

Why We Scroll, Why We Buy: Applying S-O-R and Uses-and-Gratifications Theory to Examine Social Media–Induced Purchase Decisions of Gen Z

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Abstract:

Increasing social media use by Generation Z has rendered this channel as the primary source of discovering new products. Thus, this study examine the role social media platforms play in influencing the actual purchase behaviour of GenZ consumers, by integrating the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework with the Uses and Gratification Theory. Based on the quantitative approach, the study analyses the behaviour based on the primary data collected using five point Likert scale. Out of the 412 samples collected throughout India, after cleaning and processing, final study was done on 387 samples. Structural Equation Modelling was used to analyse the impact of informativeness, entertainment, interactivity, and credibility on customer gratification, studied under hedonic, informational, and social gratification, and finally on the actual purchase behaviour as the outcome. All the social media variables were found to have a significant impact on the customer gratification experiences, and this gratification in turn collectively had a positive impact on the actual purchase behaviour. Informational gratification was identified as the major predictor. Further, the results also established the mediating role of gratification dimensions, highlighting the role of cognitive, social and affective pathways on digital persuasion. The study shifts the focus from purchase intention to actual purchase decision, offering a mechanism based explanation for social media engagements being translated into consumption outcomes.

Keywords: Gen Z, social media marketing, S-O-R model, Uses-and-Gratifications, purchase behavior, SEM

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Introduction

With the rapid expansion of social media platforms among the consumers, the contemporary consumption architecture has seen a fundamental transformation. Rather than being merely limited to a communication infrastructure, platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat have evolved into an algorithmically curated commercial ecosystem, with an increasing convergence of entertainment, information exchange, interaction, and transactional intent. Within this environment, the consumption decisions are embedded into everyday digital practices, allowing users to encounter products, evaluate alternatives, influencer interaction, and finally complete the purchase within a single integrated ecosystem. Consequently, the emergence of social commerce, live-stream marketing, influencer driven communication, and short form video platforms has blurred the boundaries between marketplace behaviour and media consumption (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kim & Ko, 2012). This has resulted in social media becoming a dominant mechanism using which consumers discover products, develop preferences, and engage in purchasing behaviour.

Amongst the contemporary consumers, Generation Z or popularly, Gen Z is the most influential and theoretically significant demography within the social media environment. Advantaged by being born in an era that is increasingly characterized by algorithmic personalisation, easy mobile connectivity, and digital culture participation, these Gen Z consumers refuse to be a passive recipients of marketing communication, instead choosing to be an active co-creators of digital consumption experience. They differ from the previous generations in that Gen Z consumers operate within a highly interactive and connected ecosystem where peer validation, social belongingness, authenticity, and experiential engagement shape marketplace evaluations more than the traditional

promotional cues (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Their consumption behaviour is intertwined with social interactions, digital identity formations, and ultimately real time information processing. Therefore, Gen Z purchasing decision are heavily influenced by content driven social media experience rather than conventional advertising mechanisms.

This ever increasing commercial presence and relevance of Gen Z has seen a sharp incline in the academic interest in understanding the influence social media has on consumer behaviour. Existing research states that social media content characteristics like informativeness, credibility, entertainment, and interactivity have a significant influence on the consumer engagement, electronic word of mouth, brand attitude, and on purchase intention (Godey et al., 2016; Yadav & Rahman, 2017). Studies have found informative content to reduce uncertainty supporting decision making, while entertaining content to enhance emotional engagement and attention retention. On the other hand, credibility reinforces trust and authenticity, whereas interactivity promotes participation and relational engagement. Together these content characteristics impacts users' perceptions and response to digital marketing communication.

Despite substantial researches in this area, existing literature fails to completely explain how social media engagement converts into actual marketplace behaviour. Earlier researches focus predominantly on brand interaction, engagement metrics, or purchase intention, providing insufficient insights into how the psychological mechanisms convert digital exposure into actual consumption outcomes. This is an important limitation since mere purchase intention does not always lead to actual purchasing behaviour, especially in digitally saturated environments, often characterised by fragmented attention, impulsive exposure, and continuous content stimulation. This implies the presence of an important conceptual gap in the process by which social media stimuli are internalized and translated into purchasing actions.

