

The Impact Of Different Emotional Appeals Among Z Audiences

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Abstract

Effectively capturing and building brand relationships with Generation Z – those born between 1999 and 2010 – requires a strategic approach that aligns with their digital-first mindset and value-driven preferences. This generation is highly perceptive and can quickly identify inauthenticity, making transparency in brand values, practices, and motives essential. To engage Gen Z emotionally, brands must prioritize creativity, authenticity, and relevance. Traditional advertising methods are less effective; instead, real stories featuring genuine individuals resonate more than overly polished or scripted content. Visually interactive formats, such as short videos on platforms like TikTok and Instagram reels, are particularly effective in capturing their attention. Additionally, Gen Z is deeply aware of mental health issues and responds positively to brands that acknowledge these struggles with empathy. Companies that advocate for mental health awareness and communicate messages of emotional support can build stronger connections with this audience.

Keywords: Generation-Z; Digital-first marketing; Brand authenticity; Consumer engagement; Social media marketing; Short-form video content; Emotional Branding; Value-driven marketing; transparent Advertising; Brand Advocacy; Audience empathy; Mental health awareness.

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I. Introduction

Advertising is a strategic communication method used by businesses and organizations to promote products, services, or ideas to a target audience. It aims to inform, persuade, and influence consumer behaviour through various channels, such as television, radio, print media, digital platforms, and social media. Effective advertising relies on creativity, market research, and audience engagement to build brand awareness and drive sales.

Purpose of Advertising:

- Advertising helps introduce a product or service to potential customers, making them aware of its existence and benefits.
- It influences purchasing decisions by encouraging consumers to buy a product or engage with a brand.
- Advertising reinforces awareness of a product or service, reminding consumers of its value and keeping it top-of-mind.
- It plays a crucial role in shaping and maintaining a positive brand reputation, fostering trust and loyalty among customers.

Online Advertising, is a digital marketing strategy that promotes products, services, or brands through the internet. It utilizes various online platforms such as websites, search engines, social media, and mobile applications to reach target audiences. This form of advertising includes methods like Display ads, Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Social Media ads, Video ads, and Influencer partnerships. Online advertising enables businesses to engage with consumers in a targeted, cost-effective, and measurable way, enhancing brand visibility and customer interaction.

Types of Online Advertising:

- Paid advertisements that appear on search engine results pages (e.g., Google Ads) based on user queries.
- Banner, image, or video ads displayed on websites, apps, or social media platforms.
- Paid promotions on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, Twitter to reach specific audiences.

- Promotional videos shown on platforms such as YouTube, Streaming services, and social media.
- Ads that blend seamlessly with content on websites or social media, making them less intrusive.
- Collaborations with influencers to promote products or services to their followers.
- Promotional content sent directly to a user's email to drive engagement and sales.
- Partnering with affiliates who promote products and earn a commission for sales generated through their links.
- Ads that appear as pop-ups or full-screen overlays on websites or mobile apps.

Advantages of Online Advertising:

- Enables businesses to connect with a global audience, reaching potential customers beyond geographical limitations.
- Compared to traditional advertising, online ads offer flexible budgeting options, allowing businesses to optimize spending.
- Uses data-driven insights to deliver ads to specific demographics, interests, and behaviours, increasing effectiveness.
- Provides real-time analytics and performance tracking, helping businesses assess the impact of their campaigns.
- Interactive formats like videos, social media ads, and search engine ads encourage audience interaction.
- Allows businesses to tailor ads based on user preferences, browsing history, and previous interactions.
- Online ads can be created, launched, and adjusted quickly, enabling businesses to respond to market trends in real time.
- Helps reconnect with users who have shown interest in a product or service but haven't made a purchase.
- With precise targeting and engaging content, online advertising increases the chances of converting potential customers into buyers.
- Consistent online presence through digital ads strengthens brand identity and trust among consumers.

Generation Z (Gen Z):

Generation Z refers to individuals born approximately between the late 1990s and early 2010s. As the first true "Digital Natives," they have been raised in an era where the internet, smartphones, and social media are deeply embedded in daily life. Understanding their unique characteristics, preferences, and behaviours is crucial for effectively engaging them, particularly in the fields of advertising, marketing, and communication.

