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Generation Z consumers' attitude towards TikTok marketing: The role of social influence, perceived enjoyment, content relevance and digital burnout

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Author:
John Marumbwa[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Department of Marketing and Retail Management, College of Economics and Management Sciences, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:
John Marumbwa,
marumj@unisa.ac.za

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Orientation: TikTok is increasingly dominating the marketing landscape in developing countries, serving as a key channel for reaching young consumers. As such, it is imperative to understand consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing.

Research purpose: This study investigated the moderating role of digital burnout (DB) in the influence of social influence (SI), perceived enjoyment (PE), and content relevance (CR) on the attitudes of Zimbabwean Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers towards TikTok marketing.

Motivation for the study: Generation Z accounts for more than two-thirds of Africa's population and is a heavy user of TikTok. For marketers, understanding Gen Z's attitudes towards TikTok marketing becomes a strategic priority.

Research design, approach and method: The study follows the positivist paradigm and utilises a quantitative method. Data were collected from 341 randomly selected Gen Z TikTok users and analysed using Structural Equation Modelling.

Main findings: Social influence, PE, and CR significantly affected Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing. Additionally, DB moderated the relationships between SI, PE, CR, and consumer attitude.

Practical/managerial implications: Generation Z consumers' attitudes are shaped by peer norms, online networks, and TikTok marketing messages that align with their socio-cultural contexts.

Contribution/value-add: The study advances knowledge of TikTok marketing in developing countries, which are characterised by a youthful population and high social media usage. It highlights the crucial attributes shaping Gen Z consumers' attitudes and demonstrates how DB influences young consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing.

Keywords: social media adoption; TikTok; perceived enjoyment; content relevance; social influence; uses and gratifications; digital burnout; Generation Z.

Introduction

Advances in internet technologies have not only boosted the growth of social media but also expanded its use among businesses and consumers, especially among younger people. For instance, TikTok, a short-form video-sharing platform launched in 2016, became the second-most-downloaded app in 2025, surpassing well-established platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram (Dixon 2025). By 2029, the global number of TikTok users is expected to reach 1.9 billion (Dixon 2025), making it one of the most popular social media platforms outside the Meta brands. With an average user spending nearly 60 min a day on the platform (Kemp 2024), TikTok has the highest social media engagement rate per post (Singh 2024). Additionally, 69% of TikTok users worldwide belong to the 18–34 age group (Singh 2024). This, in turn, makes TikTok an emerging marketing tool to reach Generation Z (Gen Z), a growing consumer demographic.

Given that they grew up in an environment characterised by smartphones, internet connectivity, and social media, Gen Z is considered the 'digital natives' cohort, comprising individuals born between the mid-1990s and 2012 (Fujak, Evens & McLeod 2025). They account for more than a

quarter of the world's population (Boyle & Townsend 2024), with total spending expected to reach US$12 trillion (equivalent to R198 trillion) by 2030 (NielsenIQ 2025). In Africa, where over two-thirds of the population is aged 25 years or younger, Gen Z represents 'the continent's most powerful consumer segments' (Akintola 2025). Not only are they early adopters of digital innovations, but they also spend considerable time online, creating and consuming content (Buckley, Ashman & Haenlein 2025). Hence, Gen Z is tech-savvy, content-focused, and used to digital interactions. Undoubtedly, this generation will shape and define future labour and consumer markets. Therefore, scholarship on Gen Z's attitudes towards TikTok marketing becomes a strategic priority for marketing practitioners (Truman, Shi & Elliott 2025).

Through its diverse content offerings, ranging from entertainment to do-it-yourself (DIY) videos, TikTok attracts a wide range of users, including Gen Z consumers (Truman et al. 2025). This creates a distinctive digital space for marketing and brand communication (Hazari, Talpade & Brown 2024). Besides its immersive, real-time content creation and consumption capabilities (Conte et al. 2025), TikTok promotes effective viral marketing through electronic word of mouth (Lacap et al. 2025). This is crucial for consumers seeking vital product information during the purchase decision-making process. Additionally, TikTok's lip-syncing features and memetic attributes enhance message retention and foster top-of-mind awareness, which are key pillars of brand development. Moreover, TikTok's viral short-video influencer marketing often sparks consumer interest and captures attention. Thus, TikTok supports consumer learning and engagement through personalised content curation and multimedia functionalities. For these reasons, TikTok represents an innovative marketing channel for value creation beyond its core mission, thereby generating increased academic interest.

