

Digital marketing factors influencing Generation Z’s purchase intention in the restaurant sector: a systematic review

Factores del marketing digital que influyen en la intención de compra de la Generación Z en el sector restaurantero: una revisión sistemática

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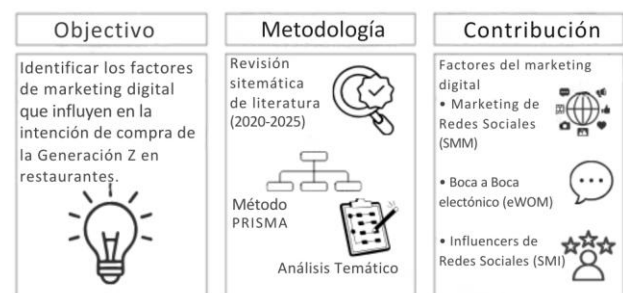
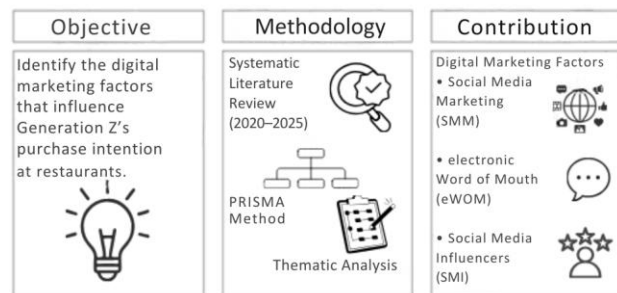
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Abstract

This article addresses the need to understand how digital marketing influences the purchasing intentions of Generation Z, a key demographic for the restaurant industry due to its strong digital presence. While studies on digital marketing exist, few focus specifically on this generation within the restaurant sector. Therefore, the objective is to identify the digital marketing factors that impact their purchasing intentions in this specific sector. The research is based on a systematic literature review following the PRISMA methodology, using the Web of Science, Scopus, and Google databases. From the thematic analysis, three influential factors were identified: electronic Word of Mouth [eWOM], Social Media Marketing [SMM], and Social Media Influencers [SMI]. The results provide clarity on this topic within the academic field and offer recommendations for restaurants to connect with this segment.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda la necesidad de comprender cómo el marketing digital influye en las intenciones de compra de la Generación Z, un grupo demográfico clave para la industria restaurantera debido a su fuerte presencia digital. Si bien existen estudios sobre marketing digital, pocos se enfocan específicamente en esta generación dentro de la restauración. Por lo tanto, el objetivo es identificar los factores del marketing digital que impactan sus intenciones de compra en este sector específico. La investigación se basa en una revisión sistemática de literatura siguiendo la metodología PRISMA, utilizando las bases de datos de Web of Science, Scopus y Google. A partir del análisis temático identificaron tres factores influyentes: boca a boca electrónico [eWOM], marketing en redes sociales [SMM] e influencers en redes sociales [SMI]. Los resultados brindan claridad sobre este tema dentro del ámbito académico y ofrecen recomendaciones para que los restaurantes conecten con este segmento.



Generation Z, digital marketing, restaurants

Generación Z, marketing digital, restaurantes

Area: Promotion of frontier research and basic science in all fields of knowledge

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Introduction

The influence of social media on consumer experiences and purchasing behaviour may vary according to gender and age group [Konar et al., 2020]. Age moderates the relationship between Social Media Marketing and brand loyalty. Therefore, it is recommended to take age into account when formulating strategies to improve purchase intention and brand fidelity [Manyanga et al., 2024; Ngo et al., 2024; Nyagadza et al., 2023; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021].

Generation Z is one of the most demanding market segments, given their interconnectivity and the volume of information to which they have access. These young people, especially those living in major cities, possess a great capacity for mastering technology, as it is an inseparable part of their lives. [Gautama et al., 2023; Tecnológico de Monterrey, 2024]. The use of social media is highly prevalent and is considered a characteristic activity among Generation Z youth. They typically coexist on two or more social media platforms. Instagram and WhatsApp are the most frequently mentioned platforms, followed by TikTok and Twitter, according to Ares et al. [2022], although these preferences can change in relation to their context and interests. Entertainment, communication, and information seeking are identified as the primary motives behind the use of social media platforms [Ares et al., 2022]. They benefit from having more quantity-based information to evaluate product performance and quality [Ngo et al., 2024] as well as to make informed buying decisions [Villarreal Ojeda, 2026]. Consequently, they are considered a segment that is highly sensitive to online advertising.