Characteristics of Generation Z:

- Growing up with technology at their fingertips, Gen Z is highly skilled in navigating digital platforms.
- Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube play a central role in their lives, serving as sources of entertainment, education, news, and social interaction.
- They support brands that align with their core values, including sustainability, social justice, diversity, and mental health awareness.
- Gen Z is outspoken on social issues such as climate change, racial equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and gender equality, and they expect brands to take clear stance on these matters.
- They prefer visual-based platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, where short, engaging, and creative video content is widely consumed.
- Interactive content, such as quizzes, challenges, and live-streamed events, resonates well with them, as they prefer active participation over passive content consumption.
- Being socially conscious, Gen Z engages more with brands that advocate for causes such as environmental sustainability, mental health, and social justice.
- Platforms that emphasize quick, visually compelling content—such as TikTok and Instagram—are the most effective in reaching this generation. Brands should focus on dynamic, visually appealing formats like memes, short videos, and GIFs.
- Collaborating with influencers who have authentic connections with their audience enhances brand trust. Micro-influencers, in particular, have strong, loyal followings, leading to deeper engagement and credibility.

Objectives:

- To find emotional appeals which capture attention of Z-Gen.
- To analyze the effect of emotional appeals on brand involvement among Gen Z audience in online advertising.
- To identify emotional appeals in different online advertising platforms by Gen Z.
- To identify social variation in how Gen Z responds to emotional appeals in online advertising.

- To identify long term impact of emotional appeals on brand perception among Z audience.

II. Review Of Literature

Callahan (1974):

Callahan (1974) conducted a foundational study on the influence of emotional appeals in traditional advertising and their role in shaping consumer purchasing behaviour. His research emphasized that emotional connections between brands and consumers go beyond immediate persuasion, fostering long-term brand loyalty. He argued that advertisements designed to evoke strong emotional responses-such as happiness, excitement, or nostalgia-tend to be more memorable and impactful compared to those that rely solely on rational arguments. Callahan's study was particularly significant in highlighting how emotions can create deep-seated associations with a brand, making consumers more likely to recall and prefer that brand in the future. His research demonstrated that emotional advertisements not only capture attention but also influence consumer attitudes by establishing a sense of familiarity and trust.

Although Callahan's work was conducted in the context of traditional media, such as print and television advertisements, its principles remain highly relevant in modern digital marketing. Today, with the rise of online and social media advertising, brands continue to leverage emotional storytelling to engage younger audiences, particularly Generation Z. This generation, being highly digital-savvy and emotionally responsive to content, is more likely to engage with brands that create authentic and relatable emotional experiences. Callahan's insights laid the groundwork for contemporary advertising strategies that prioritize emotional appeal, demonstrating that emotional engagement is not just a marketing tool but a key driver of consumer behaviour across different media platforms.

George and Berry (1981):

George and Berry (1981) conducted an in-depth study on the role of emotional appeals in advertising, particularly in print and television media. They argued that emotions play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and decision-making processes. Their research highlighted that advertisements designed to evoke strong emotions such as love, joy, and fear are significantly more effective in fostering brand recall and consumer trust. By triggering emotional responses, brands can create deeper psychological connections with their audience, making their advertisements more persuasive and memorable. They emphasized that when consumers feel emotionally invested in a brand, they are more likely to develop loyalty and preference toward it over time.

Their findings were instrumental in establishing the importance of emotional advertising strategies, particularly in an era dominated by traditional media. However, their research remains highly relevant in the digital age, where emotional storytelling has become a key component of online advertising. Today, brands leverage the same emotional principles outlined by George and Berry but apply them to digital platforms such as social media, video content, and influencer marketing. Generation Z, in particular, responds strongly to emotionally driven advertisements, as they seek authenticity and meaningful brand connections. The study by George and Berry provides a foundational understanding of how emotions influence consumer engagement, reinforcing the idea that emotional marketing remains one of the most effective strategies for capturing audience attention and driving brand success.

