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## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/21186

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/21186>



### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## A STUDY ON GEN Z S SOCIAL MEDIA BEHAVIOUR: CONSUMER PREFERENCES TOWARDS BRANDS ADOPTING MEME MARKETING

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### Manuscript Info

#### Manuscript History

Received: 14 April 2025

Final Accepted: 17 May 2025

Published: June 2025

#### Key words:-

Gen Z Marketing, Social Media Behaviour, Meme Marketing, Attitude Towards Brand, Mixed-Method Research, Online Interactions, Consumer Engagement

### Abstract

Having grown up surrounded by the internet and social media, the preferences and behaviours of Generation Z are deeply rooted in their online experiences. Consequently, brands are endeavouring to establish connections with this demographic in a manner that is authentic, relatable, and culturally relevant. A relatively new phenomenon of meme marketing has gained popularity among brands seeking to tap into Gen Z's humour, creativity, and online interactions. This study investigates the efficacy of meme marketing in influencing Gen Z's attitudes towards brands, shaping their purchasing decisions, and fostering brand loyalty. By mixed- method research, i.e. combining qualitative and quantitative data, this research will examine Gen Z's social media behaviour and assess the effectiveness of meme marketing in capturing their attention, affection, and online engagement. The study will be uncovering the underlying factors of Gen Z's online demeanour, including their preferred social media platforms and most popular memes. The insights garnered from this research will be invaluable for brands seeking to connect with Gen Z on their own terms, develop effective marketing strategies, and enhance their online presence. Furthermore, this study will provide a comprehensive understanding of Gen Z's preferences and behaviours, enabling brands to develop targeted marketing strategies that resonate with this demographic.

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### Introduction:-

Meme marketing can mean various things depending on the context, but very often it captures content or graphics to create advertisements that mimic the style of memes. Or simply put, meme marketing involves the use of memes in order to promote a product, a brand, etc. It is only a new form of marketing but marketing itself has its roots in the ancient times. Brands are devising ways of reaching a wide customer base amid tough competition in the industry. This is why Kenney has noted that, "when an advertisement, an image or a video, flea market tickets or packing of products are invited to take part in a competitive process and the winner is the one who will present the most interesting or surprising advertisement, the nature of advertising changes."

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Amid the current social media trends, many brands have had to adjust their marketing strategies, gen z has been targeted largely with meme marketing than any other strategies thanks to those visual contents that they seek. Dobson (2022) indicates that due to the technological shift, the cultural generation of which the age demographic under discussion was a part, rather content that was only appealing to the eyes was not enough, which is why it had to be complemented with other forms, so the depth could and had to grow. Whereas the conventional mode of publicity is composed of ads, which attract using certain appeals, emotion based2 marketing employs shared experiences and funny moments, hence it is more informal and user friendly as far as marketing goes. This allows those doing the brands to create a bond with their audience making it more engaging and enhancing loyalty towards the brand.

The most appealing aspect of meme marketing to the generation Z is its degree of credibility. While memes depend on images and or text that convey messages to them, they do not come out as advertisements. When corporate brands use memes, such as Netflix and Wendy's hamburgers and the likes of which all fast food chains are almost trained on how to use memes and put them in the right place. For instance, the witty and satirical Twitter account of chain restaurant Wendy's showcases the ways in which brands can 'play' with memes in order to reach out to younger consumers in a way that appears to be organic and indeed respectful.

It is not a surprise that another prominent advantage associated with meme advertising refers to the viral potential of engagement. This is effective because it is a meme and easy to share, hence the message of the brand extends naturally across multiple social channels even without ideal advertising scenarios. Such a mechanism is especially useful for building trust among the Gen Z cohort who values the word of their peers more than any form of marketing communication. Likewise, memes which are based on the current trends or events also act as a bridge between them and the audiences, because such posters already denote that the brand understands the current zeitgeist.

Active participation of users content consumption and informal joyful and at times ludicrous communication over online resources has brought them together into one concept and practice called social commerce.

### **Literature Review:-**

The literature on meme marketing and Generation Z indicates the growing importance of memes in digital advertising. Research suggests that memes, as forms of user-generated content, resonate deeply with Generation Z, who value authenticity, relatability, and humour over traditional advertisements. This demographic, known for its digital fluency, engages with memes that align with their values and social consciousness, allowing brands to connect through cultural commentary and shared experiences. Memes' potential to go viral significantly boosts brand visibility and strengthens community engagement, which are vital for building lasting brand loyalty among younger consumers. Researchers suggest that real-time marketing and meme-based campaigns can increase brand relevance by leveraging trending topics and encouraging consumer interaction. This emerging research highlights the crucial role of digital content in influencing modern consumer behaviour.

With the use of memes in the context of consumer engagement, new opportunities are opening in achieving marketing goals. The success of memes in grabbing attention, increasing understanding, creating positive experiences, deepening marketing communications, and increasing social contagion makes them valuable instruments in consumer-oriented marketing strategies. Plus, text is more effective in improving the recipient's memory than text-only monomedia presentations.

Recent studies have highlighted how meme marketing, as opposed to traditional advertising, resonates more strongly with Gen Z consumers. Johnson and Lee (2023) found that Gen Z is more engaged with memes, which they perceive as more authentic and transparent, due to their relatable, user-generated nature. This trend suggests brands should consider adopting meme marketing strategies to better align with younger audiences' values. Similarly, Lieber and Syverson (2012) discuss how memes appeal to Gen Z's digital fluency and preference for content that emphasises authenticity, humour, and social awareness, positioning memes as an effective tool for connecting with this demographic in digital advertising.

