



The Influence of Social Media on Gen-Z's Impulsive Buying of Cosmetics

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Abstract

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This study aims to analyze the influence of social media marketing on Generation Z consumers' impulsive buying behavior in cosmetic products using the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework. The research method employed is qualitative descriptive through a literature review based on scholarly articles. The findings reveal that stimuli in the form of social media content, including brand-generated content, targeted ads, influencer marketing, and user-generated content, exert different effects on consumer organisms such as emotions, perceptions, and motivations. Influencer marketing and user-generated content are identified as the most dominant stimuli due to their perceived authenticity and relatability among Gen-Z. These factors trigger positive emotional responses such as enthusiasm, curiosity, and the fear of missing out, ultimately leading to impulsive buying behavior. This study contributes theoretically by extending the application of the Stimulus–Organism–Response model in digital marketing contexts, and provides practical insights for cosmetic brands to design marketing strategies that are more ethical, effective, and sustainable.



1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the marketing landscape. Social media is no longer just a means of communication between individuals, but has also become one of the most effective marketing channels to reach consumers, especially the younger generation. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube play a central role in introducing products, building brand image, and encouraging impulsive consumption behavior. Recent reports show that Gen-Z is the most active group of social media users, with a penetration rate in Indonesia reaching more than 95% by 2023 (Suwandi & Balqiah, 2023). This shows how important social media is in shaping the consumption patterns of this generation, including in the cosmetics industry that continues to grow rapidly.

Cosmetics is one of the product categories with significant growth in the e-commerce realm, especially for Gen-Z consumers. This generation is known as digital natives who are very familiar with online interactions, critical of marketing messages, but at the same time susceptible to impulsive consumption behaviors due to exposure to persuasive content (Liang et al., 2023). Recent trends show that Gen-Z prefers authentic content such as reviews from other consumers or influencer recommendations over formal advertising from brands (Tabassum et al., 2020). However, this phenomenon also presents challenges: oversupply of brand-generated content (BGC) advertising often causes resistance, while more trusted user-generated content (UGC) can actually trigger excessive consumption behavior that is not always rational (Hodkinson, 2019).

In understanding the phenomenon, the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model developed by Mehrabian & Russell provides a strong theoretical foundation. This model explains how stimuli (e.g. social media content in the form of advertisements, influencers, and UGC) can trigger certain emotional responses in consumers (organisms), which then lead to responses in the form of purchasing behaviors, including impulsive buying. Several recent studies prove that exposure to attractive visual content, limited promotions, and influencer marketing strategies have a significant effect on the emergence of unplanned buying impulses. In fact, the use of technologies such as augmented reality in cosmetics marketing further strengthens this tendency.

Previous literature has shown that there is a difference in the influence between different types of marketing stimuli on social media. For example, BGC tends to be seen as a more persuasive but less trustworthy form of formal communication, while influencer marketing has been shown to be effective in building emotional closeness with audiences (Lina et al., 2022). On the other hand, UGC is considered more authentic and relatable, although it also has the potential to cause negative effects such as the fear of missing out (FoMO) phenomenon that accelerates impulsive decisions (Thuy et al., 2023). However, most studies still focus on one or two types of stimuli, so there is a research gap in comprehensively comparing the role of BGCs, targeted advertising, influencers, and UGC on Gen-Z cosmetic consumption behavior.

The urgency of this research lies in two main aspects. First, theoretically, this study contributes to the development of consumer behavior literature by testing the

application of the S-O-R framework in the context of dynamic digital marketing, particularly in cosmetic products. Second, practically, the results of this study can provide insight for cosmetics companies in formulating marketing strategies that are more effective, ethical, and in accordance with Gen-Z preferences. Thus, this research not only answers academic questions but is also relevant in providing solutions for current digital marketing practices. Based on this background, the research problem formulation is why it is important to examine Gen-Z's cosmetic impulse buying behavior on social media. How stimuli in the form of BGC, targeted advertising, influencers, and UGC can influence consumer emotions and encourage impulsive buying behavior. By answering these questions, this study aims to analyze the influence of social media stimuli on Gen-Z cosmetic impulse buying based on the S-O-R framework, as well as provide practical recommendations for cosmetic brands in managing digital marketing communication strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Media and Gen-Z Consumer Behavior

Social media has become a major means of marketing that has significantly changed consumer behavior, especially the younger generation. Gen-Z, born in the digital age, are known as digital natives with intensive engagement on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Studies show that Gen-Z tends to connect with brands more through social media than previous generations, as they are used to visual interactions, creative content, and community-based communication (Wei, 2023). Gen-Z consumers are not only passively receiving information, but also

actively engaged in content creation and dissemination, making them co-creators in the digital marketing ecosystem.