For studying and understanding this gap, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework is a useful theoretical foundation. Originating from the discipline of environmental psychology, the SOR framework proposes that external environmental stimuli influences the internal organismic states, which in turn generates behavioural responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). When applied to the digital marketing contexts, social media content characteristics may be conceptualised as stimuli shaping consumers' internal psychological state, ultimately influencing the purchasing behaviour. This framework has been widely applied and accepted in online consumer behaviour research, including studies on online atmospherics, social commerce, and digital engagement (Eroglu et al., 2001; Yang et al., 2024). However, despite its wide popularity, existing SOR framework often conceptualize the organism as generalised affective reactions, emotional responses, or attitudes, and thus, limits the theoretical exactness and explanatory accuracy.

In order to address this limitation, there needs to be a more mechanism centered understanding of the organismic process underlying digital persuasion. Complementing the SOR theory with the Uses-and-Gratifications Theory (UGT) addresses this limitation. UGT proposes that individuals actively engages with media to satisfy specific psychological and social needs, including hedonic, informational, and social motivations (Katz et al., 1973). Rejecting the passive audience models, UGT hypothesizes media users as goal oriented individuals who selectively consume content based on the anticipated gratification outcomes. Multiple form of gratifications exists within the social media environments, including information acquisition, entertainment, social interaction, self-expression, and identity reinforcement (Whiting & Williams, 2013). These gratifications tend to shape user engagement patterns and influence behavioural responses toward digital content.

Although, together SOR and UGT have contributed heavily to the digital consumer behaviour literature independently, only limited studies have incorporated both these perspectives into a single explanatory framework capable of explaining actual purchasing behaviour. Additionally, prior studies have rarely conceptualized gratification fulfilment as the organism linking social media stimuli to consumption outcomes. Furthermore, existing research often treats gratification as media usage outcomes rather than as an explanatory psychological process driving marketplace behaviour. As a consequence, the motivational pathways through which social media content characteristics translates into purchasing actions remains underexplored.

This study aims to address the identified gap by combining the SOR framework with UGT to develop a mechanism based explanation of Gen Z customers' social media induced purchasing behaviour. The study specifically focuses on conceptualizes hedonic gratification, informational gratification, and social gratification as direct organismic mechanisms through which social media stimuli are internalized and transformed into actual purchase behaviour. This reconceptualization will replace generalized affective state with theoretically motivational pathways, thereby improving the SOR framework's explanatory accuracy. This study places gratification fulfilment as the focal psychological mechanism driving the consumption behaviour, rather than viewing gratification as a mere media usage consequence.

Further, the study examines the four major social media content characteristics, namely informativeness, credibility, interactivity, and entertainment, as a digital stimulus. These characteristics have been studied in earlier researches independently; however, the social media is an inherently multidimensional environment, where the customers process the informational, relational, emotional, and experiential cues simultaneously. By investigating these stimuli collectively, the study aims to develop a more holistic understanding of how differentiated gratification pathways are activated using social media content. By developing this multi-path perspective, this study challenges the monolithic assumptions of digital persuasion, suggesting that social media effectiveness is dependent on multiple motivational logics rather than a singular evaluative process.

The focus on actual purchase behaviour, rather than purchase intention, further strengthens the theoretical contribution of the study. Although purchase intention has been widely examined in the digital marketing research, it is worth noting that intention does not always translate into consumption. This intention-behaviour discord is especially prominent in social media environments which is characterised by rapid content exposure, continually shifting attention, and impulsive interaction. The present study offers a behaviourally grounded understanding of social media effectiveness by examining the actual purchase behaviour, thereby extending the existing digital marketing literature beyond intentional or attitudinal outcomes.

The study is situated within the Indian subcontinent, making the findings of gratification driven behaviour relevant for developing economies. India is uniquely positioned and is one of the fastest growing social media and digital commerce marketplaces globally. It is often characterised by the expanding smartphone penetration, rapid adoption of social commerce platforms, and increasing internet accessibility. With a growing purchasing power of digitally literate consumers along with the well-developed platform driven commerce ecosystem has significantly altered the consumption practices within the emerging markets. These conditions places India in an appropriate context for this study.