Owing to its appeal to young consumers, TikTok has captured the interest of marketing scholars and practitioners. A series of qualitative studies in Asia have explored TikTok marketing in the tourism and hospitality sector (Chong 2025; Tham, (Ava) Chen & Durbidge 2024; Zhang, Liu & Lang 2025). Using quantitative methods, another stream of research from various sectoral contexts demonstrates how luxury fashion brands can leverage TikTok to engage young consumers (Zhang et al. 2025) and influence consumer behaviour (Fong et al. 2025; Lacap et al. 2025). Furthermore, while some scholars emphasised the role of TikTok influencers (Campbell et al. 2025), others examined brand engagement among TikTok Gen Z users (Ortiz et al. 2023). Additionally, other authors have examined user adoption of the platform itself (Zhao & Wagner 2024), overlooking its marketing functionalities. Notably, most published work originates from developed markets with robust technological infrastructure and an established digital consumer culture (Chu, Deng & Mundel 2024; Hazari et al. 2024; Lacap et al. 2025; Zhang & Wang 2024).

Therefore, empirical research on Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing in developing economies remains limited (Duffett & Maraule 2024). This, in turn, implies that the consumer attitude (CA)-behaviour gap remains unaddressed (Lin, Wang & Dam 2023), leading to a limited understanding of the effectiveness of online short-form video content in marketing (Fong et al. 2025; Zhang et al. 2025). Moreover, the influential roles of social influence (SI), perceived enjoyment (PE), and content relevance (CR) remain unexplored. However, existing scholarship has recognised the impact of these attributes (Liu, Su & Yin 2024; Mulcahy et al. 2025). Notably, TikTok marketing messages trigger impulsive purchase behaviours, beyond intrinsic motivation and hedonic consumption. Yet, it is unclear how marketers can balance gratification and content saturation to increase receptivity to TikTok marketing amid digital burnout (DB). Thus, scholars such as Lin et al. (2023) call for further research on the platform, considering its growing significance to marketing.

Therefore, based on the identified gaps, this study examines the following unanswered questions in the context of Zimbabwean Gen Z TikTok users: (1) *How do SI, PE, and CR influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards TikTok marketing?* and (2) *What is the moderating role of DB on the relationship between SI, PE, CR, and Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing?*

The study makes important contributions to both theory and practice. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive understanding of how Gen Z consumers in developing countries perceive TikTok marketing. This advances empirical research on Gen Z and TikTok, a platform mainly used by this demographic. Secondly, by including the predictive effects of SI, PE, and CR, the research improves the conceptual development of key factors that address the attitude-behaviour gap. Specifically, it broadens TikTok marketing research by examining how DB hinders Gen Z consumers' behavioural responses. Thirdly, for marketers, the study offers practical insights on creating TikTok marketing content that encourages a positive CA. Finally, this research helps us understand how short-form video platforms, especially TikTok, shape current discussions about Gen Z consumers and, in turn, influence firms' marketing strategies.

Literature review

TikTok marketing

TikTok marketing involves using short-form videos to promote products, brands, or services through influencer endorsements, user challenges, and storytelling (Cao & Nguyen 2025). This strategy utilises digital content creation and interactive exchanges to expand firms' promotional efforts (Lacap et al. 2025). Unlike other social networking sites, which display static adverts, TikTok's features enable contextual targeting through an algorithmically generated, engaging, and personalised content model

(Truman et al. 2025). Typically, users can engage with marketing content via two main feeds: (1) 'following', which displays content from known contacts, and (2) 'for you', which shows content based on individual interests. Therefore, TikTok can facilitate viral marketing campaigns using trending hashtags, brand endorsements, and social media challenges (Truman et al. 2025). As Lacap et al. (2025) observe, businesses are increasingly using TikTok marketing to connect with Gen Z customers, boost brand awareness, and increase revenue, thereby shifting the social media marketing landscape.

The social media literature recognises the influence of CR (Hanaysha 2022), SI (Hazari et al. 2024; Mulcahy et al. 2025), and PE (Liu, Deng & Ayub 2025) on CAs and acceptance behaviours. However, few empirical studies examine how these variables shape Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing. Despite the significant benefits of TikTok marketing (Truman et al. 2025), existing research emphasises adoption behaviours across TikTok as a broader social media platform, neglecting its unique marketing characteristics. Furthermore, the role of DB as a barrier to TikTok marketing remains to be explored. As Cao and Nguyen (2025) suggest, further research should investigate moderating variables to enhance the understanding of consumers' behaviours towards digital marketing content. Therefore, this study explores the social and psychological mechanisms that can predict Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing.

Theoretical underpinning, hypothesis development, and conceptual framework

The theoretical foundation and research constructs for this study are based on related theories. The Social Influence Theory supports the development of SI as a construct and its associated hypotheses, while PE and CR are drawn from the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). Combining these two theories provides an analytical framework for examining the mechanisms shaping Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing (see Figure 1). A detailed discussion of the relevance and applicability of the chosen theories to this study is provided below.