Among the goods of greatest interest to these young people are clothing and accessories, mobile phones, books, and cinema; however, fast food and restaurants are among the most searched for on digital platforms. Furthermore, members of Generation Z have become the primary users of food delivery applications, demonstrating a strong interest in these types of services [Lara, Jesús; Cervantes, 2023]. Restaurant owners need innovative thinking to interact with the digital youngest customers; however, they often lack the know-how to do so [Dabas et al., 2021]. Understanding how digital marketing impacts these young people in the restaurant sector can be a determining factor in encouraging their intention to buy. [S. Singh et al., 2022].

Several authors have explored Generation Z as consumers and their relationship with digital marketing [Alsaadi et al., 2024; Li & Hasnah Hassan, 2023; Ngo et al., 2024]. In turn, other studies analyze the relationship between digital marketing strategies and purchase intention in restaurants, without generational distinction [Pinca et al., 2024]. Some authors have concluded that in this sector, the generational difference constitutes a differentiating element in consumer behaviour [Ngo et al., 2024; S. Singh et al., 2022]. However, existing literature lacks studies that identify the digital marketing factors that influence Generation Z's purchase intention, specifically in the restaurant sector. Considering the competitiveness of the sector and the viability of homogeneous strategies based on segmentation, this article aims to answer the following research question:

What are the digital marketing factors that influence the purchase intention of Generation Z in the restaurant industry?

Methodology

This study adopts a systematic review approach, a methodology recognized for its rigor and systematicity in the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of relevant studies to answer a specific research question [Sgarbossa et al., 2022]. The PRISMA method [Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses], is used to answer the question posed above [Page et al., 2021].

Procedure

Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar were used as data sources. The search query used was: “purchase intention” OR “purchase decision” OR “visit intention” And “digital marketing” And “generation Z” OR “centennials” And “restaurants”.

After obtaining limited results, some variations were introduced to achieve more relevant articles. Specifically, the term "food" was introduced within the restaurant sector, using the "OR" operator. Additionally, iterations were conducted using "marketing" instead of "digital marketing," as several articles are indexed using this term, even when analyzing the digital sphere.

In addition, a temporality filter was applied, with the objective of considering only articles published between 2020 and June 2025. It was decided to take this interval of years, as the restaurant sector and its consumers experienced a significant shift in their digital marketing strategies following Covid-19. Therefore, we seek to identify the current trends that have emerged from this change [Al-Abdallah et al., 2024].

Inclusion criteria

Likewise, the following eligibility criteria were established for the selection of the scientific articles:

1. Be published in a scientific journal; theses and conference abstracts were excluded.
2. Be written in either Spanish or English.
3. Address purchase intention or its variations as one of the main variables concerning digital marketing.
4. Include study participants belonging to Generation Z.
5. Be accessible for download.
6. Employ qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodology.

The search identified 54 documents in Scopus, 950 in Google Scholar, and 15 in Web of Science. Subsequently, the titles and abstracts of the results returned by the search engines were reviewed. After this step, and following the eligibility criteria, the articles that would later be read in their entirety were selected. Finally, some articles were discarded due to a lack of coherence with the subject of the present review.

The 24 resulting articles were analyzed using ATLAS.ti software, following thematic analysis. [Braun & Clarke, 2021].

Results

As described in the methodological section, the review focused on articles published between 2020 and 2025 [Figure 1]. A growing trend is evident in the number of publications, with a peak in 2024, followed by a level decrease in 2025.

