interaction or engagement. Likewise, Ashley and Tuten (2021) proposed that the interactive elements of a video presentation, like polls, quizzes, and influencer marketing, are more likely to capture viewers' attention as well as spark engagement, especially among younger audiences who seek more immersive experiences (Xin, 2024). The Convert stage is all about moving visitors from engagement to transaction or any other form of consumer interaction, like buying, subscribing, and signing up. The most important for business success is this stage, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) explain. They said that Conversion has three things to do with: trust, cost, and value. Likewise, Biswas and Pandey (2025) asserted social proof and credibility of influencers as key drivers of higher conversion rates in social media marketing. The Engage stage is all about post-purchase engagement. Repeat buying and loyalty programs, and additional post-purchase interaction on social media.

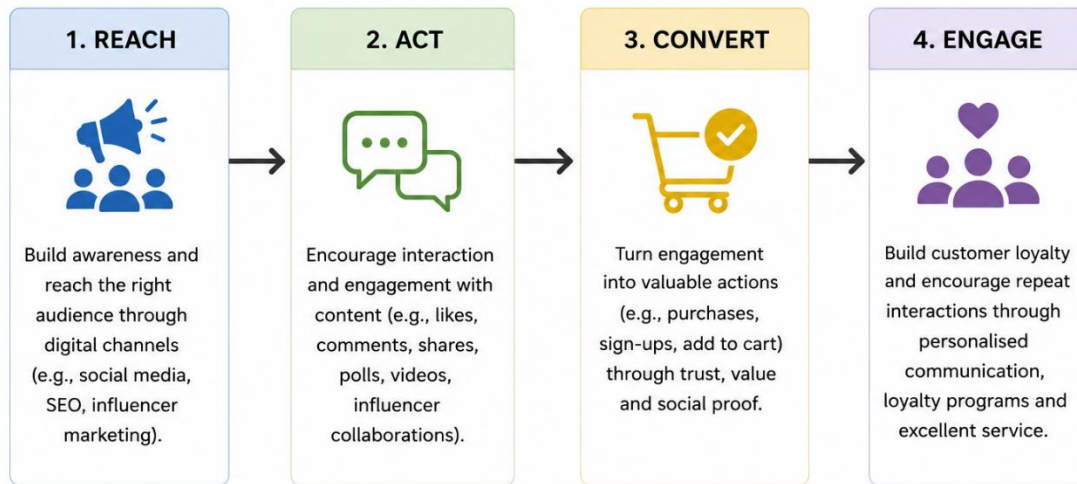


Figure 03: RACE Model

Source: (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019)

For brand loyalty to be formed and customer lifetime value to be boosted, engagement is crucial, according to Bing et al. (2024). This is especially important in the fashion industry, given the tendency of customers to switch brands due to fashion and pressure from others. The RACE model is user friendly. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) state that it enables digital marketing to be managed and each stage of the customer journey can be monitored and measured. It is widely used by businesses to drive marketing efforts to achieve particular objectives such as engagement, conversion, and retention. However, the model has its shortcomings.

Magasi (2025) suggested that RACE does not account for the dynamic and non-linear nature of the modern consumer behaviour, especially the social media era, where consumers' behaviour is often bouncing between each of the stages. Likewise, Guerra-Tamez et al. (2024) have pointed out that the model does not take into account the emotional and psychological aspects of the consumer's behaviour, which are relevant to the Z generation. However, in the UK fashion industry, the RACE model remains a crucial and relevant approach to the digital customer journey. It offers a framework for comprehending the role of social media marketing in awareness, engagement, conversion, and loyalty. This study offers valuable insights into the impact of social media marketing on Generation Z consumers' trust, brand engagement, and purchase intentions.

2.10 Comparison of Models

The Honeycomb Model of Social Media Functionality (Kietzmann et al., 2011) and the RACE Model (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019) are both helpful models to conceptualise digital marketing and consumer behaviour, but they differ in focus, methodology, and application. The Honeycomb Model is descriptive and platform-centred, with a focus on the way social media operates and its seven building blocks of identity, sharing, reputation, etc. Kietzmann et al. (2011) emphasised that these building blocks define how users communicate in the social media environment and how firms can influence consumer behaviour through a social media platform's functionality.

The RACE model is a performance marketing model that focuses on the customer journey. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) stated that the RACE model has four phases including Reach, Act, Convert, Engage that help marketers to achieve their aims. The Honeycomb Model is about the dynamics of social media, while the RACE model is about the dynamics of marketing performance, awareness, and loyalty. What is common for both models is that they recognise the importance of interaction in the online environment. They both acknowledge interactive behaviour. However, the Honeycomb Model emphasises the interaction of social communication, whereas the RACE model emphasises marketing and performance.

The second difference is related to measurability. Sauri et al. (2023) stated that the Honeycomb Model is more conceptual and lacks metrics that could be used to measure marketing performance, which may limit its performance evaluation. On the other hand, Sangsawang (2024) confirmed that the RACE model is very practical and assists companies to assess their digital marketing performance using a range of metrics - click-through rates, conversion rates, and retention rates. But according to other critics, like Bégin (2013), the RACE model is too simplistic as it provides a straightforward model that doesn't capture the true nature of social media-based consumer behaviour. Both models provide value for Generation Z and the UK fashion industry. The Honeycomb Model helps to explain how social media features are used to express identity, build trust, and engage in social media interactions, whereas the RACE model helps explain how these interactions lead to purchase intention and engagement.

2.11 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research aims to explain the relationship between social media marketing and purchasing intention of UK Generation Z consumers in the fashion industry, mediated by trust and brand engagement. It draws on consumer behaviour theory and is underpinned by an adaptation of the Social Media Functionality Honeycomb Model (Kietzmann et al., 2011), which explains how the functionality of social media has an impact on interaction, perception, and the relationship between brands and consumers.

Social media marketing is the independent variable of the model. This includes practices such as influencer marketing, interactive, user-generated content, advertising, and other social media marketing activities on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. Social media marketing is crucial in raising awareness and influencing online behaviour by creating engagement through social interaction (Murshed and Ugurlu 2023).

Mediating variable 1 is brand engagement, which is psychologically, emotionally, and behaviourally engaging with brands. Satar et al. (2024) defined engagement as "likes", "comments", "shares", and "engagement" with brand content. In this study, brand engagement is expected to act as a mediator between social media and consumer behaviour, by enhancing emotional bonding with brands. The second mediator is trust, which is perceived as trust, credibility, or authenticity of a brand or influencer. Eneizan et al. (2020) emphasised that trust reduces perceived risk and increases purchase intentions in e-commerce. For Generation Z, trust is associated with influencer authenticity, consumer reviews, and brand authenticity.

The dependent variable is purchase intention, i.e., the willingness to buy fashion products after viewing social media marketing. Ajzen (2020) proposes that purchase intention is a reliable predictor of behaviour, although other factors such as price and availability can also affect purchase intentions. The proposed conceptual model indicates that social media marketing influences brand engagement and brand trust. In turn, this will enhance purchase intention among Generation Z. Additionally, brand engagement and trust are likely to mediate the social media marketing-purchase intention link, suggesting that the effect of social media marketing on purchase intention is partially accounted for by these two factors.

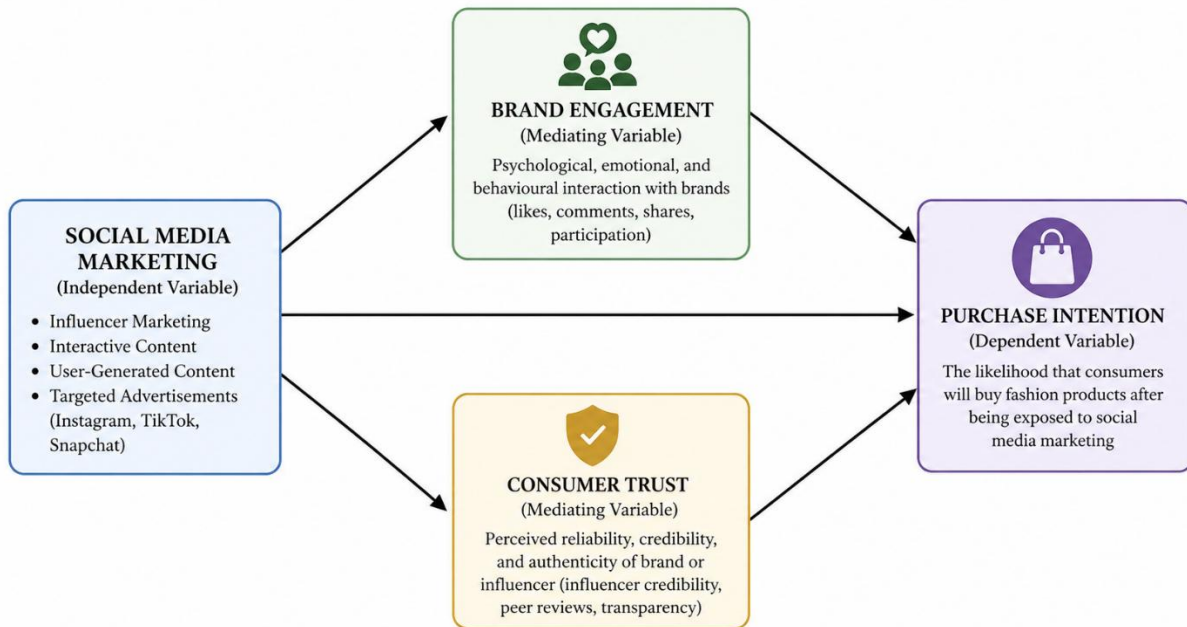


Figure 04: Conceptual Framework

This framework indicates that the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention is both direct and indirect. This is in line with Tyagi et al. (2025), who cited trust and engagement as a factor that can strengthen the impact of digital marketing on purchase intention.

3.0 Methodology

The methodological approach used in this chapter in the study of how social media marketing affects the purchase intention of the Generation Z consumers in the UK fashion industry has been explained. The research philosophy, research design, type of data, sampling design, method of data collection, and data analysis technique that were used in the study have been discussed in the chapter. The methodology developed is designed in a way that the findings from the research are reliable, valid, and suitable for the research objectives and testing of proposed hypotheses.