The social influence theory

Building on Kelman's (1958) early work, SI, as a theoretical concept, reflects the complex mechanisms that characterise interactions between individuals and their social environments (Angmo, Mahajan & Ranjitha 2025). In their social spheres, individuals engage with peers, family members, and other significant reference groups, which facilitates the formation of salient relationships (Hazari et al. 2024). These connections provide normative and informational cues that shape individuals' opinions, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours (Sun, Chen & Xu 2025). Normative SI stems from one's tendency to align with a significant other's expectations (Jia et al. 2023), while informational SI occurs when one considers information

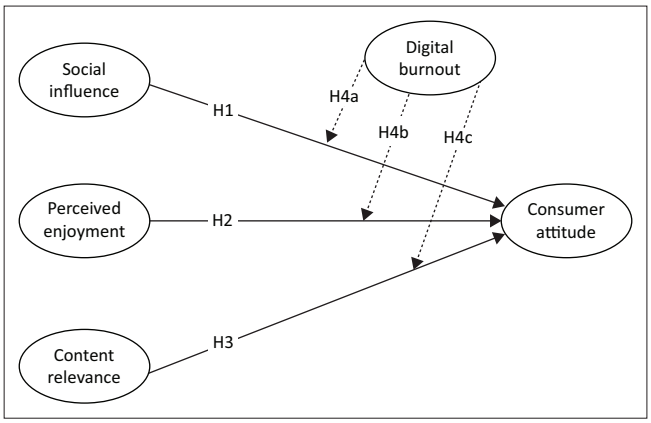


FIGURE 1: Conceptual model.

obtained from others as factual (Charles & Kanani 2025). Therefore, the Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that, through exposure to social groups, behaviour results from yielding to influence (compliance), aligning with and identifying with influencers (identification), and adjusting to conform to social norms (internalisation) (Angmo et al. 2025; Hazari et al. 2024; Kelman 1958).

Due to strong theoretical insights into how social connections influence behaviour, the SIT has been extensively applied in consumer behaviour research (Bhukya & Paul 2023). Literature on digital communication indicates that SIT is increasingly utilised to predict how consumers respond to social media influencers (Angmo et al. 2025), group-based online discussions (Sun et al. 2025), electronic word of mouth (Du et al. 2025), online brand communities (Willis & Ozuem 2025), social commerce (Charles & Kanani 2025), and TikTok brand ambassadors (Hazari et al. 2024). In this study's context, SIT functions as a theoretical framework for understanding how Gen Z consumers' social interactions with peers on TikTok influence their attitudes towards TikTok marketing. Mulcahy et al. (2025) contend that engagement with popular TikTok content is driven by social proof and credibility. Therefore, when Gen Z interacts with peers sharing common interests, they tend to adjust their behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs (Mulcahy et al. 2025). Consequently, SIT underpins the conceptual understanding of SI in this context.

The uses and gratifications theory

The UGT offers a fundamental framework for understanding why individuals engage with a specific medium in active and selective ways (Menon 2024). Initially developed to analyse consumer choices related to mass media such as radio, television, and newspapers, the theory suggests that people are not passive but rather active, purposeful, and outcome-focused when selecting and using media, seeking some form of utility (Menon 2024). As a result, individuals choose which media to utilise and why based on their desire to fulfil particular unmet needs, which can lead to either positive or negative behavioural outcomes (Micallef, Hurcombe & Feng 2025). In the social media

context, where users voluntarily participate and interact (Mizukoshi 2025), the UGT is employed to understand their motives for creating, sharing, and consuming content, including the needs they aim to satisfy (Menon 2024; Micallef et al. 2025; Mizukoshi 2025).

Several scholars have extended the UGT to various social media platforms, including Instagram (Menon 2024), WeChat (Kamboj & Sharma 2023), ChatGPT (Le et al. 2026), Line, and Facebook (Mizukoshi 2025). This shows that the UGT can be used to understand people's motivations for using different digital communication platforms and the factors that influence these motivations (Le et al. 2026). More importantly, the theory can be adapted to various digital communication contexts, such as TikTok (Bhatiasevi 2024). Therefore, the current study explores how PE and CR affect Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing through the lens of the UGT.

Hypotheses development and conceptual framework

Social influence and Generation Z consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing

Social influence refers to the driving force behind changes in an individual's behaviour, attitudes, and opinions resulting from awareness of explicit social forces (Cialdini & Goldstein 2004). Therefore, a significant other or social network can influence a person's emotions, thoughts, or feelings (Trenz, Huntgeburth & Veit 2018), even if they have reservations or negative feelings (Zhang & Centola 2020). Since Gen Z often seeks support and validation from peers, this can potentially affect their attitudes towards TikTok marketing (Hazari et al. 2024; Jia et al. 2023). Furthermore, Mulcahy et al. (2025) suggest that Gen Z tends to engage with viral and trending TikTok content because of its high social proof and perceived credibility, which ultimately shapes their behaviour. This notion has been supported by previous empirical research. A study by Jia et al. (2023) found that SI indirectly impacts behavioural intentions by shaping attitudes. Similarly, Liang, Xu and Huang (2024) and Hazari et al. (2024) identified SI as a key factor in determining consumer behaviour. Based on this, it is hypothesised (H) that:

> **H1:** Social influence positively influences Generation Z consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing.