The proposed relationships are also restricted by the specific contextual conditions. First, the study focuses on the high-interactivity social media environments where the user generated content, participatory communication, and algorithmic personalisation are salient features. Second, the model focuses specifically on the Gen Z consumers who display high digital nativity and social media dependency, which may amplify gratification-driven responses. Third, the findings are interpreted within the emerging market context, which are characterized by rapid digital transformation and evolving social commerce practices. This helps in understanding the scope and generalizability of the proposed framework.

Based on this, the study aims to answer the following research question: How does the social media characteristics influence actual purchase behaviour among Gen Z consumers through gratification-based psychological mechanisms? Addressing this, the study conceptualises and empirically tests an integrated framework combining both SOR and UGT.

The study is relevant in today's diaspora due to its contributions towards both theory and practice. It not only advances the SOR framework by reconceptualising the organism component as structured gratification fulfilment, but also extends the Uses and Gratifications Theory beyond media usage by proving its relevance in predicting actual market behaviour. The study also demonstrates that distinct content characteristics initiates differentiated motivational pathways, adding to the digital persuasion literature. This helps marketers in designing gratification-oriented social media strategies based on the strategic insights of this study, capable of converting digital engagement into actual purchases among the Gen Z customers.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Social Media Marketing and Gen Z Consumers

Firms have continuously and increasingly started using social media platforms as one of the major promotional channels for influencing consumer perception and behaviour. Engaging with brands today means interactions on the brand posts and social accounts as a part of daily digital presence. These engagements result in generating brand value and customer perception by delivering not only product specific information, but also creating value beyond information disbursement (Levesque & Pons, 2023; Godey et al., 2016). The increasing digital fluency among the GenZ consumers, along with demand for authenticity in brand content is now becoming evident in the market space. It is important for these users to evaluate social media content according to its perceived usefulness, enjoyment and social relevance rather than promotional intent. As per Djafarova & Bowes (2021), while making a purchase decision they rely on brand interaction, influence, and peer recommendation. Although GenZ is highly engaged on social media networking sites but it does not convert into actual purchase. Due to this inconsistency, we need to examine psychological factors involved in actual purchase.

Theoretical Foundation: S-O-R and Uses-and-Gratifications Theory

In Fig. 1 Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework explains consumer behavior as a process in which environmental stimuli influence internal psychological states, leading to behavioural responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In digital contexts, social media content characteristics act as stimuli that shape users' cognitive and affective reactions, ultimately influencing purchase behavior (Behera et al., 2023). However, prior S-O-R-based studies often conceptualize the organismic state broadly, limiting their ability to explain why consumers respond to specific stimuli.

In addition to S-O-R framework, UGT emphasizes on consumers engage with social media for specific psychological and social purpose (Almakaty, 2025). Whiting & Williams (2013) stated three types of gratifications: hedonic gratification, reflected enjoyment and pleasure; informational gratification, derived from acquiring knowledge; social gratification which means interaction, belongingness and social approval.

Social Media and Gratification

Informativeness

Informativeness refers to the degree to which social media content provides accurate, relevant, and useful information. Informative content reduces uncertainty and enhances consumers' ability to evaluate products, thereby fulfilling informational needs (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Additionally, informative content can enhance enjoyment and encourage sharing, contributing to hedonic and social gratifications. Accordingly, informativeness is expected to positively influence multiple gratification dimensions.

H1a: Informativeness positively influences hedonic gratification.

H1b: Informativeness positively influences informational gratification.

H1c: Informativeness positively influences social gratification.

Entertainment

Entertainment captures the extent to which social media content is enjoyable, emotionally appealing, and engaging. Prior research suggests that entertaining content enhances positive affect, immersion, and engagement, thereby strengthening hedonic gratification (Godey et al., 2016). Moreover, entertaining formats may facilitate information processing and stimulate social interaction, contributing to informational and social gratifications.

H2a: Entertainment positively influences hedonic gratification.

H2b: Entertainment positively influences informational gratification.

H2c: Entertainment positively influences social gratification.