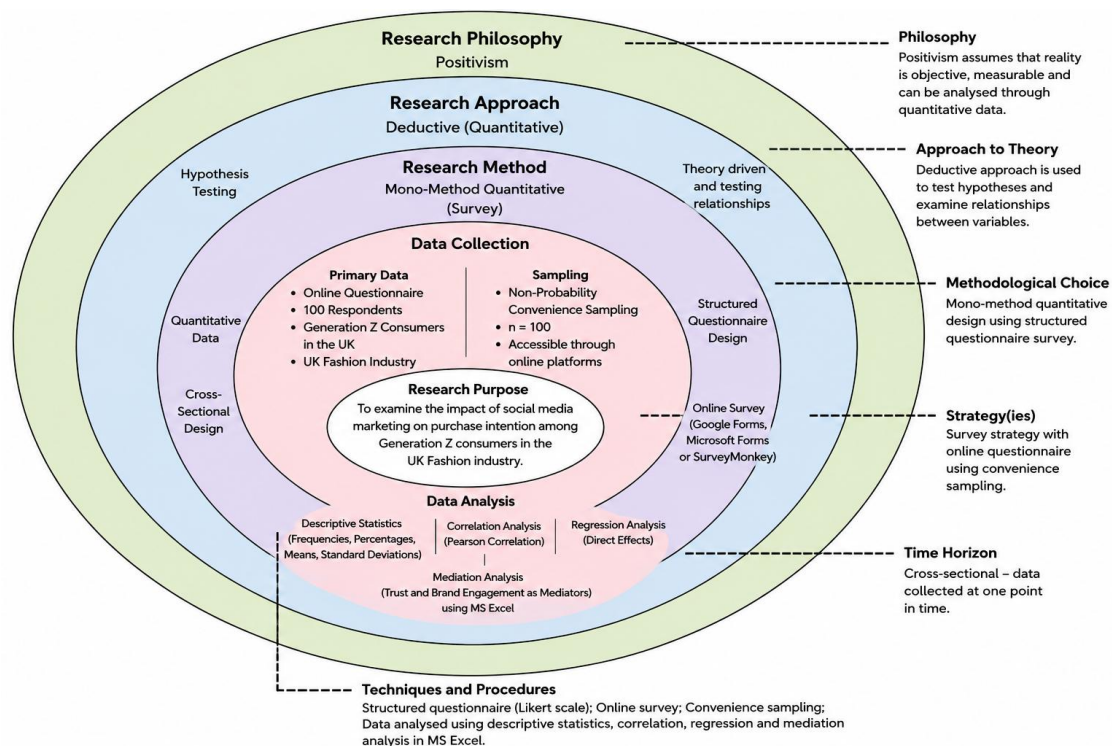


Figure 05: Research Onion

Source: (Saunders et al., 2019)

3.1 Research Philosophy

The philosophy of the research in this study is positivist philosophy, in which the philosophy of this research is based on the assumption that the reality of this study can be measured and analysed objectively using quantitative data (Saunders et al., 2019). This study is considered positivist as the research has been aimed at examining measurable relationships between social media

marketing, consumer trust, brand engagement, and purchase intention among the consumers of Generation Z in the UK fashion industry.

The positivist philosophy has been oriented towards facts that are observed and statistical relationships, not subjective interpretations. The positivist approach has been useful in conducting systematic and evidence-based studies, as a study is designed to test hypotheses and identify numerical relationships between the variables. Positive attitude to research is typically linked to structured research and quantitative analysis to produce objective and generalizable outcomes (Saunders et al., 2019). The philosophy has therefore allowed the researcher to have a consistent set of data from the respondents and to analyse the data statistically, in a detached and objective manner.

3.2 Research Approach

The deductive method was used in the present study because the study was conducted based on the theories available and previous studies related to the theories of social media marketing, consumer trust, brand engagement and purchase intention. Saunders et al. (2019) suggest that the deductive method would be suitable to quantitative research and hypothesis testing. Additionally, the deductive approach allowed the researcher to quantitatively test the relationships among social media marketing, trust, brand engagement and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers in the fashion industry in the UK by conducting a quantitative analysis and using statistical analysis.

3.3 Research Design

The design of this research is quantitative, which is used to test the hypothesis and measure the variables in this study quantitatively (Creswell, 2014). The study aims to analyze statistical relations between social media marketing, consumer trust, brand engagement, and purchase intention; thus, quantitative research has been deemed suitable.

Unlike qualitative research that explores the meanings and experiences of the subject, quantitative research has enabled the researcher to obtain their measurable data from a larger quantity of respondents and analyze their data statistically. The quantitative approach has thus increased the

objectivity, consistency, and reliability of the assessment of the consumers' attitude and behaviour pattern. Creswell (2014) suggested that quantitative research is suitable for research that involves hypothesis testing and data relationships between variables through statistical analysis. Thus, the quantitative design has been very much in line with the objectives and hypotheses of this study.

The research design is a mono-method quantitative design with a survey research type, which has been specifically applied in the study. The study has employed a “mono-method ” quantitative design research, which means that using a survey method. The design has been selected due to its ease in obtaining standardised responses from the respondents in a small span of time. The researcher has used structured questionnaires, which have been very useful in ensuring consistency in the data collection, thus being very helpful for the researcher in comparing the responses given by the participants effectively.

3.4 Data Type

The data used for this study has primarily been quantitative data that has been gathered from first-hand sources from Generation Z consumers in the UK. Primary data employed is considered suitable since it provided information from first-hand direct and relevant to consumers' perceptions, trust, consumer engagement, and intention to purchase in relation to engaging in social media marketing activities.

Primary data collection has enabled the researcher to get responses that are targeted to the research objectives and the research hypotheses. This has resulted in better accuracy, relevance, and validity of the results as the facts have mirrored the experience and opinion of the target respondents.

The quantitative data is chosen because it is able to measure the attitudes and behavioural intentions of the consumers numerically. The variables of trust, engagement, and purchase intention have been measured using structured responses (Likert scale), as this allowed for statistical analysis of the relationships between these variables. Bryman (2016) states that quantitative primary data is very useful in social science research, and can be used to study behavioural patterns, consumers' perceptions, and measurable relationships. The quantitative data have increased the reliability and objectivity of the results of the research.

3.5 Sampling Design

The number of respondents is 100, which is considered an appropriate sample size for quantitative survey research and statistical analysis of the research. Sample size has enabled the researcher to analyze the trends, relationships, and mediation effects and made it possible to conduct the study within the available time and resources. The intended customer base is the UK's Generation Z consumers. The generation from 1997 up to 2012 is generally referred to as Generation Z. This demographic has been chosen as it is the most active social media users and is an important consumer group for the UK fashion industry.

The sampling is designed taking into account the probability and non-probability sampling issues. Non-probability convenience sampling is most often used because it is convenient and accessible. The people who participated in the online survey have been chosen based on their availability and willingness to do the survey. Convenience sampling is often used in survey research when the population being sampled is easily accessed through digital channels and the internet (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

3.6 Data Collection Method

This study used digital survey tools through an online survey questionnaire, such as Google Forms, Microsoft Forms, or SurveyMonkey. As online communication platforms are ubiquitous and consumers have embraced digital, online surveys are believed to be fit for the needs of Generation Z. There have been several benefits to the use of the online survey. Firstly, it has allowed for questionnaires to be distributed efficiently in various areas in the UK. Second, online surveys have decreased the time and the expense of conventional face-to-face data collection techniques. Thirdly, it has been simple for the respondents to fill out the survey on their mobile phone, tablet, or computer.

The questionnaire has been largely answered using closed questions, some of which have been rated on a 5-point Likert scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” The reasons for including the questions using the Likert scale is because the questions are structured and quantifiable to measure consumer attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours.

The questionnaire consists of around 8-10 questions related to social media marketing activities, consumer trust in the brand, consumer engagement with the brand, and purchase intention. To be

effective in measuring the variables, questions have been included that address influencer marketing, user-generated content, online interaction, authenticity, and purchasing behaviour. The questionnaire has been reviewed, before its distribution, for clarity, simplicity, and relevance to the research objectives. The ethical issues like anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation have also been ensured in the process of data collection.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data collected has been analysed by MS Excel, and quantitative data of collected data has been analysed with descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and mediation analysis. The chosen software is Excel because it provides useful tools to organise, visualise, and statistically analyse quantitative information. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) have been used to summarize demographic data from the respondents as well as general trends in responses. These statistics have provided a profile of the consumer and behaviours of social media among the Generation Z respondents. The relationship and intensity between social media marketing, brand engagement, trust in the brand, and purchase intention have been explored using correlation analysis. Pearson correlation analysis has, in particular, been utilized to find out if positive relationships between the variables exist.

Through regression analysis, the causal relationship of social media marketing with purchase intention, trust, and brand engagement has also been investigated. For evaluating the hypotheses in the regression models, the researcher has measured beta coefficients, R-square values, and significance levels. Moreover, mediation analysis has been done to find out if the relationships between SMM and purchase intention are mediated by brand engagement and consumer trust. The mediation process has included making comparisons of direct and indirect effects among variables.

Moreover, mediation analysis has been done to find out if the relationships between SMM and purchase intention are mediated by brand engagement and consumer trust. The mediation process has included making comparisons of direct and indirect effects among variables. Ndungo et al. (2025) state that in the preliminary stage of quantitative analysis, Microsoft Excel is appropriate because it provides a systematic organisation, statistical analysis, and visualisation of research findings.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides quantitative analysis and findings of the study, which investigated the impact of social media marketing on the purchase intention of Generation Z in the fashion industry in the United Kingdom (UK). The data for this analysis comes from primary data gathered using an online survey questionnaire sent to Generation Z consumers in the United Kingdom. This chapter aims to present an analysis of the collected data and an interpretation of the findings in relation to the research objective, hypothesis, and conceptual framework of the study. Many studies in consumer behaviour and digital marketing involve the use of quantitative analysis, as this approach enables the researcher to measure the relationship between variables in an objective manner using statistical analysis (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic features of the respondents are described statistically in this part. The demographic data obtained from the survey questionnaire were summarised using frequency and percentage analysis. This analysis aims to profile the respondents and illustrate how the social media usage of Generation Z is relevant to the UK fashion industry.

Table 4.1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
16–18 Years	4	3.9%
18–21 Years	18	17.5%
22–24 Years	26	25.2%
25–27 Years	55	53.4%
Total	103	100%

Section A — Demographic Profile A1. What is your age group?

103 responses

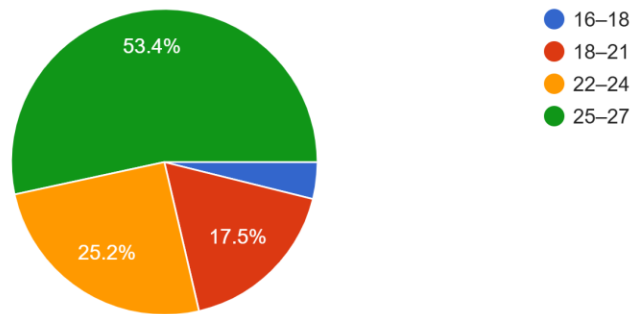


Figure 06: Demographic Profile

The result showed that the majority of the respondents were aged between 25 and 27 with 53.4% of the total sampled. Twenty-five-point two percent of the respondents were between the ages of 22 and 24 and 17.5 percent were between 18 and 21. The age group 16-18 had the smallest proportions (3.9%). This discovery suggests that the older generation of Generation Z consumers were the biggest group of respondents in the study.

Table 4.2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	57	56.4%
Female	42	41.6%
Non-binary	1	1.0%
Prefer not to say	1	1.0%
Total	101	100%

A2. What is your gender?

101 responses

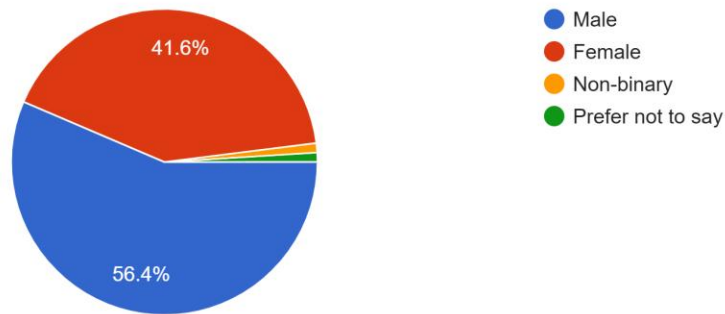


Figure 07: Gender Diagram

The gender analysis indicated that the highest number of respondents were males (56.4%) and females (41.6%). A small number of respondents were non-binary or didn't specify their gender identity. The results indicate that Gen Z consumers are not only actively involved with social media but also online fashion shopping behaviors as well.

