



A Study on Gen Z Consumer Preferences and the Challenges of Engagement in Meme Marketing

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Abstract

Meme marketing has rapidly emerged as a powerful digital marketing strategy, particularly resonating with Generation Z consumers through humor, relatability, and viral potential. This study investigates Gen Z's preferences regarding meme marketing content and examines the challenges they encounter in engaging with such content. Data collected from 254 respondents via a structured online questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive and rank analysis. Findings reveal that cultural relevance, authenticity, and humor significantly drive engagement, while content overuse and perceived inauthenticity pose major challenges. The study provides insights to help marketers refine meme strategies for enhanced connection and participation among Gen Z.

Keywords

Meme Marketing, Gen Z Consumers Preferences, Consumer Challenges, Digital Engagement.

Introduction

Meme marketing has rapidly emerged as a powerful tool in digital advertising, leveraging humor and relatability to capture audience attention. As digital natives, Gen Z consumers are particularly influenced by internet culture, making meme marketing a promising strategy to engage this demographic. However, understanding their specific content preferences and the challenges they encounter in interacting with meme marketing is critical for brands aiming to communicate effectively. This study explores the preferences of Gen Z consumers regarding meme-based content and examines the barriers

they face in engaging with such marketing efforts, providing valuable insights to optimize marketing strategies targeted at this influential generation.

Objectives

1. To determine Gen Z consumers' preferences regarding meme marketing content.
2. To examine the challenges faced by Gen Z consumers in engaging with meme marketing.

Scope of the study

The study focuses on Gen Z consumers, primarily those aged 13 to 28, who are highly active on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter), where meme marketing is prevalent. It examines Gen Z's preferences for meme marketing content, including aspects like humour, relatability, cultural relevance, and authenticity. The research explores the challenges Gen Z faces when engaging with meme marketing, such as cultural sensitivity issues, potential misinterpretations, and content saturation.

Research methodology

Area of Study

The study targets Gen Z users from urban and semi-urban areas in India who frequently use social media to consume meme content.

Sample Size

A total of 254 respondents participated in the study.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms on social media platforms and academic groups.

Data Analysis Tools

- Descriptive Analysis
- Rank Analysis

Limitations

- The study focuses exclusively on the Gen Z demographic, limiting the generalizability of findings to other age groups or generations.

- Convenience sampling and self-reported online surveys may introduce response bias and limit the representativeness of the data.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ali et al. (2024)¹ conducted a study titled “Consumer Perception of Brand Memes.” The primary objective of the research is to assess how consumers perceive brands that use memes in their communication strategies. The research methodology used is descriptive, based on secondary data from consumer behavior studies and marketing analyses. The study emphasizes that memes can shape brand image in both positive and negative ways depending on execution. Hence, the study concludes that successful brand memes require careful planning to ensure alignment with brand identity and audience expectations.

Sharma et al. (2024)² conducted a study titled “Viral Marketing through Memes: Opportunities and Challenges.” The primary objective of the research is to analyze how memes contribute to viral marketing while identifying potential obstacles in their application. The research methodology employed is descriptive, using secondary data from marketing studies, online trend reports, and social media analytics. The study emphasizes that memes can achieve rapid message dissemination but require careful cultural sensitivity. Hence, the study concludes that memes are a powerful but nuanced tool for achieving viral reach in marketing campaigns.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Descriptive Statistics

The term descriptive analysis is a valuable technique for summarizing and characterizing the salient characteristics of a set of data. The mean, median, and mode, which represent the highest average value in the data set, are included in the calculation of central tendency.

Table:1 OBSTACLES FACED BY THE DIGITAL CONSUMERS

Descriptive Statistics					
Obstacles faced by the digital consumers	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Meme marketing is perceived as overused by some brands.	254	1	5	1.88	1.012

Branded meme content can occasionally cause confusion about the intended message or product.	254	1	5	2.22	.791
Attempts to appear relatable through memes can feel forced or inauthentic.	254	1	5	2.41	.989
Excessive use of meme-based content may impact the perceived professionalism or trustworthiness of a brand.	254	1	5	2.59	1.110
Lack of context in branded memes can reduce audience engagement or interest.	254	1	5	2.66	1.370
Valid N	254				

(Source:Calculated data)

The Table shows the descriptive statistics on obstacles faced by digital consumers regarding meme marketing. The lowest mean score of 1.88 for “Meme marketing is perceived as overused by some brands” indicates strong agreement on this obstacle. Other concerns like confusion caused by branded meme content (mean 2.22), forced relatability attempts (2.41), and the impact on brand professionalism (2.59) show moderate agreement. The highest mean score of 2.66 for “Lack of context in branded memes can reduce engagement” suggests it is a comparatively less acknowledged challenge. Hence, the results show that confusing messages and perceived inauthenticity are the biggest barriers for effective meme marketing among Gen Z, while concerns like overuse and lack of professionalism, though relevant, are seen as comparatively less critical.