Perceived enjoyment and Generation Z consumer attitudes towards TikTok marketing

Perceived enjoyment refers to the intrinsic, pleasurable experiences gained from using specific technology (Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw 1992). It captures the emotional responses triggered by technology use beyond functional performance (Venkatesh 2000). This relates to hedonic gratification and the fun feelings associated with technology. Chong (2025) suggests that immersive social media environments offer engaging multimedia content and peer-to-peer interactions that can evoke pleasurable experiences. Previous research on young consumers confirms that PE positively influences attitudes towards artificial intelligence (Cui 2025) and e-learning technologies (Sasongko, Ekhsan & Fatchan 2025). Liu et al. (2025) found that enjoyable experiences from gamification and interaction incentives motivate user engagement and lead to positive attitudes. Additionally, Amores-Valencia, Burgos and Branch-Bedoya (2025) confirmed the significant positive impact of PE on high school students' attitudes towards the use of mobile technologies. In this study, PE derives from humorous marketing messages, playful content, and gamification on TikTok, which demand less effort (Liu et al. 2025). Accordingly, high levels of enjoyment align with Gen Z's desire for entertaining content. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

> **H2:** Perceived enjoyment positively influences Generation Z consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing.

Content relevance and consumer attitudes towards TikTok marketing

In the digital space, CR refers to how well information meets the expectations, desires, or aspirations of an audience (Van Gasse et al. 2024). It reflects users' perceptions of how content relates to, connects with, or aligns with their values (Hanaysha 2022). As Wei (2025) states, CR captures the extent to which content establishes meaningful connections and resonates with users and target audiences. Furthermore, Tang, Chen and Xu (2025) suggest that CR pertains to the contextual suitability of information shared on social media. In this study, CR refers to the appropriateness and resonance of TikTok marketing content with consumers. While irrelevant content may trigger negative emotions and lead to avoidance behaviours, relevant content fosters an affective attitudinal response, encouraging positive reactions. Past research highlights the significant influence of CR on CAs towards social media advertising (Hanaysha 2022; Tang et al. 2025) and content marketing (Wei 2025). Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

> **H3:** Content relevance positively influences consumer attitudes towards TikTok marketing.

The moderating role of digital burnout

Liu et al. (2024) argue that burnout results from a loss of valuable resources or the failure to achieve specific goals, which then triggers particular attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. Durmuş, Gülnar and Özveren (2022) described burnout as emotional and physical exhaustion often caused by overload and conflict, which can lead to withdrawal. In the digital context, burnout reflects emotional strain and fatigue caused by compulsive use of and exposure to digital devices and content (Da Silva et al. 2024). This phenomenon peaked during the global pandemic, which accelerated the rise of digital culture. Social media users experiencing burnout often show signs of physical and behavioural strain, such as sleep disorders, technostress, inefficiency, and unproductiveness (Da Silva et al. 2024; Liu et al. 2024). Therefore, Durmuş et al. (2022) suggest that DB can be assessed through digital ageing, digital deprivation, and emotional exhaustion. Whereas digital ageing refers to the inability to distinguish between virtual and natural contexts,

digital deprivation denotes negative emotions arising from separation from digital tools, and emotional exhaustion is measured by diminished emotional responses (Durmuş et al. 2022).

The impact of DB on users' attitudes has been widely acknowledged in existing research across various technologies, including online learning environments (Durmuş et al. 2022), social media brand communities (Osei-Frimpong et al. 2025), and social networking services (Liu et al. 2024), although with inconsistent findings. In the context of online shopping, Da Silva et al. (2024) observed that behaviour remained unchanged even among digitally exhausted customers. In another study, Aljanabi and Al-Hadban (2023) found that information overload reduces the credibility of green product content. Conversely, scholars such as Fernandes and Oliveira (2024) and Liu et al. (2024) found that DB, as measured by social media fatigue, is linked to negative attitudes. While PE, SI, and CR are often associated with positive attitudes, DB can significantly influence these relationships. For example, exhausted users may feel less motivated to engage with entertaining or enjoyable content, despite its inherent appeal (Feroz et al. 2022; Liang et al. 2024). Research indicates that even highly personalised and contextually relevant content may fail to attract the attention of users overwhelmed by digital overload, resulting in reduced engagement (Aljanabi & Al-Hadban 2023). Therefore, DB affects individual perceptions and alters the effectiveness of these key factors in shaping attitudes towards TikTok marketing. Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H4a: Digital burnout moderates the relationship between social influence and consumer attitudes towards TikTok marketing.