Table 4.4: Social Media Usage Frequency

Daily Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 hour/day	9	8.7%
1–3 hours	27	26.2%
3–5 hours	41	39.8%
More than 5 hours	26	25.2%
Total	103	100%

A3. How often do you use social media?

103 responses

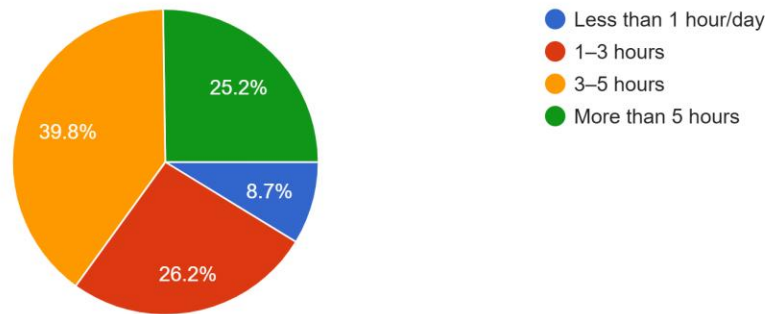


Figure 08: Social Media Usage Duration

The result shows that the respondents are very active on social media. The top four most popular social media platforms that were cited by the majority of respondents were social media platforms that took 3-5 hours each day (39.8%). Furthermore, 25.2% of the respondents indicated that they use social media for over 5 hours a day. 8.7% used social media platforms less than an hour a day. The results highlight the importance of digital platforms in the daily lives of Generation Z consumers in the UK fashion industry.

Table 4.5: Preferred Social Media Platform

Platform	Frequency	Percentage
Instagram	19	18.4%
TikTok	8	7.8%
Snapchat	9	8.7%
Facebook	65	63.1%
Other	2	1.9%
Total	103	100%

A4. Which social media platform do you use most?

103 responses

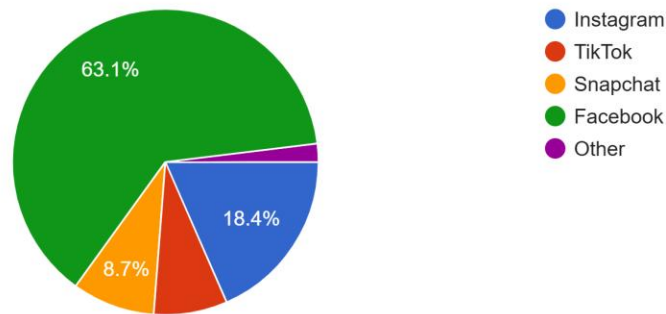


Figure 09: Most use of social media Usage

Among the respondents, Facebook was the most preferred social media platform at 63.1% of the respondents. Instagram had 18.4% of respondents, Snapschat had 8.7% and TikTok had 7.8%. A small percentage opted for other platforms. Facebook's prominence in the findings suggests that individuals interact on social media platforms for communication, sharing information and engagement in the online world. In the fashion industry, these platforms offer valuable avenues for digital marketing, influencer engagement, and online brand engagement.

Table 4.6: Online Fashion Purchase Frequency

Purchase Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	11	10.8%
Often	21	20.6%
Sometimes	49	48.0%
Rarely	21	20.6%
Total	102	100%

A5. How often do you purchase fashion products online?

102 responses

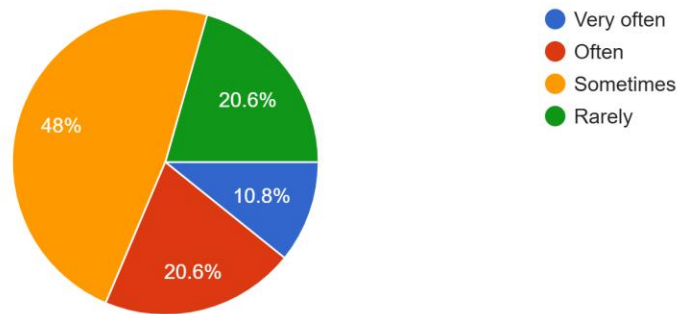


Figure 10: Online Purchase Products Frequency

The results reveal that most of the respondents sometimes buy fashion products online accounting for 48.0% of the respondents. 20.6% of the respondents bought fashion products frequently and rarely, respectively, while 10.8% said they buy fashion products online very often. The results indicated that online fashion shopping is an integral aspect of generation Z consumers' behaviour in the UK fashion industry. The findings also suggest that social media use is significantly linked to online shopping habits of Gen Z shoppers.

4.3 Descriptive Analysis of Main Variables

The descriptive statistical analysis of the main variables investigated in the study is summarized in this section. The analysis is directly linked to the research Objectives 1, 2, and 3, which are designed to investigate the role of social media marketing in stimulating purchase intention, the influence of social media marketing on brand engagement, and the impact of social media marketing on consumer trust among the Generation Z consumers of the UK fashion industry.

4.3.1 Variable 1: Social Media Marketing

Table 4.7: Descriptive Analysis of Social Media Marketing

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation
------------	------	-----------------------

Social media content from fashion brands is visually appealing	3.59	0.87
Fashion brands provide useful information on social media	3.78	0.97
Influencer promotions increase my interest in fashion products	3.85	0.81
I interact with fashion brand content on social media	3.55	0.62
Social media marketing makes fashion brands more attractive	4.06	0.80
I discover new fashion brands through social media platforms	4.09	0.87
Overall Average	3.82	0.82

The results showed that the overall attitude of the respondents to social media marketing activities in the UK fashion industry was positive. The overall average is 3.82, which shows that the application of social media marketing has a great impact on the consumer awareness and attitudes of Generation Z consumers. According to the results of the mean score, the statement “I discover new fashion brands through social media platforms” (M = 4.09) received the highest mean score, indicating that social media platforms are very effective in the discovery and visibility of new fashion brands. Therefore, digital platforms are considered as an essential tool of communication for fashion brands and as a young target group.

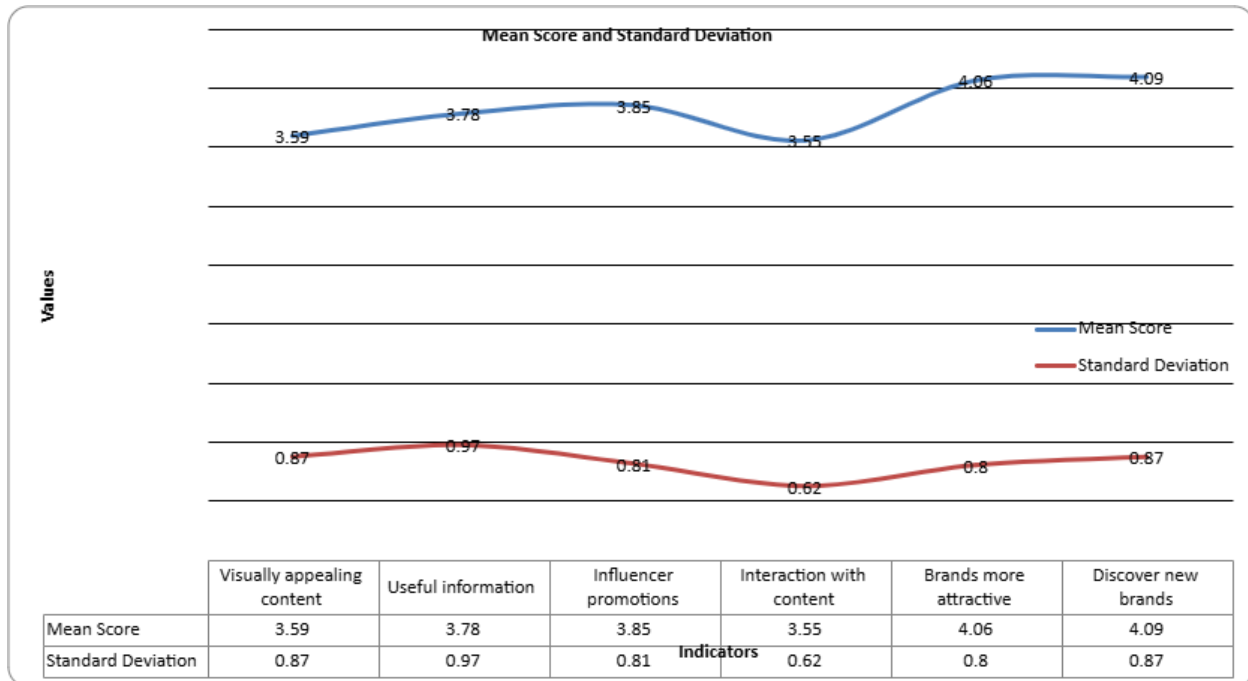


Figure 11: Social Media Marketing

Similarly, the statement “Social media marketing increases the attractiveness of fashion brands” achieved a high mean score (4.06), which emphasizes the importance of the brands' social media marketing content being appealing and engaging. Influencer marketing was another influencer that impacted the respondents' answers, having a mean score of 3.85 on the statement ‘Influencer promotions make me more interested in fashion products. This finding suggests that when the influencers endorse a brand as an endorser, it has a positive effect on the consumer's attention and interest in the brand and its products among the Generation Z group.

The mean score pertaining to the interaction with the fashion brand content was slightly lower (Mean = 3.55), suggesting that the consumers have high exposure to a lot of fashion content but not everyone likes, comments or shares it. The standard deviation values are relatively small, indicating that the respondents' opinions were not very different from each other. Instagram and TikTok appear to be the most effective platforms for engagement mostly because they are visual, short-form video, influencer-driven and interactive.

4.3.2 Variable 2: Brand Engagement

Table 4.8: Descriptive Analysis of Brand Engagement

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation
I feel emotionally connected to fashion brands on social media	3.87	0.93
I actively engage with fashion brand content online	3.77	1.05
I participate in discussions or trends related to fashion brands	3.60	1.12
Social media increases my involvement with fashion brands	4.08	0.81
I enjoy interacting with fashion brands on social media	4.02	0.82
Overall Average	3.87	0.95

The study of brand engagement has revealed that Generation Z consumers are relatively high in engaging with fashion brands on social media. The overall average score of 3.87 suggests a positive emotional and behavioural relationship between respondents and fashion brands on the Internet. “The more involved I am in fashion brands on social media, the higher the mean score was (Mean = 4.08), indicating social media is an effective platform to make the consumers and brands more connected with each other.