Ranking Analysis

Friedman Ranking Test is non- parametric statistical test is used to determine if there are significant difference among group based on ordinal data. It is based statistic is based on the difference between the observed average ranks and the expected average ranks assuming that there is no difference between the groups.

Table:2 KEY FACTORS OF MEME MARKETING INFLUENCING GEN-Z CONSUMERS

Key factors of meme marketing influencing gen-z consumers	Mean Rank	Rank
Meme marketing is perceived as an effective strategy for maintaining brand relevance among Gen Z audiences.	3.22	Rank 2
Branded meme content is more appealing when it aligns with the audience's cultural and community interests.	3.98	Rank 1
Consistent and well-designed meme content may build trust in a brand's personality.	2.57	Rank 4
Relatable memes create a feeling of emotional connection between the brand and viewer	2.56	Rank 5
Repetitive or forced memes can lead to annoyance or disinterest in the brand.	2.67	Rank 3

Test Statistics^a	
N	254
Chi-Square	183.641
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. Friedman Test	

The above table presents the Friedman ranking test for the factors influencing the appeal of meme marketing among Gen Z consumers. The results show that the highest rank is given to “Branded meme content aligning with cultural and community interests” with a mean value of 3.98, whereas “Relatable memes creating emotional connection” with a mean of 2.56 received the lowest rank. Thus, the result indicates that Gen Z consumers prioritize cultural resonance and brand relevance the most, while factors such as trust and emotional bonding, though relevant, are considered relatively less important.

FINDINGS

Descriptive Statistics

- The analysis reveals that Generation Z consumers perceive meme marketing to be frequently overused by certain brands, which may contribute to consumer fatigue and diminished engagement. Additional challenges identified include confusion caused by ambiguous branded meme content and attempts to appear relatable that are perceived as forced or inauthentic. While concerns regarding brand professionalism and contextual clarity in memes exist, these are considered less significant obstacles by the respondents.
- Overall, the data suggest that the most salient barriers to effective meme marketing among Generation Z pertain to message clarity and authenticity, which are critical for fostering meaningful consumer engagement.

Ranking Analysis

- The rankings derived from the Friedman test indicate that cultural and community alignment of meme content holds the greatest influence on Generation Z's appeal towards meme marketing. This finding underscores the importance of authenticity and cultural resonance in engaging this demographic.
- Furthermore, maintaining brand relevance through meme marketing is highly valued, whereas repetitive or contrived meme usage is noted to provoke consumer annoyance. Emotional connection and brand trust, although relevant factors, are comparatively lower in their influence on engagement.

SUGGESTIONS

- From this study, brands should prioritize developing meme content that deeply resonates with Gen Z's cultural values, community interests, and identity, as these elements strongly drive engagement and brand connection.
- From this study, it is recommended that marketers use memes strategically to maintain brand relevance by staying culturally current and integrating trending memes, ensuring brands remain modern, relatable, and top-of-mind for Gen Z.
- From this study, balancing creativity with authenticity in meme marketing is essential, with emphasis on original and genuine content rather than repetitive or forced memes, as authentic humor and relatable storytelling increase trust and emotional connection while preventing disengagement.

CONCLUSION

Memes have transcended their role as simple entertainment to become a crucial marketing instrument that effectively resonates with Generation Z. By integrating humor, cultural relevance, and relatability, memes enhance the appeal, memorability, and shareability of brand messages, fostering authentic connections often unattainable through traditional advertising approaches. This communication mode successfully captures the attention of digitally native youth, improves brand recall, and elevates engagement levels. Despite challenges such as sustaining creativity and authenticity, meme marketing remains a cost-efficient and impactful strategy for brands seeking to engage and maintain relevance with the contemporary Gen Z audience.

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