Wang et al. (2009) and Bulbul et al. (2010):

Wang et al. (2009) conducted an extensive study on the effectiveness of emotional appeals in digital advertising, focusing on how emotions influence consumer engagement. Their research revealed that online advertisements incorporating emotions such as humor, excitement, and surprise significantly increase click-through rates (CTR) and conversion rates. They found that emotionally charged content captures consumer attention more effectively than purely informational ads, as it creates a more engaging and memorable experience. Their study also highlighted that digital advertisements leveraging emotional storytelling tend to perform better on interactive platforms, such as social media and video streaming services, where users actively engage with content. The research suggested that brands that evoke strong emotions in their online ads create deeper connections with consumers, leading to increased brand loyalty and purchase intent.

Similarly, Bulbul et al. (2010) explored the role of humor in online advertising and its impact on consumer recall are particularly effective in engaging younger audiences, including Generation Z, who prefer entertaining and relatable content. Humor not only makes advertisements more enjoyable but also enhances message retention, making consumer more likely to remember the brand and associate it with positive emotions. The study emphasized that well-executed humor can break through advertising clutter and encourage social sharing, further amplifying brand reach. However, the researcher also cautioned that humor must be culturally relevant and aligned with the target audience's preferences to avoid misinterpretation or negative brand perception.

Campbell and Pearson (2018):

Campbell and Pearson (2018) conducted a significant study on the role of emotional appeals in social media advertising, particularly in engaging Generation Z consumers. Their research revealed that younger audiences respond more positively to advertisements that reflect their personal values, beliefs, and social identity. They found that emotional appeals rooted in themes of empowerment, activism, and inclusivity resonate deeply with Generation Z, as this demographic is highly conscious of social issues and prefers brands that align with their ethical and moral standpoints. Unlike previous generations, who were primarily influenced by product features and brand prestige, Generation Z tends to form emotional connections with brands that advocate for causes they care about, such as environmental sustainability, diversity, and gender equality.

The study also emphasized the importance of authenticity in social media advertising. Campbell and Pearson argued that Generation Z consumers are highly skeptical of traditional marketing tactics and are quick to disengage from brands that appear insincere or overly promotional. Instead, they favor advertisements that feature real stories, relatable characters, and meaningful narratives. Their research indicated that brands that successfully integrate emotional storytelling into their social media campaigns see higher levels of engagement, including likes, shares, and comments. This emotional engagement translates into stronger brand loyalty and a higher likelihood of consumers recommending the brand to their peers. Also their study highlighted the effectiveness of user-generated content and influencer marketing in emotional advertising. They found that Generation Z is more likely to trust content created by their peers or influencers they follow rather than corporate advertisements. By leveraging emotional storytelling through influencers and user participation, brands can create a sense of community and belonging among their audience.

Kafka and Molla (2017):

Kafka and Molla (2017) conducted an in-depth study on the effectiveness of emotional storytelling in influencer marketing, focusing on how personal narratives influence consumer engagement. Their research found that influencers who integrate emotions such as joy, nostalgia, vulnerability, or personal triumphs into their brand promotions tend to generate significantly higher engagement rates compared to those who use a purely promotional approach. They argued that emotional storytelling in influencer marketing fosters a sense of authenticity and relatability, which is particularly appealing to Generation Z consumers. Unlike traditional advertising, which often feels impersonal and corporate-driven, influencer marketing allows for a more organic and humanized brand experience, making it easier for audiences to connect with the promoted product or service on an emotional level.

The study emphasized that Generation Z, being digital natives, is highly selective about the content they engage with and tends to trust influencers who share personal experiences rather than those who appear to be reading from a script. Kafka and Molla highlighted that when influencers express genuine emotions—whether excitement about a product, struggles with self-improvement, or gratitude for a experience—their audience perceives the endorsement as more credible and trustworthy. This trust translates into higher brand engagement, increased word-of-mouth marketing, and a greater likelihood of purchase intent.

Liberali et al. (2016):

Liberali et al. (2016) conducted an extensive study on the impact of emotional advertising in E-commerce and digital marketing, highlighting how different emotional appeals influence consumer engagement and purchasing behaviour. Their research found that advertisements designed to evoke positive emotions, such as happiness, excitement, and nostalgia, significantly enhance consumer interest and increase purchase intent. When consumers associate a brand with positive emotions, they are more likely to develop long-term brand loyalty and share their positive experiences with others, further amplifying engagement. The study emphasized that digital advertisements that use joyful and uplifting messages create a more engaging and memorable brand experience, making consumers more inclined to explore and purchase products.