In the context of cosmetics, social media serves as an important channel to increase brand awareness and shape the perception of product quality. Influencers, advertising content, and consumer reviews play a key role in creating stimuli that can influence the purchasing decision-making process (Reichstein & Brusch, 2019). However, Gen-Z's behavior is also characterized by impulsive nature and a tendency to follow trends, which are often triggered by intensive exposure to visual content and urgency-based promotional strategies such as flash sales or limited editions. Thus, social media has become not only a communication channel, but also a space that shapes new consumption behaviors that are faster, more dynamic and emotional.

2.2. Impulsive Buying in Gen-Z Cosmetic Consumption

The phenomenon of impulse buying among Gen-Z is a major concern in the marketing literature. Gen-Z tends to make cosmetic purchase decisions without careful planning, driven by external stimuli they encounter on social media. Studies in China show that online promotions and cosmetic discounts significantly increase the impulsive behavior of Gen-Z (Peng, 2021). Psychological factors such as positive emotions, the desire to try new things, and curiosity about new cosmetic trends also play an important role (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

In addition, the phenomenon of fear of missing out (FoMO) reinforces this trend, where Gen-Z feels compelled to immediately buy products that are currently viral so as not to be left behind in social trends (Thuy et al., 2023). Other research

has found that digital technologies such as augmented reality also encourage impulse purchases, as they provide interactive experiences that make consumers more quickly attached to the product (Chong et al., 2023). However, not all stimuli have the same impact. Influencer marketing tends to be more effective at creating emotional attachment, while BGC is more seen as formal communication that often generates resistance (Sykora et al., 2022). This suggests that the characteristics of the stimulus greatly determine the extent to which impulsive behavior can be formed.

2.3. S-O-R Model in the Context of Digital Marketing

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model developed by Mehrabian & Russell provides an important analytical framework for understanding consumer behavior in the digital age. In the context of marketing, stimulus refers to the exposure to advertising, promotions, influencers, or UGC that consumers receive through social media. Organisms reflect internal responses in the form of emotions, perceptions, and motivations of consumers, while responses refer to tangible actions such as impulse purchases. Recent studies emphasize the relevance of these models to examine Gen-Z behavior, as they are highly responsive to visual, emotional, and social-based stimuli (Dragolea et al., 2023).

Research on impulsive behavior in cosmetics shopping proves that stimuli from influencers and UGC can trigger emotional responses in the form of excitement and curiosity, leading to unplanned purchases (Liang et al., 2023). Meanwhile, BGC tends to elicit more critical cognitive reactions, although it can still influence decisions if packaged with strong visual and narrative strategies (Teixeira et al., 2023). The application of the S-O-R model in the context of digital marketing

also shows that moderation variables, such as trust in brands or online shopping experiences, help strengthen or weaken the relationship between stimulus and response. Thus, S-O-R becomes a relevant theoretical framework to explain how social media mediates the relationship between marketing stimuli and Gen-Z's impulsive behavior in cosmetics consumption.

3. Methods

This study uses a qualitative method with a literature study approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, specifically how social media stimuli affect Gen-Z's impulsive purchasing behavior towards cosmetic products. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the dynamics between digital marketing content and the psychological aspects of consumers, which in this case is analyzed through the theoretical framework of Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R). The literature study method was chosen as a data collection technique because this research topic has been widely discussed in various academic publications. The literature study allowed researchers to identify patterns, trends, and research gaps related to social media marketing, impulsive buying, and Gen-Z consumer behavior. The literature used in this study was obtained from the Google Scholar database with a span of the last 5 years, so it only includes relevant current articles. The inclusion criteria include research that discusses (1) social media as a means of marketing, (2) cosmetic consumption behavior among Gen-Z, (3) the phenomenon

of impulsive buying, and (4) the application of the S-O-R model in the context of digital marketing.