H4b: Digital burnout moderates the relationship between perceived enjoyment and consumer attitudes towards TikTok marketing.

H4c: Digital burnout moderates the relationship between content relevance and consumer attitudes towards TikTok marketing.

Research methods and design

Research paradigm and approach

The study adopts the hypothetico-deductive approach, grounded in the ontological perspective of objectivism and the epistemological perspective of positivism. This method is most suitable for scientific research that employs systematic, robust, and logical reasoning, aiming not only to generate knowledge but also to address key management issues (Sekaran & Bougie 2016). Accordingly, a quantitative cross-sectional survey design was utilised to collect data via a self-administered, structured online questionnaire.

Participants

The Gen Z group on TikTok in Zimbabwe served as the empirical context for this study. Often called the 'post-millennials' because they were born between 1995 and 2012 (Duffett & Maraule 2024), this generation exhibits notably high levels of digital literacy. A typical member is highly tech-savvy and relies on the internet and social media for product information and interactive engagement with both brands and peers (Boyle & Townsend 2024). As a result, TikTok has become a preferred source of commercial information, news, and social interaction for Gen Z consumers, surpassing traditional online search engines and short-form video formats (Lacap et al. 2025). Therefore, in accordance with ethical research guidelines, older Gen Z TikTok users (aged 18 years – 28 years) were chosen for fieldwork in this study, as they have reached the minimum age of consent in Zimbabwe to participate in a survey.

Population and sampling

In line with previous related studies on the Gen Z cohort (see Duffett & Maraule 2024; Kara & Min 2024; Tseng, Chang & Zhu 2024), the study respondents were university students in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) reports that undergraduate enrolment at Zimbabwean universities is dominated by the 19–24 age group, which typifies the typical Gen Z cohort. Therefore, the target university in Masvingo had an overall undergraduate student population of 10 000. Using Yamane's formula, the sample size was 370. The simple random sampling technique was employed to select the final study participants, yielding 380 responses, of which 341 were considered valid, resulting in a 90% response rate. To administer the questionnaire, a link was shared via WhatsApp in August 2025, inviting students to participate in a survey.

Measurement items

The scales for all latent constructs were developed from the existing literature and suitably adapted to the context of this study. The survey instrument included 25 questions addressing the main research constructs (SI, PE, CR, DB, and CA). A five-point Likert scale was used for all measurement items, with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Social influence was primarily drawn from Venkatesh (2000) and Yu et al. (2021). The measurement items for PE were adapted from Holdack, Lurie-Stoyanov and Fromme (2022) and Van der Walt, Nkoyi and Thithi (2024). Additionally, the CR scales were adapted from Jung (2017), and the DB scale was adapted from Durmuş et al. (2022). Finally, CA was assessed using items adapted from Mukherjee and Banerjee (2019). It is important to note that the scales were modified to fit the research context. Furthermore, the survey included questions collecting data on respondents' demographic profiles. The results showed that 58% of respondents were female and 42% were male. Regarding exposure to TikTok marketing content, 52% reported frequent exposure, 30% infrequent exposure, and 18% moderate exposure.

Reliability and validity

Following the guidance provided by Collier (2020), the measurement model was evaluated by first verifying the indicator reliability (factor loadings, λ), and then conducting checks for internal consistency and construct

reliability using Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability, convergent validity (average variance extracted [AVE]), and discriminant validity (heterotrait–monotrait [HTMT] ratios and Fornell and Larcker). A partial least squares (PLS) algorithm was run in SmartPLS 4.0 (SmartPLS Gmbh, Rheinpromenade, Germany), and the results in Table 1 show that most factor loadings exceed the minimum threshold of 0.7 (Collier 2020), except for CR (CR1 = 0.684). However, based on Hair et al. (2021), indicator variables with low but acceptable factor loadings can be retained to support content validity if their contribution to the overall study is substantial. Hence, CR1 was considered. Owing to the coefficient alpha values, which ranged from 0.842 to 0.907, and the CR values, which ranged from 0.847 to 0.907, the observed latent constructs demonstrated internal consistency and construct reliability (Hair et al. 2021). Additionally, the AVEs exceed 0.5, ranging from 0.611 to 0.728, supporting the convergent validity of the constructs (Collier 2020).

Discriminant validity

In this study, a dual-criterion approach was employed to assess discriminant validity. According to Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt (2015), the results in Table 2 confirm discriminant validity, as the HTMT ratios are below 0.9. This indicates that correlations among indicators measuring different constructs differ from those within indicators measuring the same construct (Collier 2020). Moreover, Table 3 shows that all requirements of the Fornell–Larcker criterion have been met. The scores shown diagonally in bold indicate that the square roots of the AVEs for a latent construct exceed the correlations among the constructs in the model (Fornell & Larcker 1981). This confirms and establishes discriminant validity.

TABLE 1: Reliability and validity scores.

