



Social Sciences Spectrum

A Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, HEC recognized [Y-category](#) Research Journal

E-ISSN: [3006-0427](#) P-ISSN: [3006-0419](#)

Volume 05, Issue 02, 2026

Web link: <https://sss.org.pk/index.php/sss>



The Influence of Social Media Marketing on Gen Z's Buying Behavior; A Case Study of Restaurant Cafe's in Lahore

Dr. Muhammad Kamran¹ Eesha Rashid² Warda Zulfiqar³ Fatima Farooq⁴

Article Information [YY-MM-DD]

Received	2026-04-12	Revised	2026-05-31	Accepted	2026-06-12
-----------------	------------	----------------	------------	-----------------	------------

Citation (APA):

Kamran, M., Rashid, E., Zulfiqar, W & Farooq, F (2026). The influence of social media marketing on Gen Z's buying behavior; A case study of restaurant cafe's in Lahore. *Social Sciences Spectrum*, 5(2), 285-301.
<https://doi.org/10.71085/sss.05.02.541>

Abstract

This research aims to analyze the impact of social media marketing on the purchasing and consumption behavior of Generation Z in Lahore cafes and restaurants. The research examines the impact of Instagram, TikTok, visual and aesthetic content, online reviews, eWOM, influencer marketing. The quantitative study was conducted through a structured self-administered online survey method targeting 203 Gen Z respondents in Lahore, using purposive and convenience sampling techniques. The survey comprised two sections. Section B used a five-point Likert scale to measure social media activity, and behavioral/attitudinal responses. Section A collected demographic data (gender, age, occupation, and monthly dining spend). Descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution, percentage analysis, and mean score interpretation, were performed. Social media platforms such as Instagram (75.4%) and TikTok (16.7%) were places where cafes could be found. The survey's highest agreement rate was 72.9% of respondents preferring cafes with attractive backgrounds for personal photography, and 65.0% saying they visited cafes frequently due to visually appealing social media content. The study found that social media marketing has a significant, quantitative and complex impact on Gen Z café consumption in Lahore. The visual aesthetics, platform-specific content tactics and online reputation management influence the behavior. The results add to the limited empirical research on the direct behavioral effects of social media marketing in Pakistan's hospitality industry and provide practical guidance for digital marketers and café owners targeting Gen Z in Lahore.

Keywords: Instagram, TikTok, Instagrammable Content, eWOM, User Generated Content, Impulse Buying, Cafe Culture Pakistan, Social Media Marketing, Generation Z, Consumer Behaviour, Restraunt Cafes, Lahore.

¹ Assistant Professor, College of Earth and Environmental Sciences, The University of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

² Tourism and Hospitality Management College of Earth and Environmental Sciences, The University of Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

³ Tourism and Hospitality Management College of Earth and Environmental Sciences, The University of Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

⁴ Tourism and Hospitality Management College of Earth and Environmental Sciences, The University of Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: Dr. Muhammad Kamran, **Correspondence through:** muhammadkamran.cees@pu.edu.pk



Content from this work may be used under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#) that allows others to share the work with an acknowledgment of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal.

Introduction

Context and Background

The rapid rise of social media has led to a drastic change in the ways people communicate, search for information, and make purchases in the twenty-first century. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and YouTube are becoming part of everyday life, impacting not only social life but also consumer behaviour. Companies are increasingly using Social Media Marketing (SMM) to promote their goods and services through engaging content, influencer collaboration and targeted advertising. Therefore, social media has proved to be a powerful tool in influencing customer views, preferences and buying decisions in several sectors.

Unlike previous generations, they rely far more on peer reviews, recommendations by influencers and glamorous content instead of traditional advertising. They prefer authenticity, creativity and relatability and make social media marketing more effective in shaping their buying and consuming patterns. The emergence of social media and the Gen Z consumer, has transformed the restaurant and café business. Cafes are no longer rated on the quality of food only, additional factors such as ambiance, aesthetic presentation and internet presence are key to entice clients.

Café culture has become successful in neighbourhoods like DHA, Gulberg and Johar Town where cafes are aggressively marketing themselves on social media to target the youth. In the coffee business, concepts like Instagrammable settings, food photography, influencer marketing and user-generated content have been used to build a brand image and improve consumer engagement. Although social media marketing is becoming more and more important in the café business, there is very little study being conducted to analyse its influence on Gen Z customer behaviour in the local context of Lahore.

Most of the existing studies are conducted in the Western or other international markets, with different cultural, social, and economic conditions. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the impact of social media marketing on the consuming behavior of generation z. The study is conducted in restaurant cafes of Lahore. The study aims to determine the main factors affecting the decision-making of Gen Z and provide useful insights for café owners and marketers in developing effective social media strategies in a highly competitive market.

Research Objectives

1. To ascertain the response of Lahore restaurant cafes to social media marketing campaigns of the Gen Z diners.
2. To determine the most popular social media channels like Instagram, TikTok used by Generation Z for the selection of the restaurants cafes Lahore.
3. To explore Gen Z's perception of restaurant cafes using user generated content, ratings and online reviews.
4. To learn whether and how Gen Z is influenced to try new restaurants or food items by visually appealing "Instagrammable" content.