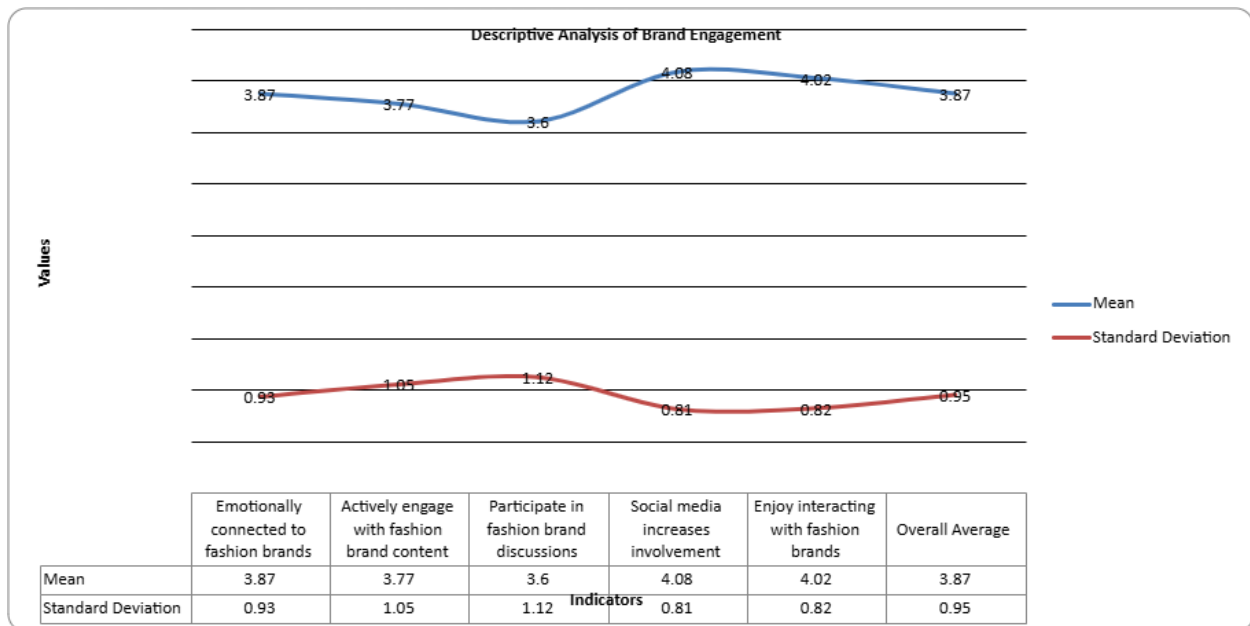


Figure 12: Brand Engagement

Likewise, the respondents reported that they like to communicate with fashion brands on social media (Mean = 4.02). It's a testament to the fact that consumers are drawn in and loyal by engaging, fascinating and interactive content. The results showed that the mean score of emotional

connection with brands was relatively high (Mean = 3.87), which means that social media plays a role in building emotional connection with brands for Generation Z consumers.

But the lowest mean score (Mean = 3.60) was when they were involved in online conversations or trends about fashion brands. These results indicate that there may be a difference in the levels of behavioral engagement (commenting vs participating in online discussion) versus emotional engagement. This is reflected in the higher value of the standard deviation (1.12), which also suggests that there is more variation in the behaviour of the respondents.

Overall, the results showed that social media platforms can be good for both emotional and behavioural engagement with Generation Z consumers, albeit that emotional engagement seems to be marginally stronger than behavioural engagement.

4.3.3 Variable 3: Consumer Trust

Table 4.9: Descriptive Analysis of Consumer Trust

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation
I trust fashion brands that are active on social media	3.91	0.86
Influencers increase my trust in fashion brands	3.98	0.89
Social media reviews affect my trust in fashion products	3.96	0.83
Information shared by fashion brands on social media is reliable	3.86	0.96
Transparent communication increases my trust	4.15	0.75
Overall Average	3.97	0.86

According to the results, consumer trust is one of the most significant factors that affect the behavior of purchasing fashion products online by Generation Z consumers. The overall mean score of 3.97 implies that there is a high degree of consensus on the significance of trust in social media marketing settings. “Transparent communication increases my trust” had the highest mean (Mean = 4.15) indicating that transparency, honesty and authenticity are well valued by young consumers. Credibility of the influencers was also a significant factor in the formation of trust, as was online reviews. In terms of trustworthiness, the mean scores of the indicators were 3.98 for influencer trustworthiness and 3.96 for social media reviews. This highlights the significant impact

of peer opinions, online reviews, and influencer recommendations on trust perceptions in the digital fashion landscape.

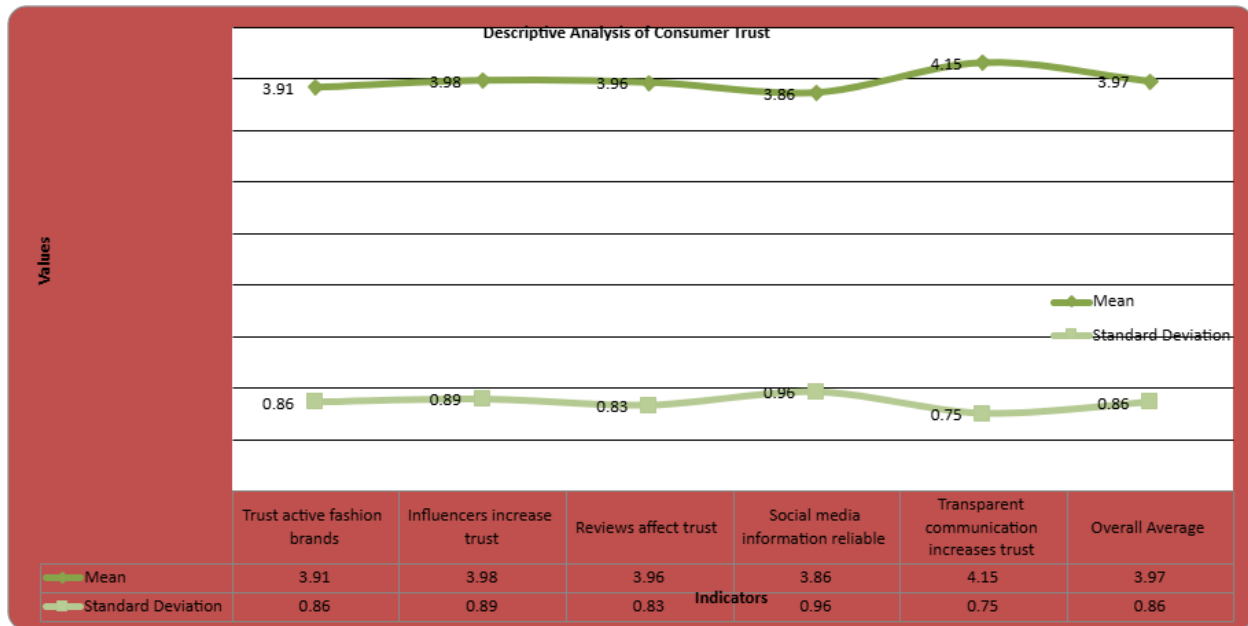


Figure 13: Consumer Trust

The relative lower standard deviation values suggest higher consistency in answers for the trust-related variables. The results indicate that trust is an important psychological determinant in the online buying behavior of Gen Z consumers when buying fashion items.

4.4.3 Variable 4: Purchase Intention

Table 4.10: Descriptive Analysis of Purchase Intention

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>I am likely to purchase fashion products I see on social media</i>	4.04	0.84
<i>Social media marketing influences my buying decisions</i>	4.08	0.73
<i>I intend to buy fashion products recommended by influencers</i>	3.88	0.95
<i>I prefer brands that I follow on social media</i>	3.65	0.56

I am willing to try new fashion brands promoted on social media

3.54 0.70

Overall Average

3.84 0.76

Purchase intention analysis results show that the use of social media marketing has a positive influence on consumer purchasing behavior among the respondents in the age group of Generation Z. The overall mean score of 3.84 shows that the purchase intention is positive with the fashion products promoted through social media platform. With a mean score of 4.08, it is clear that the digital marketing strategies affect the consumers' buying decision, which is the highest mean score in this study.

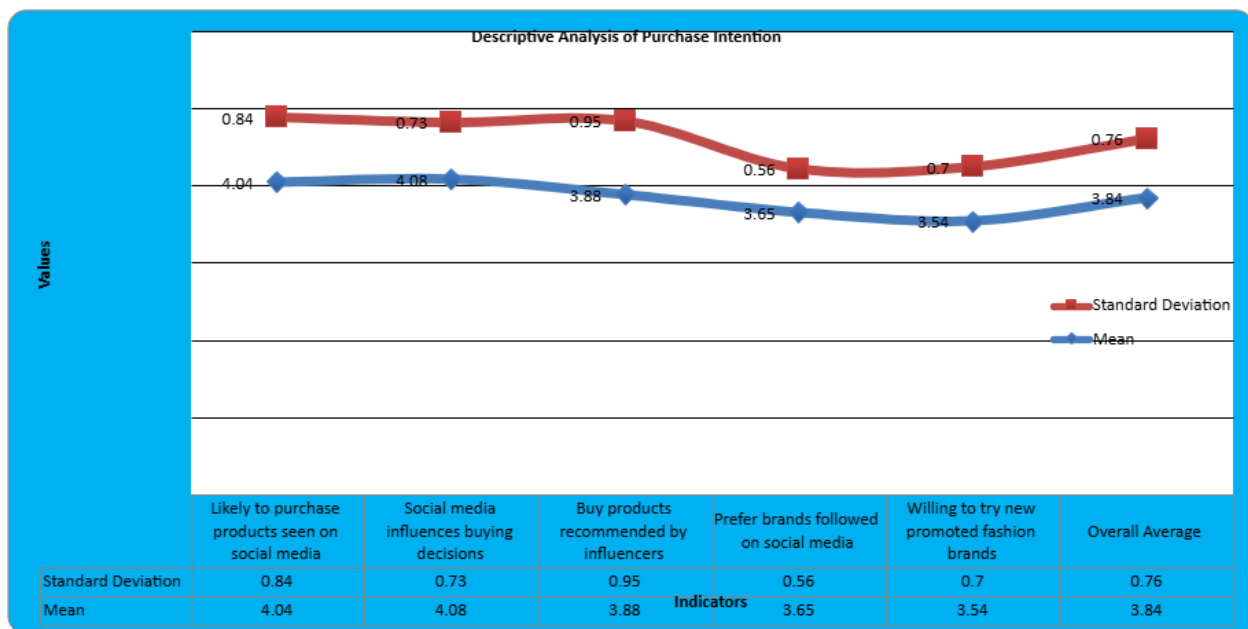


Figure 14: Purchase Intention

Willingness to buy products found via social media sites was also high (Mean = 4.04). Recommendations by influencers also had a positive effect on purchase intention, though less so than other social media recommendations. The relatively lower mean score on the willingness to try out new brands of fashion also indicates that consumers might yet be considering other factors like trust, quality of the product, and familiarity with the brand before they make the purchase. The results align with the existing literature that social media marketing positively affects the intentions to purchase among the Generation Z consumers in the UK fashion industry by affecting the level of engagement, trust, and online interaction.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

This section discusses the Pearson correlation analysis undertaken to analyse the relationship between the key variables of the study: social media marketing, brand engagement, consumer trust, and purchase intention of the Generation Z consumers in the UK fashion industry. This analysis is used to identify relationships between variables and assess if the hypotheses proposed are supported. Pearson Correlation Analysis was used due to the quantitative nature of the data in the study, which is based on a Likert scale, and because the study seeks to analyse linear relationships between variables.

The analysis is directly related to the research objective 1, 2 and 3. Objective 1 is to look at the impact of social media marketing on purchase intention. Objective 2 looks into the connection between social media marketing and brand engagement, and Objective 3 looks at the connection between social media marketing and consumer trust.