Credibility

In the context of social media credibility refers to the perceived trustworthiness and authenticity of the content. The growing use of sponsorship and influencers in social media have made credibility as one of the most important factor to judge the content effectiveness (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Credible social media content enhances informational gratification because of increased perceived reliability; it also fosters hedonic and social gratifications through trust and reduced scepticism.

H3a: Credibility positively influences hedonic gratification.

H3b: Credibility positively influences informational gratification.

H3c: Credibility positively influences social gratification.

Interactivity

Interactivity here means user engagement with the content reflected through likes, comments, sharing, and two-way communication. Interactive features increase involvement, emotional engagement, and social connection, making them strong antecedents of gratification in social media environments (Samarah et al., 2022).

H4a: Interactivity positively influences hedonic gratification.

H4b: Interactivity positively influences informational gratification.

H4c: Interactivity positively influences social gratification.

Gratification and Actual Purchase Behavior

Within the S-O-R framework, gratification means the internal psychological state which sways the buyer behavior. Hedonic gratification rises the chances of purchase by influencing impulse tendencies and emotions (Godey et al., 2016). On the other hand, informational gratification lowers the perceived risk by aiding rational decision making, and finally, social gratification provides social validation and peer approval, strengthening the purchase behaviour [Djafarova & Bowes, 2021]; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

H5: Hedonic gratification positively influences actual purchase behavior.

H6: Informational gratification positively influences actual purchase behavior.

H7: Social gratification positively influences actual purchase behavior.

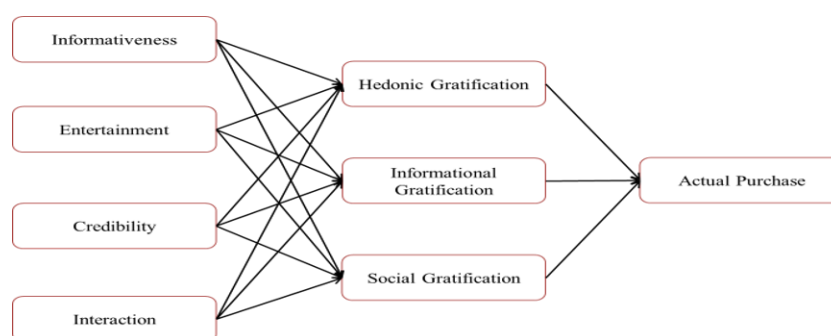


Figure 1: S-O-R and UGT based SEM Framework for Social Media Purchase Decision

Research Methodology

In this study, we examined the impact of social media factors on purchase decision among GenZ, using quantitative, cross sectional research design. A structured online questionnaire was used to collect information from 387 social media users across India, born between 1997-2012, who had prior experience with product related content on social media. A purposive non-probability sampling technique was adopted to ensure the relevance of respondents, and participation was voluntary and anonymous. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1(Strongly disagree) to 5(Strongly agree), was used to measure all constructs adapted from various studies with minor

modifications. A detailed description of the measurement items and their sources is provided in Table 1. To assess the validity and reliability of the measurement model, first we performed Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Subsequently, the model was tested to examine the relationship and mediating role of gratification between social media and purchase decision.

Table 1: Measurement Scale

Construct	Measurement Items	Source
Informativeness	INF1: Social media content provides useful information about products.	Lou & Yuan (2019); Cheung et al. (2020)
	INF2: The information shared on social media helps me compare products.	
	INF3: Social media content reduces my uncertainty about products.	
Entertainment	ENT1: I find brand-related content on social media entertaining	Godey et al. (2016); De Vries et al. (2012)
	ENT2: Social media content is enjoyable to watch or read.	
	ENT3: Brand posts on social media are fun and interesting.	
Credibility	CRE1: I find social media product information trustworthy.	Djafarova & Bowes (2021); Lou & Yuan (2019)
	CRE2: Influencers/brands on social media are reliable sources of information.	
	CRE3: Social media content appears authentic rather than misleading.	
Interactivity	INT1: Social media allows me to interact with brands easily.	Hollebeek et al. (2014); Cheung et al. (2020)
	INT2: I can share my opinions through comments and likes.	
	INT3: Social media enables two-way communication with brands.	
Hedonic Gratification	HG1: Using social media for shopping is enjoyable.	Whiting & Williams (2013); Godey et al. (2016)
	HG2: I feel pleasure when browsing product content on social media.	
	HG3: Social media shopping experiences are exciting.	
Informational Gratification	IG1: Social media helps me learn about new products.	Whiting & Williams (2013); Lou & Yuan (2019)
	IG2: I get useful shopping-related information from social media.	