Constructs	Item	Factor loadings (λ)	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Consumer attitude (CA)	CA1	0.842	-	-	0.712
	CA2	0.840	-	-	-
	CA3	0.910	0.897	0.905	-
	CA4	0.733	-	-	-
	CA5	0.883	-	-	-
Content relevance (CR)	CR1	0.682	-	-	0.636
	CR2	0.841	-	-	-
	CR3	0.836	0.856	0.870	-
	CR4	0.850	-	-	-
	CR5	0.766	-	-	-
Digital burnout (DB)	DB1	0.762	-	-	0.611
	DB2	0.834	-	-	-
	DB3	0.779	0.842	0.847	-
	DB4	0.778	-	-	-
	DB5	0.755	-	-	-
Perceived enjoyment (PE)	PE1	0.815	-	-	0.650
	PE2	0.730	-	-	-
	PE3	0.870	0.864	0.876	-
	PE4	0.750	-	-	-
	PE5	0.855	-	-	-
Social influence (SI)	SI1	0.846	-	-	0.728
	SI2	0.867	-	-	-
	SI3	0.839	0.907	0.907	-
	SI4	0.859	-	-	-
	SI5	0.855	-	-	-

Common method bias

Due to the use of self-reported items and a single cross-sectional survey, the data may be prone to measurement error, which could lead to common method bias (CMB). Therefore, Harman's single factor analysis was conducted to detect the presence of CMB, and it was found that a single factor accounted for 37% of the total variance. Since this is below the acceptable threshold of 50%, CMB does not impact this study.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was granted by the research committee of the Department of Management and Hospitality at Great Zimbabwe University (DMHRC/202507/001). The study adhered to all ethical guidelines set out by the university. The study participants consented to the study by responding to a filter question in the survey instrument.

Results

The PLS approach to structural equation modelling was utilised to evaluate the proposed relationships. Not only is this technique insensitive to data normality, but it is also well suited for studies investigating complex connections between latent constructs and indicator variables (Hair et al. 2021). Therefore, the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) method was adopted, as it aligns with previous studies that simultaneously model and measure multifaceted relationships among multiple predictor and outcome variables (Hanaysha 2022; Hazari et al. 2024; Jia et al. 2023; Liu et al. 2025). With minimal attention to theoretical foundations and sample size, this approach facilitated estimation and prediction of the causal structural and measurement models (Hair et al. 2021).

TABLE 2: The heterotrait–monotrait ratios.

Constructs	Consumer attitude	Content relevance	Digital burnout	Perceived enjoyment
Content relevance	0.888	-	-	-
Digital burnout	0.768	0.787	-	-
Perceived enjoyment	0.890	0.515	0.804	-
Social influence	0.794	0.664	0.756	0.705

TABLE 3: The Fornell–Larcker criterion.

Constructs	Consumer attitude	Content relevance	Digital burnout	Perceived enjoyment	Social influence
Consumer attitude	0.814	-	-	-	-
Content relevance	0.790	0.798	-	-	-
Digital burnout	0.681	0.748	0.782	-	-
Perceived enjoyment	0.794	0.784	0.781	0.806	-
Social influence	0.611	0.772	0.670	0.800	0.853

Structural model assessment

The structural model was assessed through checks for collinearity, analysis of path coefficient significance, and evaluation of the model's explanatory and predictive power. As shown in Table 4, all variance inflation factor (VIF) scores are below 5 (Hair et al. 2021), indicating that the model is not affected by collinearity. The analysis of the significance and relevance of the structural model's relationships reveals that all path coefficients have substantial effects (Collier 2020), explaining 76.9% of the variance in Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing. The *Q*-square value of 0.757 indicates strong predictive relevance, indicating the model's ability to predict the outcome variable.

The results in Table 4 demonstrate that SI is the most critical factor shaping Gen Z consumers' attitude towards TikTok marketing (β = 0.365, t = 8.351, p = 0.00), thus supporting H1. Furthermore, the findings confirm H2 (β = 0.226, t = 3.434, p = 0.00) and H3 (β = 0.227, t = 3.717, p = 0.00), indicating that PE and CR are important predictors of Gen Z consumers' attitude towards TikTok marketing. Regarding H4, the study examined the moderating effect of DB on the relationships between SI, PE, CR, and CA. Figure 2 shows that an adverse significant moderation effect was identified for SI (β = −0.188, t = 4.152, p = 0.00) and PE (β = −0.134, t = 2.095, p = 0.03), while CR (β = 0.233, t = 4.050, p = 0.00) showed a positive significant moderation effect. This suggests that high levels of DB reduce the influence of SI and PE on CAs towards TikTok marketing, while enhancing the impact of CR.

TABLE 4: Hypotheses testing results.