The analysis also addresses the hypotheses developed in the study:

- **H1:** Social media marketing positively affects purchase intention.
- **H2:** Social media marketing positively influences brand engagement and consumer trust.

Table 4.11: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	SMM	Brand Engagement	Consumer Trust	Purchase Intention
Social Media Marketing	1.000	0.900	0.862	0.865
Brand Engagement	0.900	1.000	0.726	0.764
Consumer Trust	0.862	0.726	1.000	0.722
Purchase Intention	0.865	0.764	0.722	1.000

The findings reveal that all the variables are positively correlated with each other, meaning that the higher social media marketing activities increase, the more likely the consumers of Generation Z are to engage with, trust, and want to purchase the product.

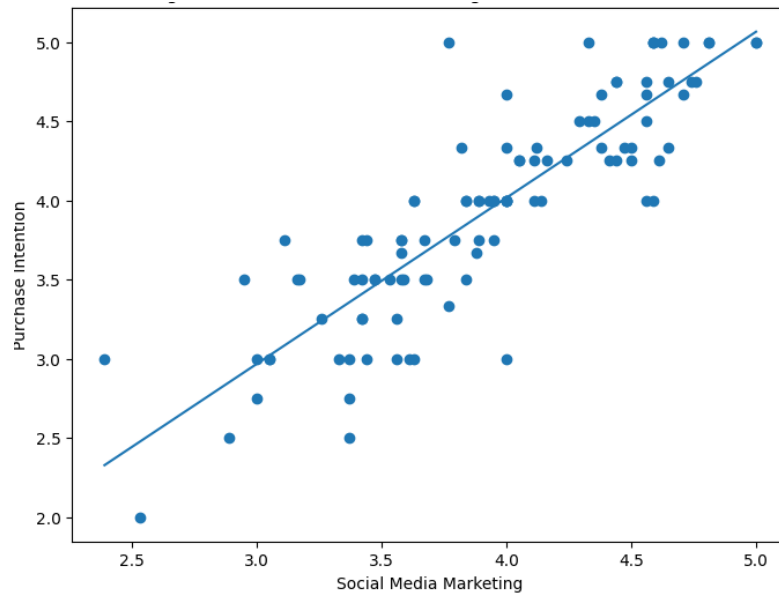


Figure 15: Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention

The correlation coefficient for social media marketing and purchase intention was 0.865, which was a strong positive correlation coefficient. It means that the more they experience social media marketing activities, the higher their intention to purchase. Hence, H1 is supported as it stated that the social media marketing positively influences the purchase intention of consumers from Generation Z in the fashion industry in the United Kingdom.

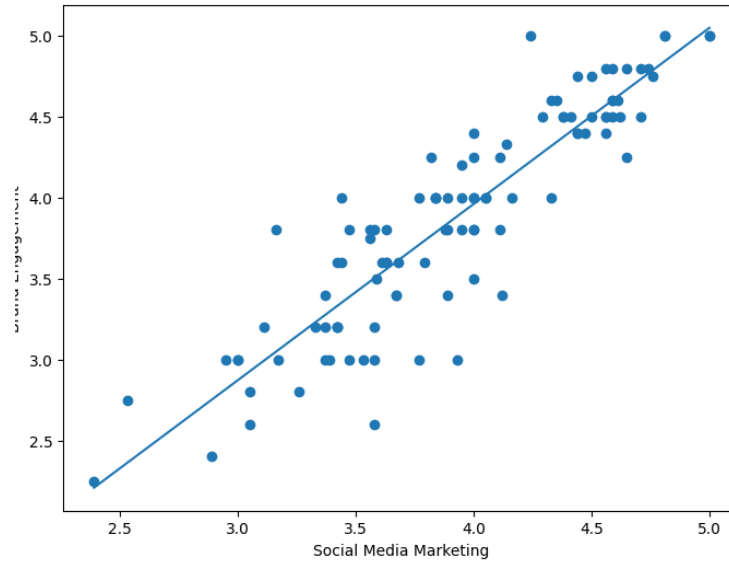


Figure 16: Social Media Marketing and Brand Enagangemnt

Likewise, social media marketing with brand engagement also showed the highest positive correlation coefficient ($r = 0.900$) among the correlations analyzed. This discovery shows that social media marketing efforts like influencer promotions, interactive content, and user-generated content have considerable impact on consumer engagement with fashion brands. The findings corroborate part of H2, which suggested that social media marketing is positively associated with brand engagement.

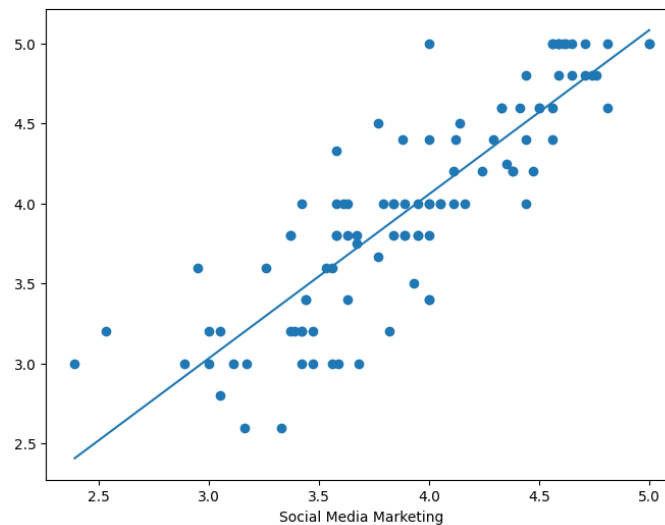


Figure 17: Social Media Marketing and Consumer Trust

The correlation between social media marketing and consumer trust is also positive and high with $r = 0.862$. This discovery reveals that as the communication becomes effective in social media, consumers tend to trust fashion brands. Transparent communication, credibility of influencers and trustworthy information on social media are positive drivers influencing the possibilities of building trust with Generation Z consumers.

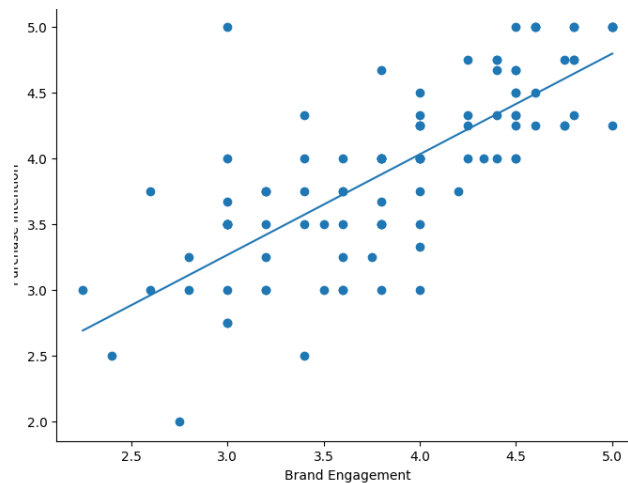


Figure 18: Brand Engagement and Purchase Intention

Moreover, the relationship between brand engagement and purchase intention was quite strongly correlated with $r = 0.764$. This suggests that customers who are emotively and behaviourally connected with fashion brands are more prone to shop fashion goods online. Actions like likes, comments, shares and interactions boost emotional connection and enhance consumer buying behaviour.

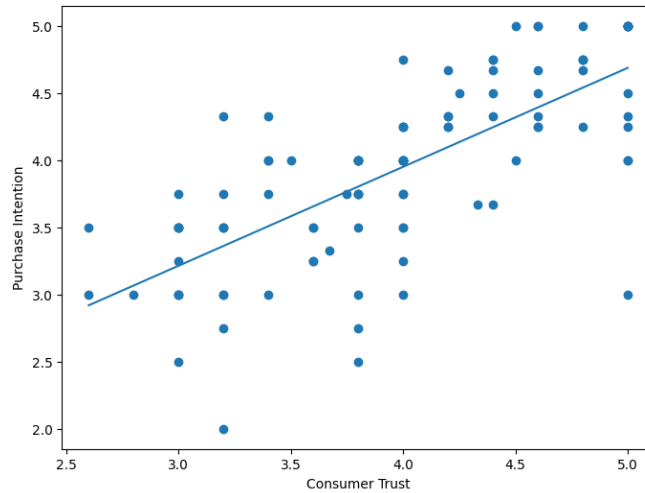


Figure 19: Consumer Trust and Purchase Intention

There was also a strong positive correlation between consumers trust and purchase intention ($r = 0.722$). That indicates that trust is a significant factor when it comes to online buying behaviour amongst Generation Z consumers. Customers are more likely to buy products from brands that they view as reliable, genuine and honest.

The results overall suggest that there is a strong positive relationship between all variables. The results showed high correlation between the two types of responses, indicating that the social media marketing is an influential factor on both psychological and behavioural responses of Generation Z consumers for the UK fashion industry.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Lou and Yuan (2019) and Matin et al. (2020), who found that the trust of consumers and their purchase intention is greatly influenced by the credibility of influencers and the transparency of online communication. The significant positive correlation found between consumer trust and purchase intention substantiates the significance of trust in online fashion purchasing environment.

The results also indicate that the stronger engagement leads to the increase in buying behaviour because engaged consumers form more emotional bonds with fashion brands. Regular exposure to posts and content on social media helps consumers become more aware of the promotion of fashion products, recommendations from influencers, and messages from brands, all of which have a positive impact on their purchasing habits.

Likewise, Generation Z customers will need to have a high level of trust with the online company they are buying from as they have to deal with uncertainty and perceived risk when buying online. Trust alleviates these concerns by enhancing trust in the quality of the product as well as the authenticity of the influencers and brand credibility. Consequently, fashion brands that are trusted are most likely to affect the social media's intention to buy.

4.5 Regression Analysis

The multiple regression analysis is presented in this section to investigate the causal effect of the social media marketing on the purchase intention, brand engagement and consumer trust among Generation Z consumers in the fashion industry in United Kingdom. Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the significance of social media marketing to predict change in the dependent variables. The analysis was directed toward the objective 1, objective 2 and objective 3 of the study and tested the hypotheses 1 and 2.

The independent variable was the Social Media Marketing (SMM) variable, and the dependent variables examined were separately Purchase Intention, Brand Engagement, and Consumer Trust. The beta coefficient, R-square value and significance level were used to assess the strength and significance of the relationships as part of the regression analysis.

Table 4.12: Regression Analysis Summary

Model	Independent Variable		Dependent Variable	Beta (β)	R ²	Significance	Decision
Model 1	Social Media Marketing		Purchase Intention	0.865	0.748	p < 0.001	Supported
Model 2	Social Media Marketing		Brand Engagement	0.900	0.810	p < 0.001	Supported
Model 3	Social Media Marketing		Consumer Trust	0.862	0.743	p < 0.001	Supported

Model 1: Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention

The first regression model is to see the effect of social media marketing on purchase intention of generation Z consumer. This analysis was directed towards Objective 1 and tested Hypothesis 1 which states that the use of social media marketing has a positive influence on purchase intention. The result showed positive beta value of 0.865, that is, there is strong relationship between social media marketing in influencing social media consumers' purchase intention. This indicates that the more the Generation Z consumers engaged in social media marketing, the more likely they are to buy fashion products online. The use of influencers, specific advertising, user-generated content and engaging imagery are contributing factors to positive online buying behavior.

