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Identification and Analysis of Socio-Cultural Strategies Affecting Generation Z's Purchasing Behavior in the Social Media Environment

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

In recent years, the convergence of cultural shifts, social transformations, and the rapid evolution of digital technologies has profoundly impacted consumer behavior, especially among Generation Z. This generation, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is characterized by its digital nativity, heightened cultural awareness, and demand for personalized and immediate interactions. In Iran, Generation Z constitutes a growing and influential segment of consumers whose purchasing decisions are shaped by dynamic socio-cultural values and extensive engagement with social media platforms. These individuals seek authenticity, brand transparency, and alignment with social values, and they interact with content in ways that reflect their ideological, aesthetic, and emotional preferences. Given the increasing importance of cultural narratives in consumer-brand relationships and the central role of digital media in everyday life, the present study seeks to identify and analyze the key socio-cultural strategies that influence the purchasing behavior of Generation Z in the social media environment. By doing so, it aims to contribute to developing contextually grounded, culturally relevant marketing strategies that are attuned to this generation's behavioral patterns and expectations.

Research Methodology

To address the research objectives, the study employed a qualitative methodology based on theme-oriented content analysis with an inductive approach. Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with twelve experts in cultural marketing, consumer behavior, and digital media. These participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance and richness of insight. The interview transcripts were analyzed systematically, involving open coding, categorizing emerging themes, and synthesis into conceptual dimensions. The qualitative analysis was supported by MAXQDA software, facilitating the code organization and refinement. Through this process, forty-five sub-categories were identified and subsequently grouped into thirteen major themes, which were then classified into four overarching dimensions: cultural and social characteristics of Generation Z in purchasing behavior (such as the influence of reference groups, preference for short-form content, brand responsibility, and the need for identity differentiation); socio-cultural strategies in marketing and sales (such as personalized promotions, use of influencers, and occasion-based incentives); cultural shifts in the shopping experience (including the use of augmented reality and artificial intelligence for customized product suggestions); and the role of emerging technologies (such as declining influence of traditional media, increased trust in AI, and integration of commerce with messaging platforms). These dimensions were organized using an Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) framework to determine each element's hierarchical structure and strategic importance.

Findings

The study's findings indicate that cultural identity, peer influence, and interactive digital experiences firmly shape Generation Z's purchasing behavior in Iran. Members of this generation are highly responsive to user-generated content, influencer opinions, and peer recommendations shared through social media platforms. They prefer short videos, visual content, and rapid interactions over traditional advertisements. Furthermore, Generation Z values

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brand authenticity, ethical conduct, and social responsibility, favoring brands that reflect environmental awareness, transparency, and cultural alignment. Emotional and symbolic associations with national or local identity significantly influence purchase decisions. Despite tendencies toward impulsive buying, Generation Z also considers price fairness and added value when making purchases. Marketing strategies such as flash sales, group deals, and time-sensitive discounts effectively engage this segment. On the technological front, the study highlights the role of augmented reality in enhancing online product experiences and artificial intelligence in delivering personalized recommendations and automating customer service. These technologies create a more immersive, trustworthy, and efficient shopping journey. Moreover, the diminishing effectiveness of traditional advertising underscores the need for brands to adopt interactive, social media-driven, and culturally embedded marketing approaches to remain relevant.

Conclusion

The study concludes that purchasing behavior among Iranian Generation Z is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by evolving cultural dynamics, technological advancements, and deepening engagement with digital media. Marketers and cultural producers must adopt an integrated approach that combines cultural storytelling with digital innovation and individualized engagement to influence this generation effectively. Strategies should leverage social media platforms not merely as promotional tools, but as cultural environments where values are shared and identities are constructed. The use of artistic and cultural influencers, rather than purely commercial figures, can strengthen emotional resonance and perceived authenticity. Incorporating augmented reality into the digital presentation of cultural products can enhance experiential depth, while artificial intelligence enables personalized recommendations that align with individual values and consumption habits.

Furthermore, offering multi-format digital cultural products, building consumer communities centered around shared values, and embedding economic incentives within culturally meaningful campaigns can reinforce brand loyalty. The implications of this research extend to cultural policymakers, digital marketers, and content producers who aim to remain competitive and socially relevant in Iran's evolving market landscape. Recognizing and strategically responding to the socio-cultural drivers of Generation Z's purchasing behavior will be key to creating sustainable and resonant consumer relationships in the digital era.

Keywords: Generation Z, purchasing behavior, social media, cultural strategies, Iranian consumers, influencer marketing, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, digital culture.