Research Questions

Objective 1: Impact of Actual buying/ Consuming behaviour

1. Out of all the individuals that view restaurant advertisements on social media in Lahore, how many end up purchasing?

2. How does the advertisement on social media influence the entire expenses of millennials and Gen Zers on one visit to the café?
3. How does social media use affect Gen Z customers' propensity to "impulse buy" certain menu items?

Objective 2: Principal Mediums

4. Which social media platform would provide the optimum ratio of "viewing content" and "physically visiting" visitors for a café in Lahore?
5. How do the brief videos of TikTok affect the choice of restaurant compared to the static photographs on Instagram?
6. How do Facebook's idiosyncrasies, such as local community groups, affect Gen Z's cafe choices in relation to visual platforms?

Objective 3: The Importance of Reviews and User Generated Content

7. How do Gen Z customers in Lahore utilise star ratings on Google and Facebook to "shortlist" cafes first place?
8. How much does user-generated material (photos and videos posted by other customers) help to support the legitimacy of a café's own advertising?
9. One poor review, and a Gen Z consumer won't visit a café promoted on social media?

4th Objective: The "Instagrammable" Content

10. What is the effect of "beauty" or "Instagrammability" of a cafe's décor on a customer's first-time visit intention?
11. To what extent does the visual attractiveness of a certain "viral" food item affect the interest in trying it, regardless of the price?
12. How might the social capital that may be generated via "checking-in" at a fashionable café impact the chances that Generation Z members would pick that venue over less attractive options?

Scope of the Study

This research investigates the influence of social media marketing on buying and consuming pattern of Generation Z, particularly on cafés of Lahore. Only Gen Zers (18-27 years of age) who are major social media users (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, etc.) are taken into account in the research. This is due to the popularity of these platforms for discovering and evaluating cafés. This research aims to examine the effect of social media marketing components (i.e., influence marketing, eWOM, visual material, advertisements, and user-generated content) on customers' purchase decision, choice of a café, and consumption of the product. It also explores the impact of factors such as trust, engagement and perceived authenticity on Gen Z decision makers.

The study is confined to a few clusters of Lahore cafés only, due to the prominence of café culture and social media in these locations, i.e., DHA, Gulberg, and Johar Town. The research focuses on customer decision-making to visit cafés, and dine-in café experiences. It is not about online grocery purchasing or general e-commerce behaviour.

However, this research solely considers the café and restaurant sector and does not include any other age group, cities of Pakistan, and kinds of enterprises. Furthermore, the research is mainly concerned with the behaviour of the customers influenced by the marketing activities on social media rather than the operational or financial success of the cafes.

Literature Review

The rise of the “experience economy” has radically changed the interaction between business and customers on a worldwide scale. Rapid development of the “Internet of Things” and digital marketing technologies has radically transformed the worldwide hospitality scene (Nartea & Barrera, 2021). Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok and Facebook have transformed from a basic communication tool to the primary driver of client behaviour for the restaurant business. This trend is notably visible in Pakistan, where there is a boom in internet and smartphone usage, which is opening new channels for the younger consumers to search for dining choices via digital “front doors” (Lakho & Rashid, 2024).

Social media has brought new means of amusement and research worldwide. Through food vlogging, “netizens” may access and study merchants before ever visiting them. And the food and beverage business has redirected its marketing spending from conventional media to “e-word-of-mouth” (eWOM) and viral marketing. For today’s diners, the value of a meal isn’t just about how it tastes or how much it costs, but about its “social currency” - the chance to share a visually appealing experience with an online community. (Ali, 2025)

The S-O-R model offers an important basis for explaining how marketing settings in the external world convert into bodily activities. In restaurant cafés, Stimuli (S) refers to the marketing signals like high-definition food photographs, stylish café reels and digital commercials. These inputs affect the Organism (O) – the interior emotional and cognitive condition of the Gen Z consumer – resulting in a Response (R). This is how digital signals prompt “approach behaviors” such as a physical visit to a cafe in Lahore or a real purchase. The digital marketing works as a Stimulus, which changes the internal emotional state of the customer (Organism) and causes a Response in behaviour, such as visiting a restaurant (Lakho & Rashid, 2024).

Lastly, a few of the present research are more targeted at intermediate outcomes like brand awareness, brand image, trust, emotional attachment and loyalty instead of the direct effect of social media marketing on “actual purchase and consumption decisions” in a localised hospitality scenario. These characteristics are helpful in understanding consumer psychology but they are not sufficient to determine whether Gen Z customers are genuinely convinced to visit a café, spend more, visit more often, try marketed goods, or prefer one café over another because of social media impact. This leaves a practical void for cafe marketers and academics who need to grasp the direct behavioural results of social media marketing in a competitive urban cafe setting. (Arif et al., 2024)

The mediating role of attractiveness, trustworthiness and knowledge of social media influencers in the relationship between a digital post and a consumer’s buying intention is examined using the Source Credibility model. “Credibility, attractiveness, and authenticity” are the biggest determinants of whether a Gen Z customer would follow a suggestion (Ahmad & Juhari, 2024).

Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) is a distinct population that prefers authenticity, transparency and accessible narrative above conventional advertising (Ahmad & Juhari, 2024). They are ‘digital natives’ and depend on social media platforms for discovery. Their consuming

behaviour is typically defined by the transition from physical things to “experiences,” where the added value of a brand is linked to its social and environmental values (Salam et al., 2024).

For the current Gen Z consumer, the physical setting of the café is frequently as essential as the cuisine, with high-quality food photography and “Instagrammable” café décor stimulating hunger and interest, functioning as a key “pull factor” for new consumers (Hussain & Khan, 2024).

Focuses on visual aesthetics and appealing café settings""Instagrammability" is a term used to describe the design elements—like distinctive lighting, neon signs, minimalist furniture, and flowery walls—that make a room worth capturing. In Lahore’s crowded café industry, companies are increasingly spending big to develop “content-ready” interiors to entice consumers to generate free marketing material. The visual appeal operates as a silent sales representative who pushes the buyer from seeing a picture to physically approaching the place. (Rahman & Ahmed, 2024)

Informational marketing and pricing comments effect the purchase intention of midscale restaurants in Pakistan popular on Facebook (Hayat et al., 2024).

Influencers are great for building mass awareness via professional “vlogs”, but Gen Z places great importance on User-Generated Content (UGC), the unedited reviews and photographs shared by normal consumers. of Lahore, a genuine evaluation from a fellow member of a city-based culinary club has more weight than a hired influencer’s recommendation. The research explores how these two diverse digital sources work together to establish the trust essential for a customer to buy from a new cafe.

Gen Z trusts peer recommendations and user generated content (UGC) over brand led ads (Malik & Khan, 2024). Positive eWOM boosts trust and minimises “perceived risk” of a trial of a new restaurant but unfavourable reviews might quickly deter prospective consumers. (Lakho & Rashid, 2024; Kazmi et al., 2024).

Consumers are purchasing not only a commodity (coffee or a meal), but a “memorable moment” in the “experience economy.” In Lahore, café culture has become a lifestyle choice. The modern cafe is not simply a place to eat. It is a hybrid area where people co-work, socialise and ‘digital check-in’. This section discusses how social media marketing in Lahore, in particular, promotes the “social status” of certain places, where the act of being seen at a particular “aesthetic” café offers social capital to the Gen Z customer. (Kazmi et al., 2024).

Most of the current research are mainly focused on “Purchase Intention” (the intention to purchase). There are no empirical statistics on “Actual Consuming Behavior” such as frequency of physical visits, real amount spent, and long term consuming patterns in a physical restaurant environment. Ahmad & Juhari, 2024; Pervin et al., 2024)

While research such as Zafar & Younis (2020) looks at supermarkets and others examine the overall “restaurant landscape” of Pakistan, study specifically on the “Restaurant Café” sub-sector in Lahore is fairly limited. (Sikandar & Ahmed, 2024)

Existing studies provide helpful insights into the role of social media in affecting attitudes, intentions, trust and loyalty but they do not fully examine the integrated, real-world behavioural effect in the unique setting of Lahore’s café business. Most study is on consumer psychology rather than on direct measures of the effect of marketing on real purchase choices, frequency of visits, and physical expenditure. Ahmad & Juhari, 2024; Pervin et al., 2024)

Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research strategy and methodologies that were utilized to study the effect of social media marketing on the consuming behaviour of Generation Z in Lahore's restaurant cafes. It presents the study concept, demographic and sample strategies, data collecting equipment and data analysis processes.

Purpose of the study:

The main aim of this study is to investigate the effect of social media marketing on the actual buying behaviour of Generation Z in restaurant cafes of Lahore.

The research especially targets at:

- Understand the effect of social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, TikTok) on café discovery
- Investigate the impact of visual appeal and aesthetic content on decision making
- Gauge the effect of social media influencers and online reviews on customer confidence
- Discover whether social media really leads to traffic, sales and repeat visits

Type of data

Primary data

The research is mostly based on primary data, namely;

- Data obtained directly from respondents

Secondary data

Secondary data are solely utilized for:

- Review of literature

Nature of data

Your data are:

1. Quantative data

- Numerical in type
- e.g. Likert scale values, percentages, rates

Software used:

- Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

Theoretical framework

The Theoretical Framework of this study is mostly based on:

Stimulus Organism-Response (**S-O-R**) Model. The model offers a framework for a psychological analysis of the influence of digital environments on human behaviour. The external social media triggers for Lahore's café business include high quality visual aesthetics (Instagrammable interiors), influencer endorsements and online peer reviews. These inputs act on the Organism — the internal psychological state of the Generation Z client, influencing their perceptions of brand trust, desire and emotional attachment to a certain café.

The concept introduces an independent causal pathway between digital marketing and the physical environment in the context of the S-O-R paradigm. The Independent Variables are defined as the many dimensions of social media marketing and the Dependent Variable is the genuine buying behavior of the youth in Lahore. This theoretical framework is vital to go beyond mere correlation, as it lets the researcher explain why and how a given TikTok film or Instagram post leads to a consumer's decision to visit a particular café in DHA or Gulberg.