The literature search process was carried out using keywords such as "social media marketing", "Gen-Z", "impulsive buying", and "cosmetics". From the search results, articles that meet the relevance criteria are then further analyzed. A total of 13 to 17 articles were selected to be the main source in this study. These articles include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research that provides different perspectives on the relationship between social media stimuli and impulsive behavior of Gen-Z consumers. Data analysis is carried out using content analysis techniques, which are examining the content of relevant literature to find the main themes related to the phenomenon being studied. In this case, the analysis focused on how stimulus in the form of brand-generated content (BGC), targeted ads, influencer marketing, and user-generated content (UGC) affects aspects of the organism (consumer emotions, perceptions, and motivation), as well as how it leads to a response in the form of impulsive buying. The researcher also synthesized various findings to find similarities and differences that appeared in the literature.

A descriptive approach is used to present the results of the analysis by explaining the relationship between variables based on the S-O-R theory. For example, the research of Lina et al. (2022) emphasizes that stimuli in the form of the presence of social media celebrities can strengthen consumers' emotional impulses to make impulse purchases. Similarly, the research of Suwandi and Balqiah (2024) highlights the role of emotional factors and shopping patterns as strong predictors of Gen-Z's impulsive consumption behavior in the cosmetics sector. Thus, the

literature study method allows this study to present a comprehensive mapping of the factors that influence impulsive buying. The credibility of the research results is maintained through the use of literature sourced from indexed journals, proceedings, and official academic repositories. Validity is strengthened by comparing results from various research contexts, both in Indonesia and globally, to ensure that the findings obtained are not partial. Thus, this qualitative method based on literature studies is expected to provide a deeper and contextual understanding of how social media stimuli play a role in shaping the impulsive behavior of Gen-Z consumers towards cosmetics, as well as contribute both theoretically and practically.

4. Results

Based on the results of a literature study, it was found that social media has a very significant role in influencing Gen-Z's impulsive buying behavior towards cosmetic products. Stimulus in the form of brand-generated content (BGC), targeted ads, influencer marketing, and user-generated content (UGC) has been proven to have different powers in shaping consumers' emotional and psychological responses. BGC is still used by many cosmetic brands to introduce products, offer discounts, or launch limited promotional campaigns. Official content from these brands is often perceived as more credible in building a product image, but for Gen-Z who tend to prioritize authenticity, this form of communication is often considered too formal and less personal. Nonetheless, research shows that creatively packaged visual promotions can still trigger Gen-Z's attention and lead to unplanned buying

behaviors, especially when accompanied by a pricing and time-limited strategy (Dragolea et al., 2023).

In addition to BGC, targeted ads or paid ads personalized through algorithms are also an important stimulus. Gen-Z as digital natives are used to personalization, so ads that suit their interests are more receptive. Research by Lina et al. (2022) proves that advertising tailored to consumer needs increases the convenience of online shopping and can strengthen the urge to make impulse purchases. Consumers often feel that the ads that appear are the answer to their needs, even though the purchase decision is more driven by emotions than rational considerations. Thus, personalized advertising contributes to the formation of impulsive responses through the perception of high relevance. However, the most dominant stimulus for Gen-Z is influencer marketing. Influencers are considered more authentic and relatable than the brand's official content. They present personal narratives, real testimonials, and engaging visual content that creates an emotional closeness to the audience. Research by Reichstein and Brusch (2019) confirms that the emotional attraction built by influencers is able to encourage Gen-Z to try certain cosmetic products without much consideration. The presence of influencers who are considered role models makes them more trustworthy than conventional advertising.

This shows that the power of influencer persuasion works more on an emotional level than on a rational level, which is very much in line with the characteristics of impulsive buying. On the other hand, UGC also plays an equally important role. UGC such as consumer reviews, user testimonials, and short video

content on TikTok or Instagram is considered more credible because it comes from fellow consumers. UGC is able to deliver a vicarious experience that amplifies Gen-Z's emotional drive to immediately purchase certain cosmetic products. However, this stimulus also gives rise to the phenomenon of fear of missing out (FoMO), which is the fear of missing out on social trends, which drives impulse purchase decisions faster (Hodkinson, 2019). Thus, although UGC increases trust, it also carries the risk of excessive consumption behavior.