Box 1

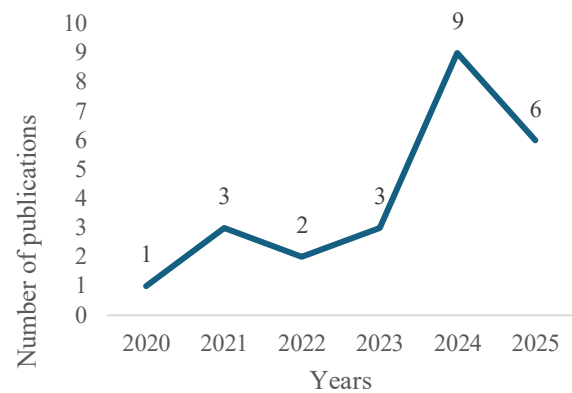


Figure 1

Publication trends

Source: Own elaboration

In terms of geographic distribution, studies in Southeast Asia predominated [70.83%]. Only two articles were found in Latin America, from Mexico and Uruguay [Figure 2].

Box 2

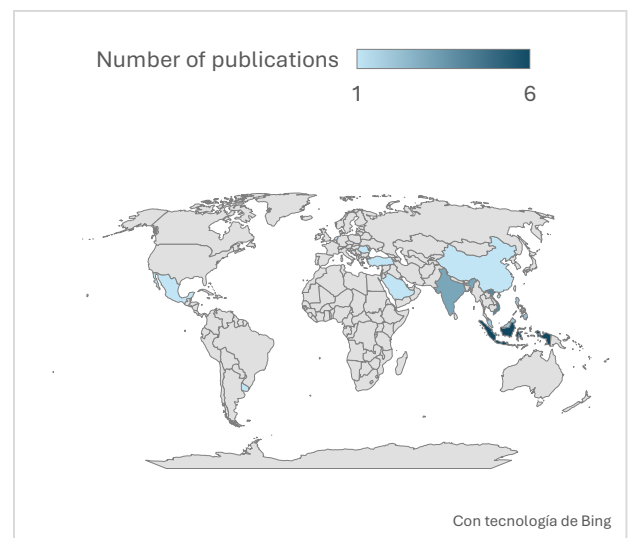


Figure 2

Geographical distribution

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the methodological approach of the articles, 75% used quantitative analysis. Next, 12.5% were mixed, while only 12.5% resorted to qualitative methodology [Figure 3]. In this sense, the application of structural equation models and multiple regressions is common, in order to measure causal and predictive relationships.

Box 3

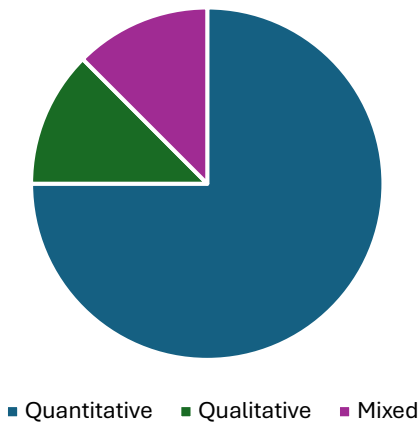


Figure 3

Methodological approach

Source: Own elaboration

The word cloud shows the most relevant terms during the review. It highlights "purchase intention", "marketing", and "food" as central themes. Also, the terms "age" and "gen" are presented; the latter is commonly used to refer to Generation Z [Figure 4].

Box 4



Figure 4

Word cloud

Source: Own elaboration

Digital marketing factors affecting Generation Z's purchase intention in the restaurant sector

From the thematic analysis, three digital marketing factors influencing Generation Z's purchase intention in the restaurant sector were identified [Table 1], thereby addressing the research question of this study.

The frequency of each factor was quantified, identifying SMM as the most common factor, analyzed in 15 articles.

Box 5

Table 1

Digital marketing factors

Digital marketing factor	Short description	Frecuency
Social Media Influencers [SMI]	These opinion leaders produce appealing digital content that resonates with Generation Z and enhances purchase intention. Credibility, reputation, and parasocial relationships mediate this effect.	9
electronic Word of Mouth [eWOM]	Reviews constitute a neutral source of information generated by other users or customers. The usefulness of the information and the credibility of the source mediate this relationship.	7
Social Media Marketing [SMM]	It is based on content shared by the company, which strengthens its digital presence and influences Generation Z's purchase intention. This effect may vary depending on the platform and type of content. There is a predominance of audiovisual content, including videos and images.	15

Social Media Influencers [SMI]

The studies reviewed agree that influencers have a significant impact on purchase intention in the restaurant sector [Ahmad et al., 2023; Ares et al., 2022; Folkvord et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2025; Pham et al., 2024].