Liberali et al., also examined the effectiveness of fear-based advertising techniques, particularly those centered around urgency and scarcity. They discovered that fear of missing out (FOMO) is a powerful psychological trigger that can drive impulse buying behaviour. For instance, E-commerce websites that use countdown timers, limited stock notifications, or flash sales effectively create a sense of urgency that pushes consumers to make quick purchasing decisions. Their study found that such fear-based appeals are particularly effective in online retail environments, where consumers often make spontaneous decisions based on limited-time offers. However, the researchers also warned that excessive use of fear-based advertising can lead to consumer distrust and fatigue, making it essential for brands to strike a balance between urgency and authenticity.

Schiffman and Kanuk (2004):

Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) conducted an extensive study on consumer behaviour, emphasizing the role of emotions in influencing purchasing decisions. Their research found that emotional appeals are

significantly more effective than rational arguments in shaping consumer preferences and driving purchase intent. They argued that while logical reasoning and product attributes are important, consumers are more likely to be influenced by advertisements that create an emotional connection. Emotions such as excitement, joy, nostalgia, and humor play a critical role in how consumers perceive brands, as they evoke personal memories and associations that make advertisements more impactful and memorable.

Their study also highlighted the growing importance of emotional marketing in targeting younger generations, particularly Generation Z. Unlike previous generations, who may have been responsive to factual or feature-driven advertisements, Gen Z prefers content that evokes emotions and aligns with their lifestyle, values, and aspirations. Schiffman and Kanuk found that advertisements incorporating elements of humor, storytelling, and personal connection tend to be more persuasive and engaging for this demographic. This is because Gen Z is accustomed to fast-paced digital content and prefers ads that feel relatable and entertaining rather than overly promotional or informational. Schiffman and Kanuk noted that emotional appeals in digital ads not only capture attention but also encourage social sharing, increasing brand visibility and engagement. They also pointed out that emotionally engaging content fosters brand loyalty, as consumers are more likely to develop long-term relationships with brands that make them feel understood and valued.

Pashna et al. (2019):

Pashna et al. (2019) conducted an in-depth study on the effectiveness of emotional appeals in digital advertising campaigns, emphasizing how emotions influence consumer engagement and brand loyalty. Their research revealed that advertisements incorporating emotions such as nostalgia, humor, and empathy tend to perform significantly better than purely informational or rational appeals. They found that emotionally charged content not only captures attention more effectively but also fosters a deeper psychological connection between consumers and brands. This emotional connection plays a crucial role in influencing purchasing behaviour, increasing brand recall, and encouraging word-of-mouth promotion.

The study also highlighted the role of humor in digital advertising, noting that humor-based emotional appeals are particularly effective in driving engagement and increasing shareability. Generation Z, known for its preference for entertaining and lighthearted content, is more likely to interact with advertisements that incorporate humor in a relatable way. Pashna et al. emphasized that humor not only makes advertisements more enjoyable but also enhances brand perception, making the brand seem more approachable and likable. However, they cautioned that humor must be carefully tailored to the target audience to ensure cultural sensitivity and avoid misinterpretation.

Lavidge and Steiner (1961):

Lavidge and Steiner (1961) introduced the Hierarchy of Effects Model, a foundational framework in advertising and consumer behaviour studies. Their model describes how consumers progress through a series of stages—from awareness to purchase—when interacting with advertisements. These stages include awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and purchase, illustrating that advertising does not immediately lead to action but rather influences consumer attitudes and decisions over time. One of the key insights of their model is the distinction between cognitive (thinking), affective (feeling), and conative (doing) stages, with emotional engagement playing a crucial role in moving consumers from passive awareness to active decision-making.