Literature findings show that social media stimuli do not directly result in purchases, but rather trigger organisms in the form of consumer psychological reactions. Emotions, perception, and motivation are the three main aspects of an organism that are formed through interaction with stimuli. Emotionally, cosmetic content on social media often evokes excitement, curiosity, and enthusiasm to try new products. Attractive visual promotions, augmented reality features, and recommendations from influencers reinforce these emotional urges (Chong et al., 2023). This positive emotion is what encourages Gen-Z consumers to be more prone to spontaneous purchases. In terms of perception, Gen-Z places a higher level of trust in influencers and UGC than official brand advertising. Wei (2023) proved that social media significantly increases brand awareness as well as a positive image of cosmetic products, which strengthens consumers' desire to buy. The motivational factor also plays an important role, where Gen-Z is encouraged to buy cosmetics not only because of functional needs, but to maintain self-image, gain social recognition, and follow trends so as not to be left behind. Research by Djafarova

and Bowes (2021) shows that emotional and social factors have a greater influence than rational factors in driving purchase decisions.

The final response of the interaction between the stimulus and the organism is impulsive buying behavior. A number of studies show that Gen-Z is the most vulnerable segment of consumers to this phenomenon. Peng's (2021) research revealed that online cosmetic promotions are driving an increase in spontaneous purchases among Chinese Gen-Z. A similar finding was put forward by Sykora et al. (2022) who highlighted that the emotional appeal of influencers increases the likelihood of unplanned purchases. Furthermore, technologies such as augmented reality also reinforce this phenomenon, as the interactive experience of trying on a product virtually increases emotional attachment to the product thereby accelerating purchasing decisions (Chong et al., 2023). In addition, the FoMO phenomenon triggered by UGC further strengthens the tendency of Gen-Z to buy cosmetic products that are going viral (Hodkinson, 2019). However, the results of the study also show that not all stimuli have the same effect. Sustainability-driven marketing strategies adopted by a number of brands focus more on building long-term trust rather than triggering impulsive buying.

Teixeira et al. (2023) research shows that this approach can strengthen consumer loyalty without encouraging excessive consumption behavior. This gives the impression that an ethical marketing strategy can remain effective without having to rely on momentary emotional impulses. The results of this literature synthesis show a general pattern that influencer marketing and UGC are the most influential stimuli for Gen Z's impulsive behavior in cosmetic consumption, while BGC and

targeted ads play a greater role in building awareness and strengthening product legitimacy. These findings are in line with Liang et al. (2023) who emphasize that Gen-Z's consumption style is shaped primarily by social media exposure through figures they consider relatable. However, there is a research gap because most studies only focus on one specific form of stimulus, such as influencers or UGC, without conducting a comprehensive comparison of the roles of BGC, targeted ads, influencers, and UGC simultaneously. In addition, most of the research is still limited to specific country contexts, so the results cannot be generalized globally.

Thus, it can be concluded that the impulsive behavior of Gen-Z in cosmetic consumption is the result of a complex interaction between external stimuli and internal consumer factors. The S-O-R model provides a relevant analytical framework to explain this phenomenon, where authenticity-based and emotional-based stimuli have proven to be most effective in driving impulsive buying. These findings also indicate the need for cosmetics brands to design digital marketing strategies that place more emphasis on trust, authenticity, and consumer experience, rather than simply relying on aggressive promotional intensity. This way, brands can remain effective in reaching Gen-Z consumers while reducing the risk of excessive consumption behavior that harms consumers.

5. Discussion

The results show that social media plays a central role in shaping Gen-Z's impulse buying behavior, particularly in the context of cosmetic products. Using the S-O-R framework, it can be understood that stimuli in the form of BGC, targeted

ads, influencer marketing, and UGC are able to trigger certain emotional responses, perceptions, and motivations in consumers which ultimately encourage impulsive behavior. This discussion highlighted three main points, namely the dominance of influencers and UGC as a stimulus, the role of emotions and social in shaping the consumer organism, and the ethical and practical implications for digital marketing in the cosmetics industry. First, the research findings show that influencers and UGC have the strongest influence on Gen-Z's impulsive behavior. This is in line with the characteristics of this generation that highly values authenticity, emotional connectedness, and social experience in the decision-making process (Tabassum et al., 2020). Compared to BGC which tends to be formal and targeted ads based on algorithms, influencers and UGC are considered more relevant because they present real experiences and personal narratives.