Hypotheses	Structural paths	VIF	Path coefficients (*β*)	*t*	*p*-value	Decision
H1	SI → CA	4.131	0.365	8.351	0.000	Supported
H2	PE → CA	4.290	0.226	3.434	0.001	Supported
H3	CR → CA	3.422	0.227	3.717	0.000	Supported
H4a	Mod DB → SI → CA	3.094	-0.188	4.152	0.000	Supported
H4b	Mod DB → PE → CA	4.907	-0.134	2.095	0.036	Supported
H4c	Mod DB → CR → CA	2.411	0.233	4.050	0.000	Supported
***R*-square**						
Consumer attitude		-	0.769	-	-	-
***Q*-square**						
Consumer attitude		-	0.757	-	-	-

VIF, variance inflation factor; SI, social influence; CA, consumer attitude; PE, perceived enjoyment; CR, content relevance; DB, digital burnout.

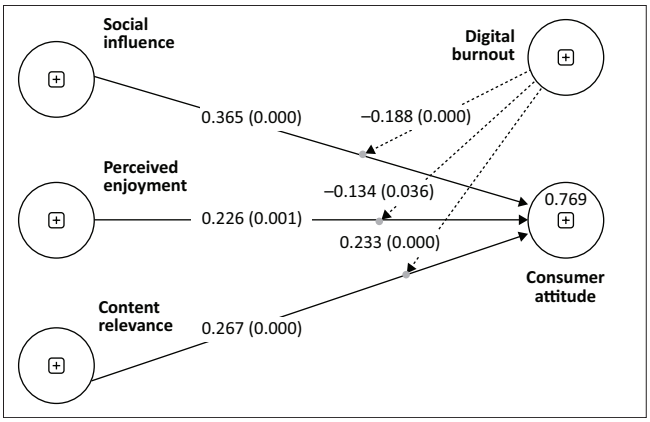


FIGURE 2: Structural model.

Discussion

This article explored Gen Z's attitude towards TikTok marketing. It identified five key discussion points. Firstly, consistent with previous research (see Hazari et al. 2024; Willis & Ozuem 2025), SI was positively associated with CA. In developing countries, normative pressure from peers (Jia et al. 2023), high social proof linked to TikTok influencers (Mulcahy et al. 2025), and socially engaging content on TikTok all contribute to the attitudinal responses of Gen Z. Specifically, the desire to conform to peer norms, along with online word of mouth shared on TikTok, helps establish social bonds that shape attitudes towards specific TikTok content. Additionally, the social appeal of peers and TikTok influencers elicits positive attitudes, making Gen Z receptive to TikTok marketing, driven by the value of parasocial relationships. Consequently, family, friends, and digital influencers play a vital role in validating consumers' choices regarding digital marketing communications (Liang et al. 2024). Unlike traditional offline marketing, which is non-personal, TikTok marketing is interactive, personal, and socially mediated, creating authentic social pathways that foster positive attitudinal responses. Therefore, firms should consider Gen Z consumers' social networks when designing social media marketing strategies, focusing on TikTok activities that build social bonds with their target audience.

Secondly, this study found that PE significantly influences CAs, aligning with earlier research by Liu et al. (2025) and Sasongko et al. (2025). This indicates that consumers develop favourable attitudes towards TikTok marketing content perceived as exciting, fun-filled, and socially engaging. When TikTok marketing content meets or exceeds Gen Z consumers' expectations, they tend to be more inclined to engage with it continuously. As such, pleasurable TikTok content evokes positive emotional responses (Chong 2025). This is unsurprising, given that content creation on TikTok is easier than on other video platforms (Hazari et al. 2024), which, in turn, makes it easier for the tech-savvy Gen Z cohort to both co-create and absorb content. Additionally, enjoyment is one of the primary motives for Gen Z to use TikTok (Cui 2025), offering hedonic gratification. Consequently, enjoyable experiences are likely to foster positive attitudes, as consumers derive happiness from TikTok's socially interactive content. Nonetheless, marketers should equally prioritise fun and relevant content to balance entertainment with informative value.

Thirdly, CR has a strong positive relationship with CA, aligning with earlier research (see Van Gasse et al. 2024; Wei 2025). Generation Z consumers firmly believe that TikTok marketing content currently aligns with their

interests and needs, which shapes their attitude towards TikTok marketing. It therefore follows that perceived relevance of TikTok marketing fosters a positive attitude among Gen Z consumers when it resonates with their personal values, situations, and preferences. Due to its multimedia capabilities, TikTok facilitates the creation of content that appeals to and relates with users' socio-cultural contexts and lived experiences, such as the use of native language, gestures, or religion. Rezek (2022) suggests that this evokes emotional connections, which ultimately elicit a positive attitude. Notably, in developing economies, young consumers are digitally socialised, helping to minimise avoidance behaviours towards TikTok-mediated marketing (Hanaysha 2022). As a result, Gen Z consumers tend to assimilate, absorb, approve, and ultimately exhibit a favourable attitude towards social media marketing messages they perceive as relevant. Therefore, it is important for TikTok marketers targeting this generation to understand local cultural contexts and values, as this helps to encourage receptivity and foster positive CAs.