Results and Discussions

This chapter's core data was collected from Generation Z customers in Lahore using a structured online questionnaire and is analyzed in detail in this chapter. The data were acquired from 203 true respondents. The data were analyzed by using the descriptive statistical methods including frequency distribution, percentage analysis and interpretation of the mean score of the Likert scale. The chapter has three important sections. Section 4.2 describes the demographic profile of the respondents (Section A of the questionnaire), Section 4.3 describes the social media engagement patterns and Section 4.4 discusses the responses of the Likert scale with respect to the behavioural impact of social media marketing on the decision to consume café products.

Each conclusion is supported by a frequency distribution table and a visual chart (bar chart or pie chart) and is followed by an interpretative discussion that connects the empirical results to the research objectives and theoretical frameworks described in the literature review.

Respondents' Demographic Profile (Section A)

Four demographic factors were recorded in section A of the questionnaire. These include gender, age group, occupation and average monthly eating expenditure. These characteristics confirmed that the sample consisted predominantly of Gen Z who are active café visitors in Lahore.

The gender distribution of the 203 valid respondents can be seen in Table below

Table: *Frequency Distribution – Gender*

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Valid %
Female	111	54.7%	54.7%
Male	92	45.3%	45.3%
Total	203	100%	100%

The results show that 54.7% of the respondents were female (n=111) and 45.3% were male (n=92).

Age Group

The age distribution of respondents in the Generation Z bracket may be seen in Table 4.2 and Figure 4.2 below.

Table: Frequency Distribution – Age Group

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
18–21 Years	72	35.5%	35.5%
22–26 Years	131	64.5%	100.0%
Total	203	100%	

Source: *Primary Data (Survey, 2024)*

Profile of Occupation

Table below show the occupational background of respondents

Table: Frequency Distribution – Occupation

Occupation	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
University Student	119	58.6%	58.6%
Employed / Self-Employed	48	23.6%	82.3%
Unemployed	24	11.8%	94.1%
Other	12	5.9%	100.0%
Total	203	100%	

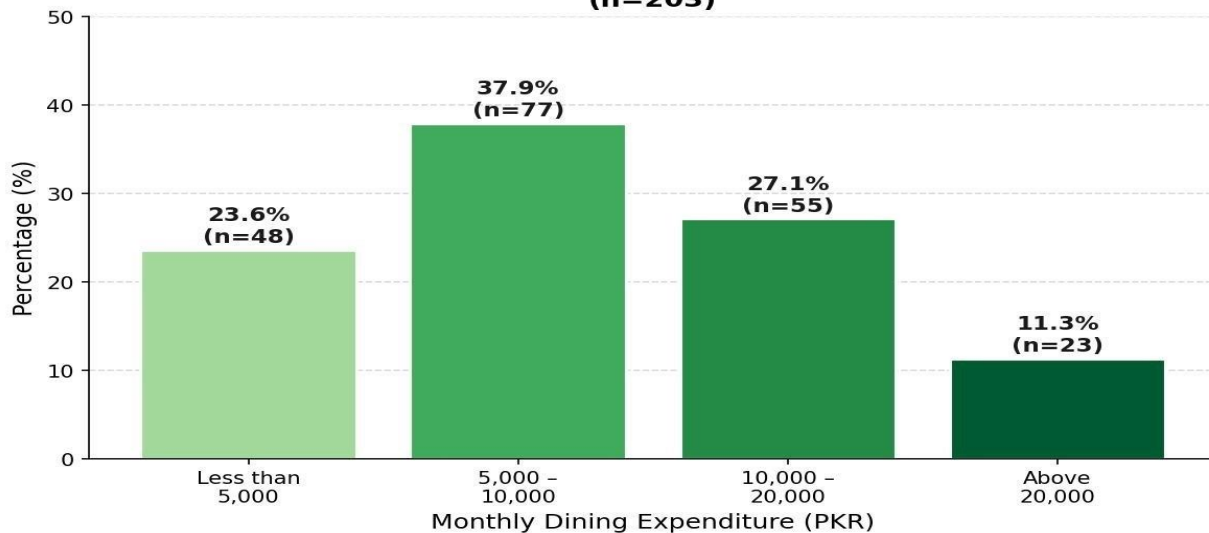
The results suggest that the largest single occupational category were university students, who classified themselves as such (n=119, 58.6%). Of the respondents, 23.6% (n=48) were employed, 11.8% (n=24) were self-employed, 11.8% (n=24) were jobless and 5.9% (n=12) picked “Other.”

Monthly Food Expense

Figure below illustrates the average monthly dining expenditure on eating out by respondents.

The data suggest that the largest group of respondents (37.9%, n=77) spent between PKR 5,000

Figure 4.4: Monthly Dining Expenditure (n=203)



and 10,000 on monthly dining out followed by 27.1% (n=55) spending between PKR 10,000 and 20,000. 23.6% (n=48) spent less than PKR 5000 and 11.3% (n=23) spent greater than PKR 20000.

Primary Café Discovery Platform (Q5)

Table below indicate the highest social media site utilized by respondents to find out new cafés.