The R-square value of 0.748 suggests 74.8% of the variance in purchase intention is accounted for by social media marketing. It shows that social media marketing is a significant predictor of online buying behaviour in the UK fashion industry. Additionally, the p value of < 0.001 indicates that the correlation is statistically significant. Thus Hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

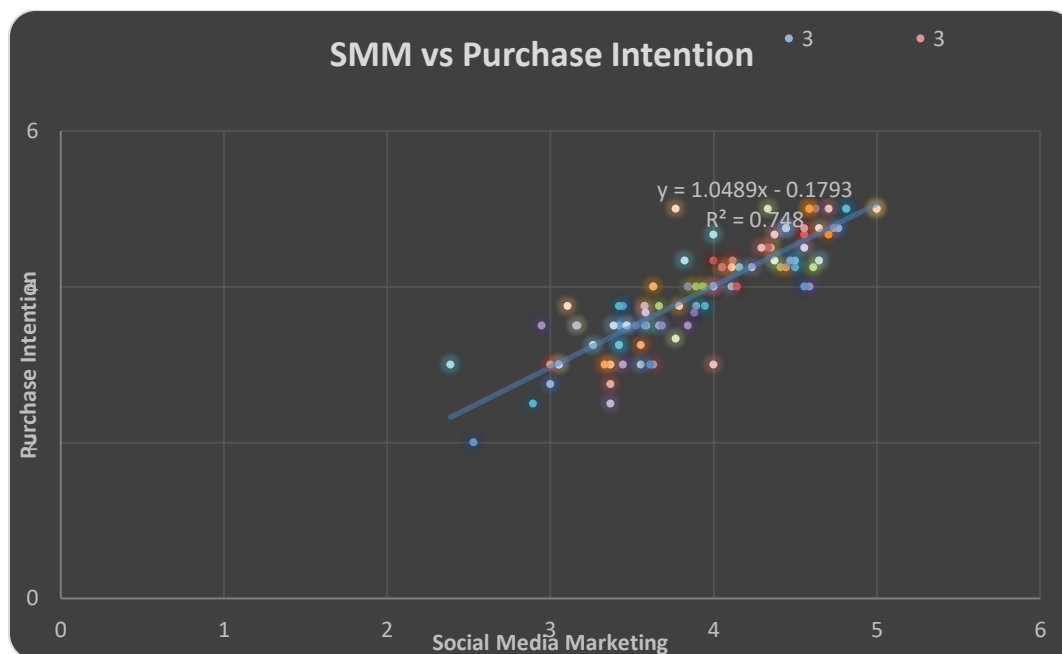


Figure 20: SMM VS Purchase Intention

This result aligns with Matin et al. (2020), who claimed that digital marketing activities have a significant effect on the decisions consumers make when purchasing a product, by enhancing the interaction and exposure of products online. The findings also lend weight to the idea that social media is a key factor in the consumer behavior of Generation Z, with constant digital interaction.

Model 2: Social Media Marketing and Brand Engagement

The second regression model investigated the impact of social media marketing on brand engagement. This analysis dealt with Objective 2 and tested Hypothesis 2. The regression results showed the highest values of the beta coefficient among the three models with $\beta = 0.900$. This suggests that social media marketing has a positive and great effect on the consumers' interaction with the fashion brand. The discovery indicates that digital interaction via social media has an immense impact on emotional and behavioural engagement of Generation Z consumers.



Figure 21: SMM VS Brand Engagement

The R-square value of 0.810, which means that 81.0% of the variation in brand engagement is explained by the social media marketing activities. This shows that social media marketing can be really effective in engaging with consumers and building an emotional connection to the fashion brands. Based on the significance value of $p < 0.001$, further confirmation is given that the relationship is statistically significant, which supports Hypothesis 2.

This result is consistent with the study by Shahid and Ikram (2024), which determined that content in social media that is interactive is able to make a positive influence on the engagement of the young consumers. Consumer engagement, like liking, commenting, sharing, and joining in online fashion conversations, boosts consumer engagement and attachment to brands. Instagram and TikTok, in particular, have highly visual platforms with interactive features that promote better engagement.

Model 3: Social Media Marketing and Consumer Trust

The third regression model explored the impact of social media marketing on consumer trust. This analysis has focused on and further tested Objective 3 and Hypothesis 2. The regression results revealed a positive beta coefficient $\beta = 0.862$, which indicated that consumer trust is positively influenced by social media marketing. It indicates that social media communication plays an important role in building trust with Gen Z consumers.

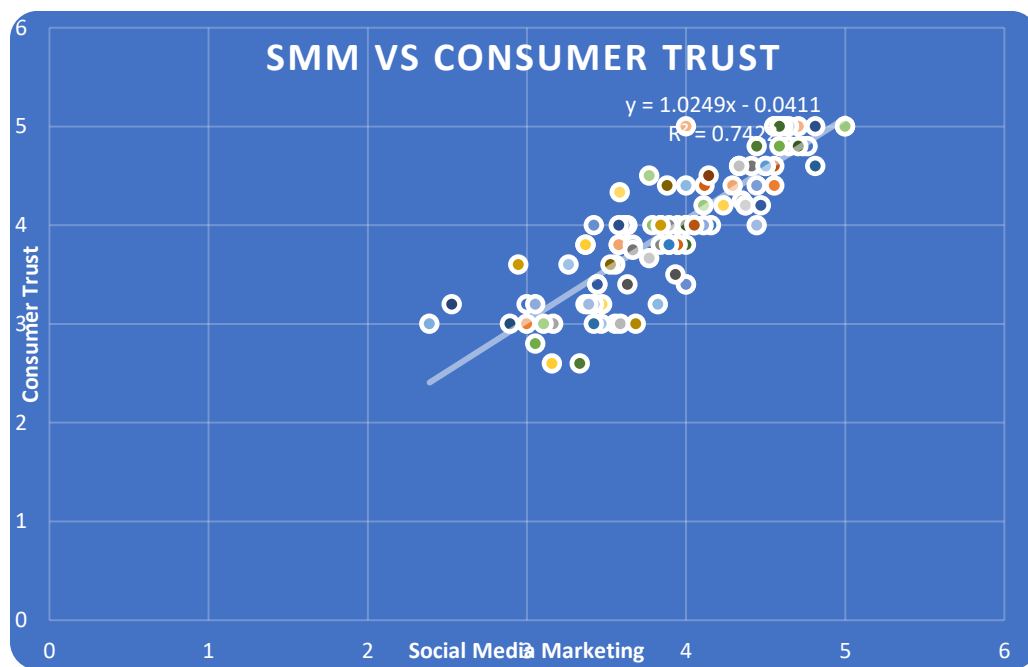


Figure 22: Social Media Marketing vs Consumer Trust

R-square value of 0.743 clearly suggests that, around 74.3% of the variance in consumer trust can be accounted for by the social media marketing activities. The significance value of $p < 0.001$ indicates that the model is a significant model.

The results of the study reveal that these key concepts, authenticity, transparency, and influencer credibility, play a role in consumers' trust of Generation Z. Consumers are more likely to trust fashion brands that communicate their message, give them clear information about the product, and instill trust in their partnering influencers. The results confirm the Lou and Yuan (2019) findings, who highlighted that social media users' trust in influencers and their purchase intention is greatly impacted by the influencers' credibility.

The regression analysis results overall suggest that social media marketing can positively impact the purchase intention, brand engagement, and consumer trust among Generation Z consumers in the UK fashion industry. The high level of the beta coefficients and R-squared values, along with the statistically significant results, show that social media marketing is a vital contributing factor in digital consumer behaviour and online fashion buying decisions.

4.6 Mediation Analysis

To see if brand engagement and consumer trust act as mediators between the relationship of social media marketing and the purchase intention among Gen-Z people in the UK fashion industry, the mediation analysis was conducted. To find out if there is a direct or indirect influence between social media marketing and purchase intention, mediation analysis was used. The analysis directly tested Hypothesis 2, which suggested that brand engagement and consumer trust act as the mediating variable between social media marketing and purchase intention.

The mediation analysis was performed with the mediation regression analysis on Excel. The analysis was conducted in four major steps: Firstly, the direct effect of social media marketing on purchase intention was tested, Secondly, the direct effect of social media marketing on the mediators was tested, Thirdly, the direct effect of mediators on purchase intention was tested, and Fourthly, the comparison of the direct effect before and after the mediators was made.

The mediation paths examined in this study were:

- Social Media Marketing → Brand Engagement → Purchase Intention
- Social Media Marketing → Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention

Table 4.16: Mediation Analysis Summary

Relationship Path	Beta (β)	R ²	Significance
SMM → Purchase Intention	0.865	0.748	$p < 0.001$
SMM → Brand Engagement	0.900	0.810	$p < 0.001$
SMM → Consumer Trust	0.862	0.743	$p < 0.001$
Brand Engagement → Purchase Intention	0.764	0.583	$p < 0.001$
Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.722	0.521	$p < 0.001$

Direct Relationship

In the first step, the direct connection between social media marketing and purchase intention was analyzed. The regression result showed that the beta coefficient value of social media marketing is 0.865 with a positive sign, which means that social media marketing has a significant effect on purchase intention among Generation Z consumers. An R-square of 0.748 indicates that 74.8% of the variance in the purchase intention is accounted for by social media marketing activities. The value of $p < 0.001$ indicates that the relationship is statistically significant.

Relationship Between SMM and Mediators

The second was to study the effect of social media marketing on brand engagement and consumer trust. The results showed that there was an extremely high positive correlation between social media marketing and brand engagement ($\beta = 0.900$). In the same way, social media marketing also had a positive effect on consumer trust (0.862). For both of these relationships, it was statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

This research suggests that Gen Z consumers are highly engaged with these forms of social media marketing, including influencer marketing, interactive content, and user-generated content, enhancing their emotional engagement and trust.

Relationship Between Mediators and Purchase Intention

The third step was to determine whether the mediating variables have a significant impact on the purchase intention. Furthermore, it can be seen that the influence of brand engagement was very positive, with a coefficient value of $\beta = 0.764$, and for consumer trust was also very positive, with a coefficient value of $\beta = 0.722$. The two associations were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

The conclusions indicate that emotionally involved consumers are more inclined to buy fashion products online. Likewise, online purchasing behaviour is more likely to be reported by consumers when they have trust in fashion brands and influencers.

Mediation Effect

Finally, the direct relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention was compared before and after the introduction of the mediating variables. The results revealed that the direct effect of social media marketing decreased after adding brand engagement and consumer trust into the regression model. The direct relationship was still statistically significant, however. So, the study did not find complete mediation but rather partial mediation.

The results suggest that social media marketing has a direct and indirect effect on purchase intention via engagement and trust. This shows that social media marketing is not just a marketing tool used to influence purchasing behaviour on its own but also is used to build emotional relationships and trust with customers, thereby elevating purchase intention among Generation Z customers.

The findings complement the Social Media Functionality Honeycomb Model created by Kietzmann et al. (2011) that explains how the interaction of social media enhances communication, relationships, trust, and engagement between brands and consumers. The results further confirm the theory of Consumer Behaviour that states that psychological and emotional aspects play a very important role in the decision-making process.