Lastly, on the one hand, DB negatively moderates the influences of SI and PE on CAs. This finding aligns with the work of Zhang and Wang (2024). In the online space, digital overload hampers the effectiveness of factors such as SI and PE, which typically lead to positive attitudinal responses. Therefore, highly personalised and pleasurable content may fail to capture users' attention due to digital overload. This reduces favourable attitudes towards TikTok marketing. Among Gen Z consumers, habitual use of TikTok may lead to emotional exhaustion and fatigue, thereby diminishing the crucial role of SI on their attitudes. Similarly, even when TikTok marketing content is designed to be enjoyable, DB weakens its effect on CAs (Qin et al. 2024). Consequently, fatigued Gen Z consumers tend to hold unfavourable attitudes towards pleasurable and exciting marketing content. Conversely, DB exhibits a positive moderating role between CR and CA. In developing countries, the perceived relevance of TikTok marketing content for Gen Z's attitudes depends on levels of DB (Qin et al. 2024). As a result, fatigued consumers are less likely to be attracted to and may ignore irrelevant content. In contrast, exposure to highly relevant content that aligns with their aspirations and interests elicits positive emotional responses. This can be attributed to selective exposure, whereby cognitively fatigued consumers prioritise TikTok marketing content that they perceive as meaningful while disregarding peripheral cues. For TikTok marketers, increasing message relevance to match the audience's emotional and cognitive contexts is essential for engaging Gen Z consumers amid DB.

Theoretical implications

This study is significant in multiple ways. Social influence, PE, and CR have been identified as key predictors of CA. These findings support the SIT, which highlights the importance of SI in shaping attitudinal behaviours. Due to digital socialisation and peer interactions on social media, SI plays a crucial role in shaping Gen Z CAs. Furthermore, the study expands the SIT by analysing the moderating effect of DB, demonstrating how Gen Z consumers may become less receptive to marketing cues. It also improves understanding of UGT, indicating that PE and CR are vital factors affecting CAs towards TikTok marketing. Not only that, the study further refines UGT by introducing DB as a depletion constraint that alters the gratification-attitude relationship. Additionally, the results confirm that the predictors of CA (SI, PE, and CR) are based on validated theories. Therefore, the research extends existing scholarship on CAs and digital marketing technologies into the context of TikTok marketing. It further establishes TikTok as a source of timely, relevant, and valuable product information for young consumers making purchasing decisions. Finally, this study offers valuable insights into the behaviour of Gen Z consumers, a group that has traditionally been under-researched in marketing.

Practical significance

This study offers valuable practical insights for marketing practitioners in general and Zimbabwean marketing managers specifically. The findings indicate that marketing managers should focus on the factors influencing CAs, which were confirmed in this study. Social influence, PE, and CR were positively linked to CAs towards TikTok marketing. This suggests that marketers must ensure that TikTok content remains relevant to users' needs. Furthermore, the content should be engaging and attractive to evoke positive consumer emotions. Since DB reduces consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing, marketers should avoid overwhelming the platform with excessive information. Digital overload may result in negative attitudes towards TikTok marketing. Nonetheless, the study highlights TikTok's inherent communicative potential as an emerging marketing tool with significant capacity to enhance brand visibility.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study investigates a significant marketing communications channel and deepens our understanding of the factors influencing Gen Z consumers' attitudes. Conducted in a Zimbabwean context, the results may have limited applicability to other regions due to differences in digital infrastructure, TikTok usage patterns, and socio-cultural factors. Since these contextual elements vary across markets, consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing also differ. Therefore, behavioural responses observed in this study might not accurately mirror the perceptions of Gen Z consumers elsewhere. Given that the study utilised a small sample size, further research with a larger sample is needed to verify the conceptual model. Despite these constraints, this study provides valuable empirical evidence of the relationships among the variables under study. Future research could examine how psychosocial mechanisms shape attitudes towards mobile

social media platforms among different generations. They could also examine how factors such as social media fatigue, technostress, and intrusiveness weaken the attitude-behaviour nexus across various social media platforms.

Conclusion

Although TikTok marketing has attracted the attention of scholars and practitioners, the effects of specific variables on Gen Z consumers' attitudes have not been sufficiently examined, especially in developing countries. This research demonstrates that SI, PE, and CR positively influence CAs towards TikTok marketing. Furthermore, DB plays a vital role in shaping consumers' attitudes towards TikTok marketing. In sum, the study proposed an analytical framework to examine the mechanisms that influence Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards social media marketing efforts, specifically TikTok marketing.

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CRediT authorship contribution

John Marumbwa: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Visualisation, Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting this study and its findings are available within the article and its listed references.

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