	IG3: Social media helps me make better purchase decisions.	
Social Gratification	SG1: Social media makes me feel connected with others while shopping.	Whiting & Williams (2013); Priporas et al. (2020)
	SG2: I enjoy interacting with others about products on social media.	
	SG3: Social media shopping helps me feel socially accepted.	
Actual Purchase Behavior	AP1: I have purchased products after seeing them on social media.	Djafarova & Bowes (2021); Godey et al. (2016)
	AP2: Social media content has directly influenced my buying decisions.	
	AP3: I frequently buy products promoted on social media.	

Data Analysis and Results

SEM was considered appropriate given the study's objective of simultaneously examining multiple latent relationships and indirect mechanisms. As shown in Table 2, all the value of Cronbach's α and composite reliability are above threshold value 0.7, ranging from 0.85 to 0.91, indicating strong internal consistency and AVEs (Average Variance Extracted) were higher than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017). These results indicate that the measurement model demonstrated adequate psychometric properties and was suitable for further analysis. Table 3 represent the Descriptive statistics of the study. The mean values of variables range between 3.69 to 3.92, indicating respondents had a moderate to high agreement for gratification experiences and social media content. The highest mean was for the information gratification variable, suggesting social media use primarily for seeking information and decision validation. With the standard deviation ranging between 0.66 to 0.75, the responses reflected consistency across the samples (N=879).

In order to check the distinctiveness of the variables under study, discriminant validity was assessed using Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio. Table 4 presents the Fornell-Larcker results and the square root of the Average Variance Extracted, where the AVE for each construct is found to be greater than its inter-construct correlations. This confirms that each of the constructs are empirically distinct. The HTMT values, presented in Table 5 below, are well below the threshold of 0.9, supporting the absence of multicollinearity issues.

Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Informativeness	0.86	0.89	0.62
Entertainment	0.88	0.91	0.67
Credibility	0.85	0.88	0.6
Interactivity	0.87	0.9	0.65
Hedonic Gratification	0.88	0.91	0.68
Informational Gratification	0.86	0.89	0.63
Social Gratification	0.85	0.88	0.6

Actual Purchase Behavior	0.88	0.91	0.67
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Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Informativeness	3.78	0.72
Entertainment	3.85	0.69
Credibility	3.74	0.71
Interactivity	3.81	0.68
Hedonic Gratification	3.88	0.7
Informational Gratification	3.92	0.66
Social Gratification	3.76	0.73
Actual Purchase	3.69	0.75

Table 4: Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	INF	ENT	CRE	INT	HG	IG	SG	AP
INF	0.79							
ENT	0.52	0.82						
CRE	0.48	0.55	0.77					
INT	0.5	0.58	0.53	0.81				
HG	0.46	0.61	0.49	0.57	0.82			
IG	0.59	0.54	0.63	0.56	0.58	0.79		
SG	0.44	0.57	0.52	0.64	0.55	0.6	0.77	
AP	0.49	0.53	0.57	0.51	0.62	0.66	0.58	0.82

Table 5: Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio

Construct	INF	ENT	CRE	INT	HG	IG	SG	AP
INF								
ENT	0.71							
CRE	0.68	0.73						
INT	0.7	0.75	0.72					
HG	0.66	0.81	0.69	0.76				
IG	0.79	0.74	0.83	0.77	0.78			
SG	0.65	0.76	0.71	0.84	0.73	0.8		

AP	0.72	0.75	0.78	0.73	0.82	0.85	0.77	
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To assess the genuine fit of the hypothesized model with the observed data, multiple goodness-of-fit indices were used. The results, as shown in Table 6 below, indicates a good model fit, with χ^2/df below the threshold of 3, CFI at 0.94, and TLI at 0.93. RMSEA value equalled 0.056, while SRMR was equal to 0.041. These values confirm the adequacy of the proposed model in representing the observed data and, thus, is suitable for further analysis.