In turn, this impact is influenced by reputation and parasocial relationships [Zhang et al., 2024]. The influence of social networks is especially strong with Generation Z, as this group tends to be highly receptive to digital trends. When a product or service of cafes and restaurants becomes popular on networks, the likelihood of purchase increases [Gunawan et al., 2021].

Credibility is a key factor mediating the effectiveness of influencers on purchase intention [Ahmad et al., 2023; Pereira et al., 2025; Pham et al., 2024; Purwanto & Rahayu, 2024]. However, the findings of the articles are not homogeneous on this element. Ahmad et al. [2023] mention a growing distrust of Generation Z towards influencers since they perceive their reviews to be motivated by business deals. Different from the previous results, Folkvord et al. [2020] found that these young people perceive influencers as trustworthy people, so they tend to consume their content and the recommendations they offer without questioning or doubting their veracity.

Some authors have inquired into how gastronomic influencers generate credibility. It has been shown that they do not need experience or formal or academic qualifications to do so. They tend to prioritize those who regularly publish content on gastronomic topics [Ahmad et al., 2023; Sang et al., 2024]. On the other hand, the relevance of the content does impact the effectiveness of the message conveyed by the influencer. Thus, influencers who align their publications with the interests of their audience generate purchase intention [Gunawan et al., 2021].

Another factor to consider is the connection they can establish with their audience. Folkvord et al. [2020] found that fostering a warm personal relationship and parasocial interaction is crucial for successfully promoting healthy products. This connection occurs when followers perceive similarities between themselves and the influencers [Purwanto & Rahayu, 2024]. Finally, the influencer's reputation will also affect young people's adoption of their recommendations [Sang et al., 2024].

Influencers are key to promoting brand recognition. Through their publications, which usually have a great reach, they significantly increase the visibility of restaurants. The visual elements they share [usually videos of dishes and the experience they live] remain in the minds of their followers, in a more natural way than ads [Purwanto & Rahayu, 2024]. Through this resonance effect, they encourage brand recall and association with the content they consume on social networks [Gunawan et al., 2021]. Another benefit is that many times, people tend to visit and follow the profiles of the recommended restaurants. In this way, they will receive more content and information about the restaurant, creating a relationship with the brand.

Electronic Word of Mouth [eWOM]

People tend to check reviews from other users in their choice of restaurant [Ahmad et al., 2023]. Online reviews affect the purchase intention of Generation Z [Bawana et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2025; Magbanua et al., 2021; Rojas-Robertson, 2026]. They consider online reviews as an up-to-date source of useful information for their consumer decisions [Azman et al., 2025]. Unlike the information shared by the company itself, reviews offer neutral criteria that allow you to learn about the restaurant's positive and negative aspects in just a few minutes. This is the differentiating element that reviews provide, and why they are increasingly valued by users across a variety of sectors. Hence, it is positive for restaurants to encourage digital dialogues and especially testimonials [García et al., 2024].

In addition, the adoption of recommendations is mediated by several factors. Users value the quality of information present in reviews, and credibility also positively influences their acceptance. They also tend to accept reviews more readily when these are relevant to their choices. In the eWOM adoption process, elements such as the transparency of the review and the reputation of the reviewer [if known] are taken into account [Hung & Think, 2024].

Social Media Marketing [SMM]

Social Media Marketing significantly influences Generation Z's purchasing intentions in the restaurant sector [Abdou, 2025; Abergos et al., 2024; Hung et al., 2025; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021; Irsanyya et al., 2023]. Tourists use social networks, once they have selected their destination, to decide which attractions to visit, including restaurants [Băltescu & Untaru, 2024]. Likewise, Azman et al. [2025] show an influence between SMM and online fast-food shopping.

Similarly, young people may be more susceptible to the influence of purchasing decisions, depending on the platform and content. The quality of images or videos, the use of trending audio, and even the color scheme can moderate their reception of information [Ares et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2025]. In this sense, visual content, especially videos, influences purchase intention [Băltescu & Untaru, 2024]. Videos are often more effective than other formats [Ahmad et al., 2023].