Table: Most Used Platform for Café Discovery

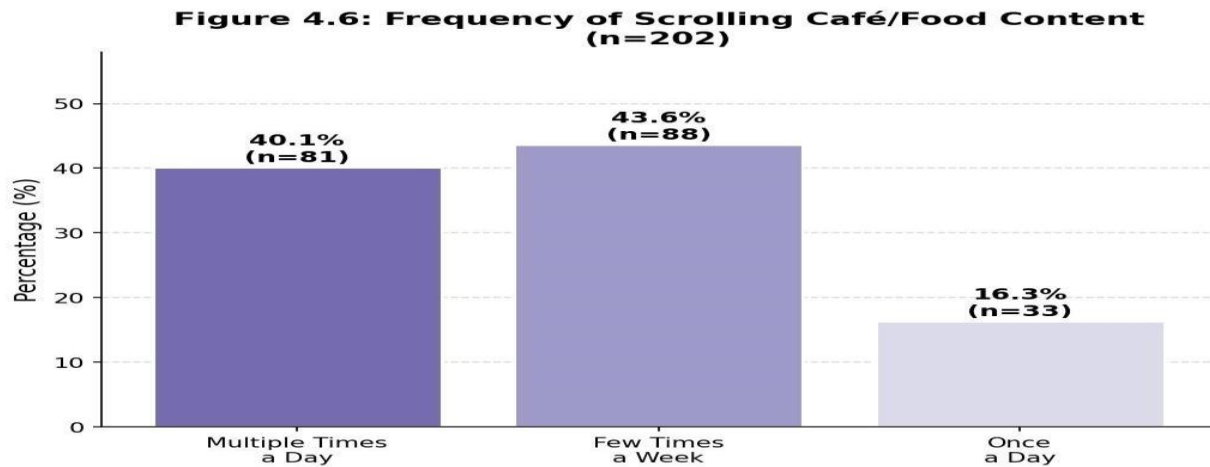
Platform	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
Instagram	153	75.4%	75.4%
TikTok	34	16.7%	92.1%
Snapchat	8	3.9%	96.1%
Facebook / Others	8	3.9%	100.0%
Total	203	100%	100%

The results are impressive: Instagram is by far the most popular discovery channel for cafés with 75.4% of respondents using it. (n=153) 16.7% (n=34) reported TikTok, while Snapchat and Facebook/Others were both 3.9% (n=8 each). The finding is strongly in favor of Research Objective 2.

Frequency of Engagement with Café/Food Content (Q6)

Figure below show the frequency of responder to browse on the internet about food vlogs/café.

Figure: Frequency of Scrolling Food/Café Content (n=202)



Results show that 43.6% of respondents (n=88) consume café/food-related information a few times a week and 40.1% (n=81), numerous times a day. Only 16.3% (n=33) indicated daily engagement.

Likert Scale Analysis – Social Media Marketing Behavioural Effect (Q7Q15)

Questions 7 to 15 were assessed using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to examine respondents’ behavioural and attitudinal responses to social media marketing in the context of café visits. Figure below visual overviews of all responses and a consolidated breakdown of all responses is provided in Table below presents a detailed analysis of each statement.

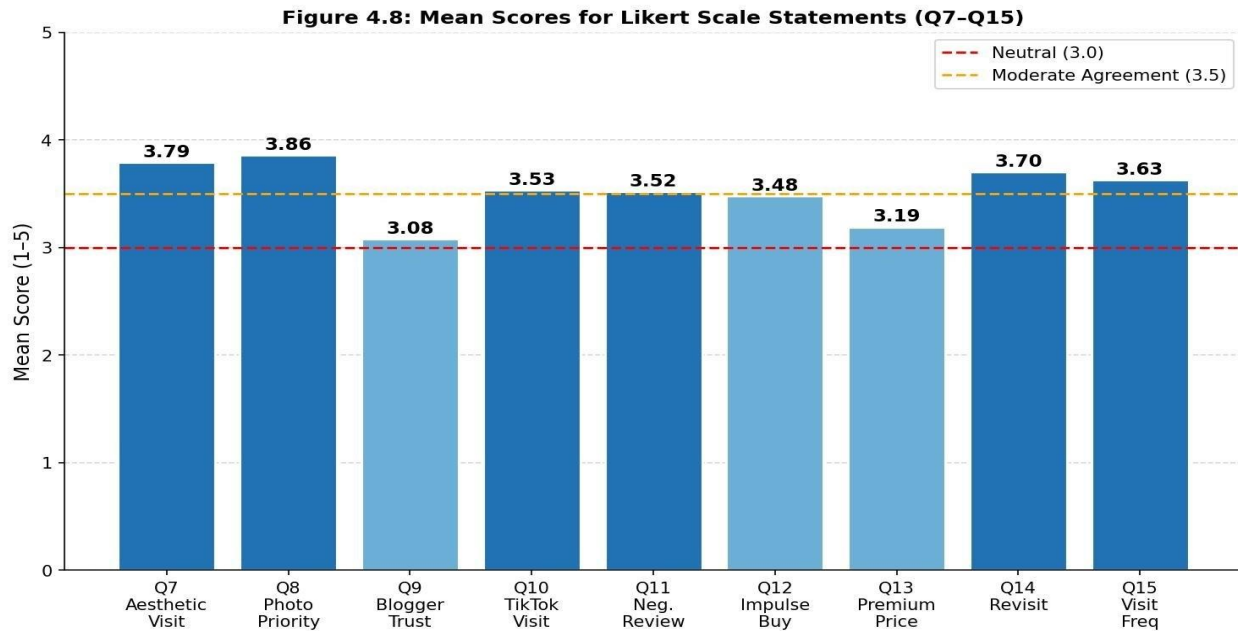
Table: Consolidated Likert Scale Response Summary (Q7–Q15)