Table 6: Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
χ^2/df	2.31	< 3.00
CFI	0.94	> 0.90
TLI	0.93	> 0.90
RMSEA	0.056	< 0.08
SRMR	0.041	< 0.08

The path analysis results, presented in Table 7, indicate that all hypothesized relationships were statistically significant. Informativeness (H1a-H1c) positively influenced hedonic ($\beta=0.28$, $p<0.001$), information ($\beta=0.34$, $p<0.001$), and social gratification ($\beta=0.22$, $p<0.001$). Entertainment showed the strongest effect on hedonic gratification ($\beta=0.41$, $p<0.001$), while credibility shows strong path coefficient with informational gratification ($\beta=0.33$, $p<0.001$) and interactivity had the strongest impact on social gratification ($\beta=0.42$, $p<0.001$), underlying the role of trust and participation. All three gratifications significantly impact the purchase decision, with informational gratification showing strongest impact ($\beta=0.36$), followed by hedonic ($\beta=0.29$) and social gratification ($\beta=0.25$). Overall findings support the integration of S-O-R and UGT in GenZ purchasing behaviour.

Table 7: Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	p-value	Result
H1a	Informativeness → Hedonic Gratification	0.28	<0.001	Accepted
H1b	Informativeness → Informational Gratification	0.34	<0.001	Accepted
H1c	Informativeness → Social Gratification	0.22	<0.001	Accepted
H2a	Entertainment → Hedonic Gratification	0.41	<0.001	Accepted
H2b	Entertainment → Informational Gratification	0.26	<0.001	Accepted
H2c	Entertainment → Social Gratification	0.29	<0.001	Accepted
H3a	Credibility → Hedonic Gratification	0.24	<0.001	Accepted
H3b	Credibility → Informational Gratification	0.38	<0.001	Accepted
H3c	Credibility → Social Gratification	0.31	<0.001	Accepted
H4a	Interactivity → Hedonic Gratification	0.33	<0.001	Accepted
H4b	Interactivity → Informational Gratification	0.27	<0.001	Accepted
H4c	Interactivity → Social Gratification	0.42	<0.001	Accepted

H5	Hedonic Gratification → Actual Purchase	0.29	<0.001	Accepted
H6	Informational Gratification → Actual Purchase	0.36	<0.001	Accepted
H7	Social Gratification → Actual Purchase	0.25	<0.001	Accepted

To further examine the mediating role of gratification, indirect effects were tested using a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. As reported in Table 4, all indirect effects were statistically significant, as the confidence intervals did not include zero. The results confirm that hedonic, informational, and social gratifications partially mediate the relationships between social media content characteristics and actual purchase behavior.

Following validation of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships. Model fit was assessed using multiple goodness-of-fit indices. The results indicated an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.31$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.056, SRMR = 0.041), which meets the recommended thresholds for SEM analysis. This suggests that the proposed S-O-R and Uses-and-Gratifications-based framework adequately represents the observed data.

Table 8: Mediation Analysis Results

Independent Variable	Mediator	Dependent Variable	Indirect Effect	95% CI
Informativeness	Informational Gratification	Actual Purchase	0.12	[0.07, 0.18]
Entertainment	Hedonic Gratification	Actual Purchase	0.12	[0.07, 0.19]
Credibility	Informational Gratification	Actual Purchase	0.14	[0.08, 0.20]
Interactivity	Social Gratification	Actual Purchase	0.11	[0.06, 0.17]

Overall, the study supports the proposed model empirically. Gratification had a significant mediating role between the relationship of social media and actual purchase. These findings empirically support gratification fulfilment as the organismic mechanism proposed within the integrated S-O-R framework.

Discussion

Rather than suggesting a direct stimulus–response relationship, the findings demonstrate that social media influence operates through gratification-based psychological mechanisms. Earlier studies have found informativeness and entertainment to enhance the users perceived value and emotional engagement (Kim & Ko, 2012; Muntinga et al., 2011). A high degree of credibility also increases informational gratification. Perceived authenticity and trust are key elements for effective persuasion through social media (Chiu & Ho, 2023; Appelman & Sundar, 2016).