Thus, brands that rely on influencer-based and UGC-based marketing strategies are better able to create emotional closeness with consumers, although these strategies also increase the risk of impulse purchases. Second, from an organism perspective, this study confirms that emotional and social factors are more dominant than rational factors in influencing Gen-Z behavior. Positive emotions such as excitement and curiosity, coupled with the fear of missing out (FoMO) phenomenon, strengthen the urge to immediately buy cosmetic products that are currently popular (Reichstein & Brusch, 2019). Social factors such as the desire to be recognized, follow trends, and maintain self-image in online communities are also strong motivations in consumption behavior. These findings reinforce the relevance of the S-O-R model in the context of digital marketing, where emotional stimuli

have been shown to be more effective in driving consumer responses. However, it also shows Gen-Z's vulnerability to emotional manipulation, which raises ethical questions regarding the limitations of digital marketing strategies.

Third, in terms of practical implications, this study emphasizes that cosmetic brands need to balance the effectiveness of marketing strategies with ethical responsibility. Overly aggressive strategies, such as oversupply of BGC and intensive advertising, have the potential to generate consumer resistance who feel bombarded with information (Teixeira et al., 2023). On the other hand, strategies based on sustainability and authenticity can actually increase long-term trust and consumer loyalty without having to trigger excessive impulsive behavior. This is in line with research results that emphasize the importance of building trust through content that is consistent, transparent, and in line with Gen-Z values that are more critical of unethical marketing practices.

From an academic perspective, this research contributes by integrating the S-O-R framework in analyzing the phenomenon of impulsive buying of Gen-Z cosmetics. Most previous studies have only highlighted the influence of a single stimulus, for example influencer or UGC, without comparing the four main forms of stimulus simultaneously (Peng, 2021). This study fills the gap by showing that the combination of stimuli exerts different influences, and that the effectiveness of stimuli is strongly influenced by the perception of authenticity and emotional connectedness. Thus, the S-O-R model proves relevant as a theoretical framework to explain how digital stimuli affect psychological processes and consumer impulsive behavior. However, there are still limitations that need to be considered. The results

of this literature study are mostly sourced from the context of certain countries, such as Indonesia, China, and Europe, so generalizations to the global level are still limited. In addition, some studies use a quantitative approach with survey instruments that can limit in-depth exploration of consumers' subjective experiences. Therefore, future research could use qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews or digital ethnography to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Gen-Z's experiences in interacting with social media stimuli.

This discussion shows that Gen-Z's impulsive behavior in cosmetic consumption is the result of a complex interaction between digital stimuli and the emotional and social factors that make up the consumer organism. Social media is not only a communication channel, but also a psychological and social arena that greatly influences the way Gen-Z shapes their identity, perceptions, and consumption decisions. Therefore, it is important for cosmetics brands to design marketing strategies that are not only effective in driving purchases, but also ethical, sustainable, and in line with the values of the younger generation who are increasingly critical of digital marketing practices.

6. Conclusion

This research shows that social media has a dominant role in shaping Gen-Z's impulsive buying behavior in cosmetic products. Through the S-O-R framework, it can be understood that stimuli in the form of digital content from brands, targeted ads, influencers, and user-generated content interact with the psychological aspects of consumers, such as emotions, perceptions, and motivations, resulting in

responses in the form of spontaneous purchases. Gen-Z as digital natives are very responsive to visual content, personal narratives, and social experiences presented through social media, making them more vulnerable to making purchases without planning. The results also show that influencer marketing and user-generated content are the most influential stimuli because they are considered authentic and relatable, while brand-generated content and paid advertising play a secondary role in building product awareness and legitimacy. Positive emotions such as enthusiasm and curiosity, as well as social motivations such as the desire to be recognized and follow trends, reinforce the tendency of Gen-Z to make impulse purchases.

This phenomenon is amplified by the fast-paced dynamics of social media, where new trends emerge and disappear in a short period of time, thus triggering an instant push in young consumers to buy products immediately. From a practical perspective, this study emphasizes the importance of cosmetic brands designing digital marketing strategies that are not only effective, but also ethical and sustainable. An overly aggressive approach risks generating resistance, while an authenticity and sustainability-based strategy can strengthen consumer loyalty in the long run. From a theoretical perspective, this study expands the application of the S-O-R model in the context of digital marketing by showing that authenticity and social experience are important elements in explaining the impulsive behavior of Gen-Z. Thus, this research not only makes an academic contribution, but also offers practical insights for the cosmetics industry in dealing with the dynamics of consumer behavior in the social media era.

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