Q No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
Q7	Visited café due to aesthetic/Instagrammable look	5.4%	7.4%	22.2%	33.0%	32.0%	3.79
Q8	Prioritize cafés for good photo backgrounds	6.9%	6.9%	13.3%	38.9%	34.0%	3.86
Q9	Trust food bloggers over traditional ads	9.0%	13.4%	41.3%	32.8%	3.5%	3.08
Q10	Physically visited café after TikTok/Reel	8.9%	10.4%	21.8%	36.1%	22.8%	3.53
Q11	Negative review deterred planned café visit	7.9%	13.9%	19.3%	36.1%	22.8%	3.52

Q12	Social media led to impulse purchase	5.0%	17.3%	24.3%	31.7%	21.8%	3.48
Q13	Willing to pay premium for shareable experience	8.4%	26.2%	19.8%	28.7%	16.8%	3.19
Q14	Revisit café for viral/trendy menu items	3.5%	9.4%	22.8%	42.1%	22.3%	3.70
Q15	Café visit frequency increased via social media	5.0%	12.9%	20.8%	36.6%	24.8%	3.63

Note: *SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, a = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree. Percentages shown.*

Figure: Mean Scores for All Likert Statements (Q7–Q15)



Summary of Main Results

The analysis presented in this chapter yields a number of important conclusions which, taken together, satisfy the research objectives of this study. First, the demographic profile exhibits that the sample is representative of Gen Z population of café goers in Lahore. The majority of the respondents are female (54.7%), aged 22–26 years (64.5%), and a high number of university students (58.6%). The monthly expenditure behaviour on eating shows that a considerable percentage of the respondents (65.0%) spend PKR 5,000 or over on monthly trips to cafes which indicates a considerable economic connection with the café sector.

Secondly, Instagram is the first choice to search for cafes (75.4%) then is TikTok (16.7%) that is still a strong site. With over 80% of respondent’s view café posts at least a few times a week, the

ease of content engagement shows social media as a fixture and strong force in the everyday consumer environment of Gen Z in Lahore.

Lastly, the Likert scale analysis revealed the highest level of behavioral agreement from the Gen Z respondents on the basis of the aesthetic and visual elements of the café marketing. The highest mean scores were for photo priority (Q8: 3.86) and aesthetic inspired visits (Q7: 3.79) followed by revisit behavior (Q14: 3.70) and overall increase in visit frequency (Q15: 3.63). For TikTok/Reel driven physical visits (Q10: 3.53) and inadequate review deterrence (Q11: 3.52) moderate to significant agreement was also seen. However, the somewhat lower scores for blogger trust (Q9: 3.08) and willingness to pay a premium price (Q13: 3.19) reveal complexities and complexity in Gen Z consumer behavior that deserve more examination.

Together the results demonstrate that social media marketing does indeed have a large and multi-faceted effect on the actual purchase and consuming behavior of Generation Z in restaurant cafés in Lahore. The most impactful behavioral drivers are visual content, platform specific engagement, peer reviews and aesthetic appeal.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The concluding chapter sums up the key findings of the study, formulates the evidence based conclusions with respect to the stated research objectives and research questions, and presents practical recommendations to cafe owners, digital marketers, and industry practitioners in the competitive cafe market of Lahore. The chapter further acknowledges the limitations of the study and offers suggestions for future research that may extend the empirical foundations presented in this chapter.

The main objective of this research was to study the impact of social media marketing on actual buying and consuming behaviour of generation Z in restaurant cafes of Lahore Pakistan. Most of the preceding studies have centred on intermediate outcomes such as brand awareness, brand image, or purchase intention. This study, however, attempted to explore the immediate behavioral consequences (e.g., physical visiting the cafe, impulse buying, revisit frequency, and overall changes in dining behaviour) of particular social media marketing stimuli.

Quantitative research design was used. A structured questionnaire was prepared and sent online to 203 valid respondents of Gen Z in Lahore. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, frequency distribution and Likert scale mean score analysis. The results are discussed below with respect to each of the four research objectives.

The first and foremost research objective was to investigate if social media marketing leads to actual behavioural outcomes in Gen Z café consumers in Lahore, not only affecting their opinions or intentions. The results strongly suggest that this translation does occur and does occur across several aspects of behaviour.

A total of 65.0% respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they physically visited a café simply because the décor is attractive or Instagrammable on social media (Q7, Mean=3.79). This suggests that exposure to visual content on social media sites directly results in a physical visit, a behavioural not attitudinal impact. Moreover, 58.9% stated that they have physically visited a café to sample a certain dish they saw on TikTok or Instagram Reels (Q10, Mean=3.53) which further confirms short-form video content as a successful conversion technique for the café industry.