Mediation analysis confirms that gratification functions as the central organismic mechanism, a bridge between stimulus and purchase behavior. Among Gen Z consumers, informational gratification emerged as the strongest mediator, indicating that cognitive evaluation and decision-support processes play a dominant role in translating social media engagement into purchasing behaviour (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). The finding suggests that although Gen Z operates within entertainment-driven platforms, their decisions are strongly influenced by the information-oriented and decision-support needs. Mediating the impact of entertainment on the actual purchase, hedonic gratification underlined the role played by effective engagement in driving actual purchase. Similarly, social gratification mediated the influence of interactivity, aligned with participation and relational experience in social context (Azhar et al., 2025; Hannan et al., 2023). The findings therefore reposition gratification fulfilment from a passive outcome of media use to an active explanatory mechanism underlying digital consumption behaviour.

Theoretical Contributions and Managerial Implications

This study extends the digital consumption theory, to reconsider the way persuasive influence occurs within participatory media environments. Instead viewing S-O-R model as an affective mediation model where stimulus affects response via an intermediary (Organism), this research identifies the organism as a hedonic gratification, informational gratification and social gratification, to enhance the explanation of S-O-R and show how the responses in social media are driven by different motivations for responding to stimuli rather than general level of affect. Thus, this research positions gratification as the core psychological mechanism through which digital stimuli acquire behavioural consequences, thereby advancing a mechanism-centered view of digital persuasion.

This study has also extended the scope of UGT beyond its traditional focus on media engagement by showing that gratification fulfilment directly influences actual purchasing behavior. It bridges the intention-behavior gap and exhibit that gratification is not merely psychological outcome of media use but as an explanatory model for predicting purchase activation. Finally, the result show that social influence is achieved via different forms of gratifications. These gratifications have both independent and cumulative effects on purchasing. Overall, these extensions provide an integrated approach to explain the way consumers are influenced to make purchase decision within socially embedded commerce environments.

From managerial perceptive, the study offers marketers several useful suggestions for brands and influencers. Informational content should be given priority; informational gratification has significant influence on actual purchase behaviour. On the other hand, when paired with useful information, entertainment contents can help in increasing hedonic gratification while maintaining engagement. Trustworthy, authentic, and transparent influence collaboration is important as identified by the credibility variable. Lastly in order to enhance social gratification and maintain strong consumer brand relationship, organisation can leverage various interactive features including polls, comments, and feedbacks. Together these results highlight that in order to convert social media engagement into actual purchase, organisations need to divert their resources towards gratification-oriented content strategies.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explain why the social media engagement converts into actual purchase behaviour, and developed an integrated framework removing the limitations of the SOR and UGT frameworks, focusing on the Gen Z consumers among the overall Indian customer's demography. Four major variables of social media, namely Informativeness, Credibility, Entertainment, and Interactivity was found to drive the three gratification needs of these consumers. In turn, the Hedonic, Informational, and Social gratification affects the actual user purchase behaviour. Of these, information gratification significantly influenced the consumer purchase, highlighting the importance of not only experiential appeal, but also the decision support value.

By shifting the focus from purchase intention to actual purchase behaviour, the study fills the overlooked aspect in existing literature, providing a justifiable understanding of social media effectiveness. The results underscore that superficial approaches adopted for social media engagement are no longer effective. Organisations should give priority to satisfying emotional, informational and social needs of users with gratification-oriented contents. This study provides useful insights and practical replicability for academicians and practitioners by providing theoretically grounded and practical framework accounting for why and how social media influences GenZ's purchasing. By demonstrating gratification fulfilment as the central organismic mechanism linking social media stimuli to marketplace behavior, the study advances a more precise explanation of digital persuasion in participatory media environments.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has certain limitations that suggest directions for future research. One of the limitations of the studies is that a cross-sectional design does not support causal inferences; longitudinal or experimental design can be employed to examine changes in gratification and purchases over time. Second, the use of self-reported data can lead to common method bias; future studies may consider adding objective behavioural or transactional data. Third, the targeting of GenZ users for this study limits generalizability; making comparisons with other generational cohorts would be of interest. Finally, future studies may also focus on the possible effects of different

platforms used, on different product types, and can also focus on different mediating variables including influencer credibility and cultural context.

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