Their research emphasized that emotional appeals are just as important—if not more so—than rational appeals in shaping consumer preferences. While cognitive processing (such as learning about product features) is necessary, Lavidge and Steiner argued that emotions drive consumer decision-making at deeper levels. They suggested that advertisements that evoke positive emotions—such as excitement, happiness, or nostalgia—are more likely to foster brand liking and preference, making consumers more inclined to choose that brand over competitors. Their findings laid the groundwork for modern emotional marketing, which prioritizes storytelling, relatable content, and personalized experiences to build strong consumer-brand relationships.

Albers-Millers and Stafford (1999):

Albers-Millers and Stafford (1999) conducted an in-depth study on the effectiveness of emotional appeal strategies in advertising, emphasizing how different emotions influence consumer perception, engagement, and decision-making. Their research revealed that humor, fear, and love-based appeals are particularly effective in capturing consumer attention and enhancing brand recall. They found that advertisements that evoke strong emotional reactions tend to create deeper connections with consumers, making them more likely to remember the ad and develop positive associations with the brand.

One of their key findings was the effectiveness of humor-based advertising. They discovered that humor not only grabs attention quickly but also makes advertisements more enjoyable and shareable. This is particularly relevant in today's digital and social media landscape, where brands use humor-driven content to increase engagement, virality, and brand likability. However, Albers-Millers and Stafford (1999) also cautioned

that humor must be carefully crafted to align with the cultural background, values, and preferences of the target audience. Their research also highlighted the impact of fear-based appeals, often used in industries such as healthcare, safety, and insurance. They found that fear can be a powerful motivator when used appropriately, encouraging consumers to take action, such as adopting healthier behaviours or purchasing protective products. However, they warned that fear appeals must strike a balance between urgency and reassurance-excessive fear can lead to avoidance, while moderate fear combined with a clear solution can drive positive consumer response.

McKay-Nesbitt et al. (2011):

McKay-Nesbitt et al. (2011) conducted a comprehensive study on the influence of emotional appeals on consumer decision-making across different age groups, highlighting the varying emotional triggers that drive engagement. Their research found that younger consumers, including Generation Z, are particularly responsive to advertisements that evoke emotions such as excitement, joy, and social connection. Unlike older generations, who may prioritize rational decision-making and product benefits, younger consumers are more likely to be influenced by emotionally charged, dynamic, and visually stimulating content.

A key takeaway from their study was that emotional appeals play a crucial role in capturing and maintaining Generation Z's attention in a crowded digital environment. Given that Gen Z is highly active on social media and digital platforms, they are more likely to engage with advertisements that feel authentic, interactive, and emotionally compelling. McKay-Nesbitt et al. emphasized that traditional advertising methods relying on logic-driven persuasion may not be as effective for this demographic. Instead, brands must leverage immersive storytelling, humor, relatable influencers, and socially relevant messaging to make a lasting impact.

Edosomwan et al. (2011):

Edosomwan et al. (2011) conducted a pivotal study on the role of social media in modern advertising, emphasizing how emotionally engaging content can drive higher consumer interaction and foster brand loyalty. Their research explored how the rise of social media platforms transformed advertising strategies, shifting from traditional one-way communication to interactive, relationship-driven marketing. They found that brands that successfully use emotional appeals on social media tend to create stronger connections with their audience, leading to increased engagement, shares, and long-term consumer trust.

One of their key findings was that emotional content on social media has a higher likelihood of going viral. Advertisements and brand messages that evoke emotions such as happiness, inspiration, nostalgia, or even sadness tend to resonate more deeply with users, encouraging them to like, comment, and share. This aligns with the behaviour of Generation Z consumers, who are highly active on platforms like Instagram, tiktok, and twitter and prefer brands that engage with them on a personal and emotional level.

Another crucial aspect of their research was the impact of storytelling in social media marketing. They found that brands that incorporate storytelling into their social media ads create more meaningful and memorable experiences for consumers. Whether through short-form videos, personal testimonials, or behind-the-scenes content, brands that share relatable and emotionally engaging narratives tend to achieve higher engagement and stronger brand affinity.

III. Research Gap

The existing literature provides significant insights into the role of emotional appeals in online advertising, particularly in the context of consumer engagement and brand perception. However, despite the contributions of various studies, there remain several research gaps that need to be addressed, particularly in relation to Generation Z and their response to emotional advertising in digital spaces.