Social media advertising also influenced unplanned purchase behavior, with 53.5% of respondents reporting that they had been prompted to make impulse purchases, due to social media

advertisements they saw when visiting a café (Q12, Mean=3.48). More importantly, 61.4% responded that their overall frequency of visits to cafés has increased as a direct result of social media feed exposure (Q15, Mean=3.63). The third result is highly important as it means that social media marketing is not only influencing individual transaction decisions but also changing the consumption habits of Gen Z café consumers in Lahore over the passage of time.” These results are consistent with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, where the social media content (Stimulus) elicits emotional and cognitive engagement (Organism) that leads in concrete physical and financial responses (Response).

Suggestions

The findings of this study result in the following evidence-based recommendations for café owners, digital marketers and social media strategists in the restaurant café industry of Lahore. These recommendations are based on the empirical findings of this study and are intended to be practical and feasible within the local business environment. Context.

1. Invest in Instagram-First Marketing Strategy

Instagram is the major medium for 75.4% of Gen Z respondents to discover cafés, so café owners need to treat Instagram as their main marketing channel. This means regularly posting Reels and Stories with great quality culinary photography Post during peak hours of usage and use relevant local hashtags (e.g. #LahoreEats, #CafeLahore) to increase organic reach within the Gen Z audience.

2 Build and Manage Instagrammable Physical Spaces

Q8 scored the highest mean score (3.86) over Q7 (3.79). The evidence is clear, physical aesthetic design is a key factor driving café choice for Gen Z. Cafés should invest in visually distinctive interiors - unique lighting, neon signs, floral walls or themed décor which can serve as natural backdrops for customer content creation. These “contentready” surroundings are perfect for converting customers into unpaid brand ambassadors.

3. TikTok and Instagram Reels for Food Reveal

3.53 (Q10). 58.9% of respondents personally visited a café after watching a dish on TikTok or Reels. Café owners must build a specific short-form video content strategy, focusing on eye-catching food displays, “viral dish” forms and behind-the-scenes information. Partnering with TikTok Food Creators in Lahore can increase reach and create the urgency based FOMO effect that leads to instant visits.

4. Add Regular Menu Items Based on Trends & Virality

Q14 (Mean=3.70) reveals that 64.4% of Gen Z consumers return to cafés that consistently offer trendy or viral menu items they see online. Cafés should employ a dynamic menu strategy that includes seasonal offers, viral culinary trends (such a unique drink or a visually spectacular dessert) and exclusive “social media specials” to encourage repeat visits and ongoing content creation by customers.

5. Use Targeted Social Media Ads to Convert Impulse Shoppers

53.5% of the respondents verified impulse buying due to social media marketing (Q12, Mean=3.48). Cafes should be running targeted paid campaigns, especially Instagram Stories ads and TikTok In-Feed commercials, to promote limited-time offers, new product launches and

visually engaging content. This tactic is built on Gen Z's propensity to purchase things on impulse when they see a pretty picture in their feed.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study suggests various possibilities for future research that will build on and extend the findings. For scholars and researchers interested in social media marketing, consumer behaviour and the hotel business in Pakistan, the following directions are suggested:

- Future research should consider larger, probabilistic sample sizes (> 500 respondents) to increase the statistical power and generalisability of findings beyond Lahore to other major urban areas of Pakistan such as Karachi, Islamabad and Faisalabad.
- A comparative research of the impact of social media marketing on Gen Z and Millennial consumers in the café business in Lahore could provide useful insights into generational shifts in digital consumer behaviour, and assist café marketers build generation-specific strategies.

Future research should employ sophisticated inferential statistical techniques such as multiple regression analysis, factor analysis, and structural equation modelling (SEM) to establish the causal relationship between specific social media marketing variables (e.g. influencer content, aesthetic visuals, eWOM) and actual behavioural outcomes including spending amount, visit frequency, and brand loyalty.

A longitudinal study of Gen Z café consumption behaviour over a six to twelve-month period before and after targeted social media campaigns would provide stronger causal evidence of the direct behavioural impact of social media marketing, and would avoid the temporal restrictions of the current cross-sectional design.

Due to its fast increasing market share among Gen Z consumers in Pakistan, future research should investigate the role of TikTok more fully as a unique marketing channel. There is definitely a case for research to compare TikTok vs Instagram content conversion rates and behavioural consequences in the café sector, which would be really useful for marketers.

Researching the effect of negative eWOM on revenue and loss rates in cafés in Lahore would support this study's behavioural deterrent finding and provide café operators with quantitative data justifying investment in online reputation management. • Further studies can look into the ethics of social media marketing to Gen Z, including transparency in influencer partnerships, psychological effects of FOMO marketing, and long-term implications of aspirational lifestyle messages to the financial decisions of young consumers in Pakistan.

Qualitative or mixed-methods study that included focus groups or in-depth interviews with Gen Z café consumers in Lahore would provide a richer contextual understanding of the psychological processes underlying the quantitative patterns uncovered in this study – particularly the selective nature of blogger trust and the nuanced relationship between aesthetic appeal and willingness to pay.

Conclusions

The present study had the objective to investigate a practically and academically meaningful topic i.e. whether social media marketing truly effects the dining behaviour of Generation Z in restaurant cafés in Lahore or it only influences their attitudes and intentions? This thesis answers this question in affirmative and in no uncertain terms; social media marketing does have real and measurable behavioral effects on Gen Z café consumers in Lahore.