The results also indicate that consumers' trust in the fashion brands and influencers enhances their online purchasing behaviour as it lowers their perceived risk. Likewise, engagement fosters emotional connection by promoting ongoing interactions among consumers and brands, such as likes, comments, shares, and contributions to online discussions. Generation Z consumers are especially concerned with authenticity, transparency, and interaction, as they are very active in digital consumption and are very dependent on communication in social networks in order to make a purchase.

4.7 Hypothesis Testing Summary

This section summarises the overall hypothesis testing results obtained from the correlation, regression, and mediation analyses conducted in this study.

Table 4.17: Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Result	Supported/Rejected
H1: Social media marketing positively affects purchase intention	Significant positive relationship found	Supported
H2: Brand engagement and consumer trust mediate the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention	Mediation effect identified	Supported

The statistical results proved that indeed social media marketing has a significant impact on the purchase intention, brand engagement and consumers' trust in the UK fashion industry among generation Z consumers. The results of the correlation analysis and regression analysis revealed that the relationships between the variables were positive, and the mediation analysis showed that brand engagement and consumer trust partially mediated the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

The findings show that social media marketing plays a very important role in consumers' online behaviour. The interactive content, the credibility and authenticity of influencers in their communication greatly contributes to engagement and trust thus positively influencing the purchase intention of consumers. The results highlight the significance of the clear and participative social media strategy, building emotional engagement and trust, to create a better shopping experience for Generation Z consumers.

4.8 Chapter Summary

The study was quantitatively analysed based on the responses received from the participants from the UK fashion industry in answering the survey questionnaires which were distributed to the Generation Z consumers and discussed in this chapter. The chapter used the method of demographic analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis and mediation analysis to examine the relationship between social media marketing, brand engagement, consumer trust, and purchase intention. The findings revealed that social media marketing plays an important role in the buying intention of the consumers, their engagement in

the brands and their trust in the brand. Results of correlation and regression analyses indicated that all the variables were strongly correlated with each other and the mediation analysis identified that the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention was partially mediated by brand engagement and consumer trust. The results reveal that Generation Z consumers' purchasing behaviour online is influenced by the influencer marketing and interactive content, transparency, and digital engagement. The chapter thus offers good empirical evidence for the study hypotheses and research goals.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter elucidates the key results obtained from the study about the effect of Social Media Marketing on the purchase intention of Generation Z in the UK fashion industry. This chapter's purpose is to expand on the statistical results provided in Chapter 4, relate these to the research goals and hypotheses, and tie them to the review of literature and theoretical background. The chapter critically discusses the impact of social media marketing activities on purchase intention, both directly and indirectly via brand engagement and consumer trust.

The discussion follows the structure of the research questions of the study. The first section discusses the role of social media marketing in stimulating purchase intention. The second part is about how social media marketing has impacted brand engagement, and the third is about the impact on the trust of the consumer. In addition, the chapter examines the mediating role of brand engagement and consumer trust between social media marketing and purchase intentions.

The results are analysed using the Social Media Functionality Honeycomb Model developed by Kietzmann et al. (2011) and Consumer Behaviour Theory. These theories are used to explain the impact of social media interactions, communication, sharing behaviour, and digital engagement on consumer perception and online purchase decisions by Generation Z consumers in the fashion industry in the UK.

The results of the survey are clearly backed up by the theoretical models that were discussed in the literature review, especially Social Media Functionality Honeycomb model and RACE model. The findings revealed social media marketing has a significant effect on the purchase intention, brand engagement and consumer trust for Gen Z in the UK fashion industry. The results are in line with Kietzmann et al. (2011) who stated that the social media features (conversations, sharing, identity, relationships) increase the interaction and emotional bond between consumers and brands. The results of the survey also confirmed that the use of influencer marketing, interactive communication and user generated content positively impacts engagement and trust which leads to increased purchase intention.

Likewise, the results align with Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick's (2019) RACE Model, which posits that digital marketing efforts take consumers through a chain of reach, interact, convert and engage. The high regression of social media marketing on trust and purchase intention suggests

that social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok are effective in promoting online purchasing behaviour amongst Generation Z consumers and encouraging consumer interactions. The findings of the mediation also align with the previous studies of Matin et al. (2020) and Shahid and Ikram (2024), who suggested that trust and brand engagement foster the link between social media marketing and purchase intention in digital settings.

5.2 Discussion Based on Objective 1

The outcomes of the study showed that social media marketing significantly affects the purchase intention of the UK fashion industry consumers of Generation Z. The results of the correlation and regression analyses showed a positive correlation between social media marketing and purchase intention, which proves that social media marketing has a strong influence on the online buying behavior. The regression analysis results showed that the value of the beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.865$) is high, meaning that social media marketing has a strong influence on the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers.

The one major finding was the effect of influencer marketing on the buying decision. Respondents indicated that fashion products are presented to them more often via the promotion of influencers, and the influence of influencers on the purchase decision of the respondents is positive. The discovery suggests that the influencers have a huge influence on influencing the consumer's perception of attitude towards fashion consumption among the users of Generation Z, and they are able to produce content that feels more like a presentation of the product than a traditional ad. By building content that feels more like a product presentation and is more relatable than a traditional ad, influencers are doing a good job of creating content that feels more "lifestyle. The Generation Z consumers then perceive the recommendations made by the influencers to be relevant and authentic.

This is in alignment with Khurdei et al. (2023), who claimed that social media marketing plays a significant role in the consumer's awareness and purchasing decision due to its interaction and influencers. Likewise, Matin et al. (2020) discovered that social media participation and trustworthiness of influencers were significant factors to boost the intention to purchase online among young consumers. The findings of the present work, therefore, validate the importance of being able to impact marketing strategies in the UK Fashion industry.

The other significant factor affecting purchase intention was the user-generated content. They have been found to have a positive impact on the consumers' fashion brand perception as they see reviews and videos of “how to” styling and “fashion” made by other consumers. Genuine, unmanipulated content, such as user-generated content, is more likely to be trusted by Gen Z users than ads, which are more focused on social proof and what peers think. This implies that social media has made marketing communication from brand to consumer.

Additionally, the results indicated that Instagram and TikTok are the top social media platforms when it comes to the influence of social media platforms for Generation Z consumers. These platforms include the ability to include interesting video material, appearances, and interactive components that are essential for attracting and motivating customers. Fashion marketing is visual, and Generation Z customers like to see products first via video, fashion demos, and influencer posts.

This confirms the results of Nash (2019), who claimed that the UK fashion industry has experienced a radical shift in digitalisation and that social media has become one of the most important communication channels for consumers to engage in conversations with brands and to drive brand visibility. The results are also consistent with the findings of Djafarova and Bowes (2021) that Instagram has a great influence on Generation Z's purchasing decisions in the field of fashion, in that it uses visual content and the communication of influencers.

The results can then be broken down based on Kietzmann et al.'s (2011) Social Media Functionality Honeycomb Model. The sharing strand is the way that consumers share fashion-related information, reviews, and recommendations through digital devices. The segment that requires the involvement of brand and consumer in comments, messaging, and online discussions is called “Conversations.” As a part of fashion marketing, the “identity” part plays a significant role in that consumer of Generation Z use fashion brands to generate a sense of identity, lifestyle, and social belonging through the use of social media content.

Social media is a key platform for Gen Z consumers before they make a purchase on fashion products due to the instant access to trends, reviews, influencers, and peers' information. This generation is, in general, very tech-connected and appreciates authenticity, social interaction, and real-time communication when evaluating fashion brands, born after 1981.

5.3 Discussion Based on Objective 2

The findings indicated that there is a significant impact of social media marketing on Gen Z consumers' engagement with brands. In the regression analysis, the greatest relationship was identified between SM and brand engagement ($\beta = 0.900$), which means that SM activities have a significant impact on creating emotional and behavioural interaction between consumers and fashion brands. The findings showed that the respondents enjoy participating in the social media of fashion brands and that they have an emotional attachment towards the brands on social media. This implies that Gen Z consumers are more emotionally attached and involved with fashion brands through social media marketing.

The highly interactive nature of social media platforms is one of the significant factors that can explain this. Likes, comments, shares, polls, stories, and live videos enable consumers to be an active part of activities related to a brand. Social media can offer a two-way connection between brands and consumers that leads to more emotional connections and engagement than traditional advertising. The results corroborate the definition of brand engagement provided by Satar et al. (2024), which refers to emotional, behavioural and psychological interactions between consumers and brands. This result also corroborates Hollebeek (2011), who stated that there are three components of engagement: emotional, cognitive, and behavioural, which can impact long-term consumer-brand relationships.

The results also show that the emotional engagement scores are slightly higher than the behavioural engagement scores among the Gen Z consumers. In less common cases, respondents discuss or follow online communities of brands, but they are actively consuming and enjoying the social media content related to fashion. This is in line with Dwivedi et al. (2021), who said that internet usage can sometimes be passive, as in the case of watching and following.

Brand communities also help to boost engagement. Online communities are being increasingly adopted by fashion brands to spark interaction, engagement, and conversation with their customers, as well as the sharing of content. These communities are used to further cement consumers' brand identity and love. Social interaction is of particular importance to Generation Z

consumers, as social media is a significant means of communication and expression of identity to them.

In summary, the findings indicated that social media marketing positively influences emotional and behavioral attachment of Gen Z consumers with the fashion brands due to its ability to engage, attract, and interact continuously through digital platforms.

5.4 Discussion Based on Objective 3

The results showed that social media marketing has a positive impact on the consumer trust of the UK fashion industry among Generation Z consumers. The regression analysis revealed that the beta coefficient (β) was 0.862, and it indicated the contribution of the independent variable (social media communication) to the development of trust among consumers. The urge to communicate and build trust is one of the strongest lessons that was learned. Respondents report that transparency and authenticity have had a significant impact on consumers' trust in fashion brands. Honesty, openness, and authenticity are appealing characteristics for digital communication amongst Generation Z consumers.

The authenticity of influencers was another factor that contributed to the trust. With relatable product experiences and recommendations, influencers helped to establish trust among fashion brands. Building trust has to do with being perceived by influencers as sincere and authentic. Too commercial or impractical influencer content can result in a loss of consumer trust. The findings support Lou and Yuan (2019), who found that the credibility of the influencers has a significant influence on trust and purchase intention in social media. Similarly, Kim and Kim (2021) demonstrated that influencers' genuine communication creates trust and that consumers are more inclined to connect with the influencers than ads.

Important factors that were mentioned as means of establishing trust were peer reviews and user-generated content. When it comes to buying fashion products, Generation Z consumers heavily depend on online reviews and their peers' experiences. Positive reviews or social proof help to lessen the uncertainty and build confidence in the quality and reliability of the product and brand. Based on the findings, it is concluded that the result of the study indicates that the uncertainty associated with online shopping in the fashion industry can be reduced as a result of the establishment of trust. There are perceived risks related to product quality, appearance, and

reliability because products are not seen and inspected before they are purchased online. Thus, trust functions as a psychological mechanism that enhances consumer confidence and encourages them to buy products online. The overall results indicate the position of psychological factors, trust in a digital fashion environment, and its influence on the purchasing behavior of Generation Z.