Limited Research on Emotional Appeals Specific to Generation Z:

Several studies, such as those by Callahan (1974), George and Berry (1981), and Lavidge and Steiner (1961), have examined emotional appeals in traditional advertising. However, these studies do not specifically address Generation Z, a demographic that exhibits distinct digital consumption behaviours. While emotional appeals have been studied in general consumer contexts, there is a lack of research that directly investigates which specific emotional triggers most effectively capture the attention of Generation Z in online advertising.

Insufficient Focus on Emotional Appeals and Brand Involvement Among Generation Z:

The study by Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) highlighted that emotional appeals are more persuasive than rational messaging, particularly among younger audiences. Similarly, Wang et al. (2009) and Bulbul et al. (2010) found that humor and excitement in digital advertisements lead to higher consumer engagement. However, these studies did not extensively examine how different emotional appeals influence Generation Z's level of brand involvement in the long term. Since this generation is highly skeptical of traditional marketing

tactics, a deeper exploration is needed to understand how emotional advertising fosters deeper connections and long-term brand engagement among Gen Z consumers.

Lack of Comparative Analysis Across Online Advertising Platforms:

Studies like Liberali et al. (2016) and Pashna et al. (2019) have explored the impact of emotional storytelling and nostalgia in online advertising, but they do not comprehensively compare how different platforms—such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter—differ in their effectiveness when using emotional appeals. Since Generation Z interacts with brands across multiple digital channels, understanding which emotional appeals work best on different platforms remains an underexplored area.

Limited Examination of Social and Cultural Variations in Gen Z's Response to Emotional Appeals:

While Campbell and Pearson (2018) examined how advertisements reflecting social values resonate with Generation Z, their research did not analyze how cultural and social factors influence emotional responses among different Gen Z subgroups. Since Gen Z is a diverse and global generation, there is a need for studies that identify how regional, cultural, and socioeconomic differences shape their emotional reactions to online advertising.

Need for Research on the Long-term Impact of Emotional Appeals on Brand Perception:

Studies such as Kafka and Molla (2017) and Edosomwan et al. (2011) explored the effectiveness of emotional storytelling in influencer marketing and social media engagement. However, these studies largely focus on short-term engagement metrics (such as likes, shares, and comments) rather than examining how emotional appeals influence long-term brand perception and loyalty among Generation Z consumers. Given that Gen Z places a high value on authenticity and transparency, further research is needed to determine whether emotional appeals lead to lasting brand trust or if they only create temporary engagement spikes.

IV. Conclusion

“The study of emotional appeals and engagement in online advertising targeted at Generation Z,” highlights the growing importance of emotionally driven marketing strategies in the digital age. Generation Z, as a digitally native and socially conscious cohort, responds differently to advertising compared to previous generations, requiring brands to adapt their strategies to create meaningful connections. The literature review reveals that emotional appeals such as humor, nostalgia, excitement, and social activism play a crucial role in capturing attention, fostering brand involvement, and shaping long-term consumer perceptions.

Traditional advertising research, such as that by Callahan (1974), George and Berry (1981), and Lavidge and Steiner (1961), established the foundational role of emotional appeals in consumer engagement. However, more recent studies, including those by Wang et al. (2009), Bulbul et al. (2010), and Schiffman and Kanuk (2004), indicate that digital and social media platforms have reshaped how emotional content influences consumer behaviour. Research also suggests that emotional storytelling, visually compelling content, and influencer marketing are among the most effective ways to engage Generation Z consumers and encourage brand interaction (Kafka and Molla, 2017; Edosomwan et al., 2011).

Despite these insights, several research gaps remain. There is a lack of studies that specifically identify which emotional appeals are most effective for Generation Z, as well as how emotional advertising influences brand loyalty over the long term. Additionally, more research is needed to understand the effectiveness of emotional advertising across different online platforms and how social and cultural variations shape Gen Z's emotional responses to digital ads.

As brands continue to shift toward emotionally engaging, digital-first advertising strategies, future research should focus on understanding the deep psychological and behavioural impact of emotional advertising on Generation Z. This will allow marketers to craft more authentic, relevant, and impactful campaigns that not only capture attention but also build lasting consumer relationships in an increasingly digital marketplace.

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