This behavior is also influenced by brand awareness, brand trust, and brand reputation [Abdou, 2025; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021; Mohamed Sadom et al., 2024; Windarsari et al., 2022]. These young people often visit the social media profiles of brands that interest them. From the information that potential consumers find about the brand, they can know it, determine if it is trustworthy and decide to take it into account in their consumption decisions.

Discussion

The results obtained can be explained by several theoretical models that study consumer behavior, such as the Stimulus-Organism-Response [SOR] model [Ibrahim et al., 2021; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974] and the Theory of Planning Behavior [TPB] [Ajzen, 1991]. These models suggest that they are precursors to purchase intention, and that this relationship may be mediated by psycho-emotional variables.

Based on these findings, managerial implications can be derived for restaurant businesses targeting Generation Z.

The findings showed that restaurants should collaborate with influencers to increase purchase intention among Generation Z. Inviting them to sample dishes for free or offering discounts are effective alternatives for this marketing strategy [Erwin et al., 2023]. However, special attention should be paid to the influencer's alignment with the restaurant's values, credibility, and online reputation. Ideally, they should seek out influencers whose content focuses on gastronomy, as restaurant-related information will be more relevant to their audience [Sang et al., 2024].

Along with influencer marketing, eWOM is another way to create social validation. Restaurants should be able to encourage customers who visit them to share their experiences publicly. It's worth noting that this can also generate negative eWOM, so before taking this step, it's necessary to ensure that the service and food offered are of a recommendable quality. Achieving customer satisfaction is essential to driving eWOM [Liu et al., 2021; Poyoi et al., 2024; Uslu, 2020]. Restaurants can create challenges that include sharing reviews or visual content about the restaurant to stimulate positive emotions that can boost eWOM [Alshreef et al., 2023].

It's also important to have attractive, creative spaces, as they are often called "instagrammable spaces," which are simply those spaces that encourage customers to want to share them on their social media [Uslu, 2020]. Likewise, innovating the menu and the presentation of dishes to ensure they exceed customer expectations is another way to build memorable experiences and generate organic reviews [Tsaour et al., 2024].

Another recommendation stemming from the impact of Social Media Marketing on purchase intention is to build a strong presence on these platforms. In this regard, restaurants should share engaging visual content, especially videos, a format highly popular among Generation Z [Zhang et al., 2024]. Incorporating storytelling as a narrative is another way to humanize the brand, foster connections, and drive purchase intention of this segment [Kunjiapu et al., 2025].

Conclusions

According to this systematic literature review, the digital marketing factors that impact Generation Z's purchase intentions in restaurants are: Social Media Influencers, Social Media Marketing, and electronic Word of Mouth.

For companies in the restaurant sector, especially those seeking to attract young consumers, these results offer practical recommendations. For academia, they constitute a synthesis of the current state of research, which can contribute to strengthening conceptual frameworks. Similarly, as a generational study, it lays the groundwork for comparative research with other generational segments.

Future research can analyze their impact in different contexts, providing practical recommendations for local restaurants. For greater specificity, these studies could even be grouped into different types of restaurants. To better understand consumer behavior, it would be convenient to delve into other recurring concepts in this review: engagement, brand trust, brand awareness, and brand reputation, and evaluate the level of influence that these have on purchase intention.

Finally, it is also necessary to evaluate how socio-demographic variables, such as income level and academic degrees, moderate the relationship between these factors and purchase intention.

Declarations

WoS

Web of Science

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no interest conflict.

Author contribution

Alfonso-Sanjul, Iris Leandra: Contributed to the theoretical framework, documentary review, and analysis of the results.

Acosta-Gonzaga, Elizabeth: Contributed to project management, theoretical framework, review and discussion.

Availability of data and materials

The articles analyzed in this research are found in the Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar databases.

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This article contributes to the SECIHTI area: Promotion of frontier research and basic science in all fields of knowledge.

Abbreviations

ATLAS.ti	Specialized software for qualitative data analysis, used to perform thematic analysis and categorization of information.
COVID-19	Pandemic caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2
eWOM	electronic Word of Mouth
Gen Z	Generation Z
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
SMM	Social Media Marketing
SMI	Social Media Influencers
S-O-R	Stimulus–Organism–Response
TPB	Theory of Planned Behavior

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