5.5 Discussion of Mediation Effects

Based on the mediation analysis results, brand engagement and consumer trust are mediated between social media marketing and purchase intention. This will directly impact purchase intention and indirectly through engagement and trust building. The results suggest that social media marketing can be better if consumers' emotions are triggered towards fashion brands and they believe the information spreading through social media platforms. Trust improves buying confidence and decreases uncertainty in online transactions, and brand engagement enhances emotional attachment and involvement.

These findings also support that of Matin et al. (2020) that trust and involvement can significantly influence the buying behaviour of digital marketing. Similarly, Dabbous et al. (2020) found that the emotional attachment and trust of digital consumers with the online platform positively affect the intention to buy online. The findings can also be discussed in relation to the Honeycomb model and the Consumer Behaviour theory. The Honeycomb Model brings a sense of importance to interaction, relationships, sharing, and communication in the creation of engagement and trust. Consumer Behaviour Theory also attributes emotional and psychological elements to be an important part of the buying decision process.

Generation Z consumers are very active users of digital media, and they are always inundated with a lot of information on the Internet, so they value authenticity, interaction, and transparency. Therefore, creating a profitable and engaging social media account can help you make your customers purchase from your fashion brand. Thus, you can easily persuade your customers to make a purchase from your fashion brand if you are able to create a decent and reliable social media account that is interesting.

5.6 Discussion of Hypotheses

The findings validated Hypothesis 1, which postulates that social media marketing has a positive influence on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers. The correlation analysis and regression

analysis results revealed that there was a strong positive correlation between social media marketing and purchase intent.

The findings also confirmed the second hypothesis, which suggested that there is a mediation effect between social media marketing and purchase intention through brand engagement and consumer trust. The mediation analysis results validated the partial mediation relationships, which suggested that engagement and trust intensify the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchasing behavior. Overall, both hypotheses were statistically significant, supporting the idea that social media marketing, engagement, and trust are key factors that affect the purchasing behaviour of Generation Z in the UK's fashion industry.

This study contributes to this gap in the literature by specifically investigating the effects of social media marketing on purchase intention, with the mediation of brand engagement and consumer trust among generation Z consumers in the UK fashion industry. The direct relationship between social media marketing and consumers' behaviour was generally the focus of previous studies, and only a few studies explored the indirect relationships between social media marketing and consumer behaviour in the UK fashion context. As a result of this study, the social media marketing and purchase intention, social media marketing and brand engagement, as well as social media marketing and consumer trust relationships were shown to be strong positive regression relationships ($\beta = 0.865$; $\beta = 0.900$; and $\beta = 0.862$, respectively). The mediation analysis also validated that the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention is partially mediated by trust and engagement. Thus, it is established that emotional involvement and consumer trust are salient psychological factors that can explain the purchase behaviour of Generation Z in digital fashion context, on an empirical basis.

5.7 Theoretical Implications

The study makes a significant contribution to the Social Media Functionality Honeycomb Model, as it gives empirical data on the effect of social media functionalities on consumer behaviour in the UK fashion industry. The results specifically support the significance of the 'sharing', 'identity,' and 'conversations' elements of the model in relation to Gen Z. The study further contributes to the work of social media marketing literature as it illustrates that social media marketing can not

only directly influence the purchase intention, but it also has an indirect effect on purchasing behaviour via the involvement of brand and trust level. This builds on past research and includes engagement and trust in one package.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the research on Generation Z consumer behaviour in the literature by providing evidence that Generation Z consumers do rely heavily on the authenticity of fashion brands, social proof, the credibility of the influencers, and interactive communication. Consequently, the results add to the knowledge of the influence of digital communication on today's consumer behaviour in very visual and social fields like Fashion

5.8 Practical Implications

The results deliver key suggestions for UK fashion brands to enhance their social media marketing strategies. The first thing that fashion brands should do is focus on authentic and real influencers and not only on promotional campaigns. Consumers want to interact with influencers who demonstrate authenticity, relatability, and transparency. Secondly, brands need to be ready to take advantage of interactive elements such as polls, live videos, stories, and brief video snippets, which have been proven to increase interactions with Gen Z. Instagram and TikTok are, therefore, still crucial elements to include in fashion marketing strategies.

Thirdly, user-generated content should be encouraged by fashion brands as peer reviews, styling videos, and consumer experiences all have a strong effect on purchasing decisions. Hashtags, competitions, and online communities are ways to promote content sharing among brands. Fourth, transparency should be seen as a priority in digital communication. Consumers should ask for transparency in their products' information from fashion brands, give feedback, and openly communicate with brands to establish trust between them. Lastly, brands need to improve engagement strategies by establishing online communities and keeping consumers engaged through ongoing interaction. Emotional attachment and brand relationships greatly increase purchase intention and long-term consumer loyalty for Gen Z consumers.

5.9 Contribution to Literature Gap

The present study fills the gap in the literature by specifically examining how social media marketing, consumer trust, brand engagement and purchase intention are related among the Gen-Z consumers in the UK fashion industry. Existing research mainly focused on either consumer behavior or consumer trust or the engagement towards brands separately. This study, however,

incorporated both mediation factors in the same model and primary quantitative data was collected from consumers (Generation Z UK).

Further to this, the study used the Social Media Functionality Honeycomb Model in the UK fashion industry, thus making a contribution to the existing digital marketing literature in both an empirical and theoretical sense. The results also provide insights into the role of influencer marketing, user generated content and interactive social media communication in the purchasing behaviour of Generation Z in the UK fashion industry.

5.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the significant findings of the study about social media marketing's impact on the purchase intention of Generation Z in the UK fashion industry have been critically discussed. The discussion was conducted with the research objectives, hypotheses, literature, and theoretical framework used in the research. The findings supported the hypothesis, as it was found that social media marketing has a significant influence on consumer purchase intention and engagement of only Generation Z consumers, which includes consumer trust. Influencer marketing, user-generated content, interactive communication, and visual platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, were the biggest drivers when it came to influencing purchasing behaviour.

The chapter also validated that the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention is partially mediated by brand engagement and consumer trust. Hence, in this study, the importance of emotional attachment, authenticity, and trust is highlighted in the digital marketing environment.

5.11 Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations to this study. Firstly, the study only examined Generation Z consumers of the UK fashion industry, which could restrict the applicability of the results to other industries or demographics. Secondly, the study employed a quantitative research design and self-reported survey responses that could include the possibility of subjective opinions and response bias. Thirdly, the sample size was relatively small. The results may be more reliable and generalisable with a larger sample size. Lastly, the study is concerned with purchase intention and not purchase behaviour, so the intention may not imply actual purchase.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the impact of social media marketing on the purchase intention of the Generation Z customers in the British fashion industry. The findings of literature review and survey analysis showed that social media marketing is useful in learning positive influence on the purchase intent of consumers was consistent with the results. The findings of the survey also supported the relationship between these four and the consumer behaviour described in previous studies, where the results indicate that the influencers, UGC, interactive communication and social visual media have significant influence on the consumer of the Gen Z segment in the UK fashion industry. Instagram and TikTok are two of the most influence platforms that provide highly visual and interactive platforms, and as such they were confirmed as one of the platforms that have an impact in fashion discovery, comparison and peer recommendation.

The first objective of the study was to gain insight into how UK fashion brands are using social media marketing. Literature search and surveys identified the use of various forms of influencer marketing and interactive communication, personalised content and short-form videos across UK fashion brands to engage with Generation Z consumers. The results showed that social media plays an important role in the UK fashion industry as a communication and promotion medium.

The second objective was to explore the role of social media marketing in generating customers' engagement with brands for Generation Z. Based on the literature and the findings of the survey, social media marketing had positive impacts on brand engagement, which was expressed through the likes, comments, sharing, online discussion and emotional interaction. The study found that interactive communication and attention grabbing content can have a positive effect on consumers' emotional bond and engagement towards fashion brands.

The third objective of this study is to find out how consumers' trust is affected by social media marketing. The findings validated that social media marketing has a positive effect on consumer trust via influencer authenticity, transparent communication, credible reviews and user-generated content. The literature review as well as the empirical results showed that trust can alleviate consumers' uncertainty and boost their confidence in fashion brands when they shop online.

The final objective was whether trust and brand engagement is an intervening variable between social media marketing and purchase intention. The mediation analysis confirmed the partial mediation model for consumer trust between SMM and purchase intention and that for brand engagement between SMM and purchase intention. Social Media Marketing has both direct and indirect effects on the purchase intention, the latter through emotional involvement and trust building. The overall findings of the study revealed that social media marketing is significantly affecting online buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers in UK fashion industry. The findings showed that authenticity, engagement, transparency, and interactive communication were important aspects to increase consumer trust, engagement, and buy intention.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

The study adds to the Social Media Functionality Honeycomb Model by empirically establishing the relationships between social media transactions, sharing, identity and communication patterns and purchasing behaviour of Generation Z. The research also adds to the social media marketing literature by providing evidence that the interaction between brand engagement and consumer trust has a positive influence on the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. Moreover, the study is relevant to the study of consumer behaviour in the Generation Z because it draws attention to the significance of the credibility of the influencers, the role of UGC, and online interactions in digital purchasing process.

6.3 Practical Recommendations

The findings provide several recommendations for UK fashion brands.

1. Brands should prioritise authentic influencer marketing, as Generation Z consumers are more likely to trust influencers who are relatable, credible, and transparent in their communication.
2. Secondly, fashion brands should increase the interactivity of their social media content by using reels, short-form videos, live sessions, and polls to improve consumer engagement and online interaction.

3. Thirdly, fashion brands should encourage user-generated content such as customer reviews, hashtags, styling posts, and shared consumer experiences, as peer-generated content has a strong influence on purchase decisions.
4. Fourthly, fashion companies should improve transparency in digital communication by providing honest product information and actively responding to consumer feedback in order to strengthen consumer trust.
5. Lastly, UK fashion brands should focus more on Instagram and TikTok within their social media marketing strategies because these platforms have the strongest influence on Generation Z consumers in the fashion industry.

6.4 Future Research

A comparison of the purchasing behaviour of Generation Z consumers with other generations, like Millennials and Generation Alpha, could be additionally examined in future research to find out the differences in their digital purchasing behaviour. Comparative research can also be done between two countries or two industries to compare their differences in terms of the effectiveness of social media marketing. Other factors could be studied in the future for consumers buying online to gain a wider understanding of their online purchasing behaviour, including brand loyalty, social influence, perceived value, or fear of missing out (FOMO). Finally, qualitative or mixed-method research techniques can help to gain deeper insight into consumer emotions, motivations, and experiences regarding social media marketing and online fashion purchase behaviour.

7.0 References

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8.0 Appendix

Responses of first 10 responded

Respondent	Age Group	Gender	Social Media Usage	Most Used Platform	Online Fashion Purchase Frequency
1	25–27	Male	3–5 hours	Instagram	Often
2	25–27	Female	More than 5 hours	Facebook	Very often
3	22–24	Female	3–5 hours	Instagram	Sometimes
4	25–27	Male	3–5 hours	Facebook	Often
5	25–27	Male	More than 5 hours	Facebook	Very often
6	25–27	Male	Less than 1 hour/day	Facebook	Rarely
7	25–27	Male	1–3 hours	Facebook	Rarely
8	25–27	Male	1–3 hours	Facebook	Rarely
9	22–24	Male	1–3 hours	Facebook	Sometimes
10	25–27	Male	1–3 hours	Facebook	Rarely