Instagram and TikTok have radically transformed the way Lahore's young consumers discover, assess, choose and re-visit restaurant cafés. The aesthetic characteristics of digital café marketing — Instagrammable decor, visually appealing food displays, and shareable experiences – have become the predominant behavioural triggers of the current age. At the same time, the possibility of negative eWOM to discourage planned visits highlights the double-edged sword of social media as a marketing tool, as it can be used to spread both positive and bad brand views with equal efficiency.

So what does this mean for cafe owners and digital marketers in Lahore? Social media marketing is not an add-on to traditional marketing, but the core venue for influencing Gen Z customer behaviour. Urban cafes that invest strategically in Instagram-first content creation, stunning physical design, short-form video marketing and proactive reputation management will be best positioned to acquire, convert and keep the Gen Z customer segment in an increasingly competitive market.

The study contributes to a growing body of empirical work on social media marketing in the Pakistani hospitality industry and addresses a specific gap in the field by analyzing the actual behavioral effects within the localized setting of the Lahore café industry. The findings, conclusions and recommendations presented here are considered to be a beneficial resource for academia scholars and industry practitioners to comprehend and harness the behavioral potential of social media marketing in the digital era.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

Funding

The authors did not mention any funding for this research.

References

- Ahmad, N., & Juhari, A. S. (2024). The impact of social media influencers on purchase intention of Gen Z: The mediating effect of perceived authenticity and credibility. *Journal of Digital Marketing and Consumer Behavior*, 12(1), pp. 45-63.
- Ali, S. (2025). The influence of food vlogging on dietary practices and consumer behaviors among Gen Z: A digital ethnography analysis. *Asian Journal of Communication and Media Studies*, 8(2), 101-118.
- Arif, M., Hassan, R., & Qureshi, J. A. (2024). The mediating effect of vlogger attractiveness between influencer marketing and purchase intention: Evidence from the restaurant sector of Pakistan *Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences*, 18(1), 112-134.
- Attiq, S., Khalid, H., and Hashmi, M. S. (2024). Brand love and social media: The role of visual content in developing emotional consumer brand ties among Pakistani youths. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 78, 103-119.
- Hayat, K., Abbas, M., Zaman, K. (2024). The Role of Facebook Advertising in Shaping Purchase Intentions for Mid-Range Restaurants in Pakistan. *International Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, 6(2), 89-107.
- Hussain, A., & Khan, F. (2024). Instagrammable food photos as a marketing tool: Its influence on university students' desire to visit cafes in Lahore. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research Pakistan*, 5(1), 33-52.
- Kazmi, S. H., Iqbal, M., & Bajwa, T. (2024). Electronic word of mouth and consumer trust in food service industry: Evidence from urban Pakistan. *South Asian Journal of Business and Management Cases*. 13(2), 145–163.
- Lakho, S. R. & Rashid, M. A. (2024). Digital marketing stimuli and consumer response in restaurant industry of Pakistan: An analysis using S-O-R Framework *Journal of Marketing and Consumer Research*, 22(4), 78–96.
- Malik, A. & Khan, Z. (2023). User-generated content versus brand-generated content: Trust and purchasing behaviour comparison among Gen Z consumers in Pakistan. *Pakistan Business Review*, 26(1), pp. 67-89. (2021).
- Nartea, M. T., & Barrera, D. A. Role of social media in the new era of marketing: Digital change in food and beverage business. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 10(4), 195-210.
- Pervin, N., Saha, P., & Chowdhury, M. A. (2023). Impact of Social Media on Café Choice Decision among Gen Z Consumers: A South Asian Outlook on Theory of Planned Behavior. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 23(2), 311-328.
- Rahman, S., & Ahmed, T. (2024). Aesthetic surroundings and social media-driven café culture: The importance of atmosphere in Gen Z dining decisions in Pakistan. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 14(3), 220-238.
- Salam, M., Bhatti, M. and Nawaz, T. (2024). Gen Z and the experience economy: Evidence from Pakistan's urban cafe industry and changing consumption patterns. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 48(1), 102-121.

- H., Sikandar & B., Ahmed. (2024). Restaurant sector performance and social media marketing in Pakistan: A qualitative and quantitative analysis. *Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship*, 15(2), 56-74.
- Zafar, A. U., & Younis, M. (2020). Impact of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Buying Behavior in Retail Industry of Pakistan. *Pak. J. Appl. Econ.*, 30(2), 143–167.
- Kotler, P. & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing management* (15th ed.) Pearson Education.
- Chaffey, D., and Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2019). *Digital marketing. Strategy, implementation and practice* (7th ed.). Pearson Education, Inc.
- Statista. (2024). *Social media usage statistics in Pakistan 2024*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com>
- McKinsey and Company. (2023). *How Gen Z Consumers Are Shaping the Future of Retail & Dining*. McKinsey Global Institute. Source: <https://www.mckinsey.com>
- We Are Social & Hootsuite. (2024). *Pakistan country report. Digital 2024*. Source : <https://wearesocial.com>.