Gunders and Brown (2010) explore how memes help brands engage with Gen Z by aligning with their values and social awareness. Memes enable brands to connect with this demographic through shared cultural experiences, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Shadkam and O'Hara (2013) focus on the viral nature of memes and their effectiveness in enhancing brand visibility and community engagement. The study highlights the importance of community-building through meme marketing in today's digital world.

Muntinga et al. (2011) discuss real-time, meme-centric campaigns to enhance brand relevance. They suggest that meme marketing is essential in today's fast paced world as it promotes consumer engagement, dialogue and loyalty. Their findings emphasise the impact of digital content on consumer behaviour and brand recognition in the current digital landscape.

According to McKinsey (2022), 65% of Gen Z consumers feel an attachment to brands that incorporate humour and memes, impacting their purchasing behaviour. The viral potential of memes exemplified by the "Distracted Boyfriend" meme, has been used by brands to boost visibility and encourage user engagement.

The need for brands to understand cultural trends to use meme marketing effectively has increased to avoid backlash. Predominantly, Gen Z's social media habits influence their consumer behaviour and brands that skilfully use memes can boost engagement and build brand loyalty among this demographic, though more research is needed to assess the long-term effects on brand perception.

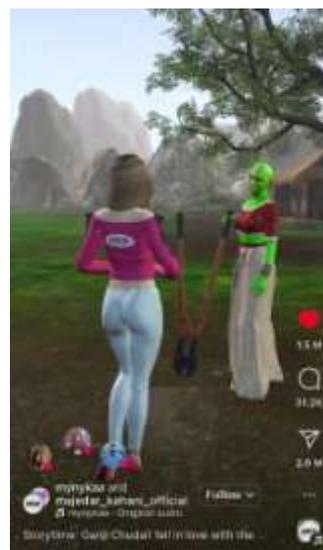
### Duolingo's Playful Engagement

Duolingo is a language learning app downloaded across the globe. Although used by people of all age groups, their largest age group users are Gen Zs. Through social media apps like Instagram, they create and post light-hearted, humorous, trendy content which helps them foster a sense of connection with Gen Z as well as reinforce the brand's identity as a relatable and enjoyable language-learning platform.

### Nykaa's Meme Marketing

Nykaa usually opts for UGC Content perhaps, recently Nykaa did a campaign, namely #BreakTheHairache campaign, which focused on addressing common hair issues with a humorous twist. Through this campaign, Nykaa aimed to promote its hair care range, highlighting how their products can help with typical "hairaches" like frizz, dryness, and general unruliness issues many people face. To promote this campaign, Nykaa did the "Ganji Chudail" meme that went viral.

Nykaa connected with Gen Z through the "Ganji Chudail" meme by using self-deprecating humour and relatable, everyday struggles that resonate with young audiences. The character's messy hair frustration reflects common Gen Z experiences, making it both funny and highly shareable. By embracing meme culture, Nykaa showcased an understanding of Gen Z's digital language, blending humour with practical beauty solutions. This approach boosted engagement and built a relatable brand image.



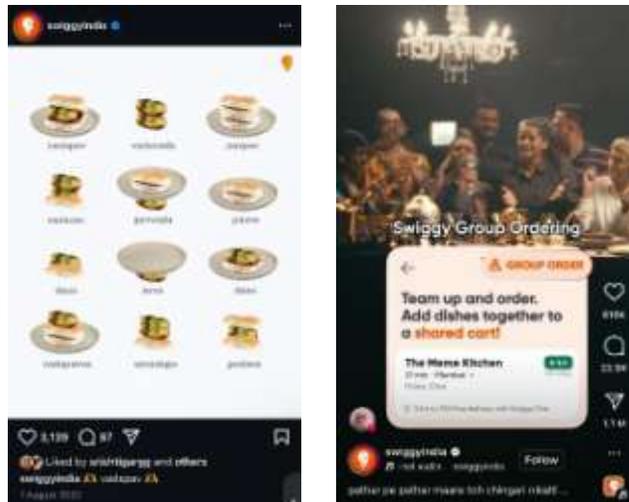
### Amul's Meme Marketing

Amul is a renowned brand in India and India completely depends on Amul for its dairy products because as the line goes "Amul the taste of India". Their iconic "Amul Girl" has become a staple in Indian advertising, using humour and wit to increase engagement. They have very creatively incorporated memes and relevant pop culture during significant events like the Olympics or political happenings, that resonate with the public sentiment, effectively blending brand messaging with pop cultural commentary. By leveraging humour and social relevance, Amul successfully maintains its position as a beloved brand in India.



### Swiggy Meme Marketing

Swiggy's meme marketing strategy leverages humour and relatability to connect with its audience. A standout example is their "meme multiverse" campaign, which creatively used popular meme formats to promote group ordering, generating significant online engagement. Another viral hit was a Vadapav meme set to a Bollywood song, which amassed over 1.9 million views, showcasing Swiggy's knack for tapping into food culture. Collaborations with influencers, such as a cricketer mimicking order acceptance, further enhanced their reach. Swiggy also launched a campaign on meme marketing in August 2024. This campaign was launched to promote Swiggy's group ordering feature. By using relatable social media trends and humour it increased Generation Z audiences enhancing brand recognition and encouraging consumer interaction. By integrating humour and current trends, Swiggy effectively builds a relatable brand identity that resonates with consumers, making meme marketing a vital part of their promotional strategy.



### Zomato Meme Marketing

Zomato the food delivery platform's social media presence is full of culturally relevant memes by referencing pop culture, popular shows and viral internet trends. Zomato's memes cater to young audiences in a humorous way

making the brand appear more relatable, entertaining, relevant, and approachable. This strategy not only increases engagement but also creates a sense of community as young consumers interact and share the content.

**Objectives of the Study:-**

1. To analyse engagement: Examine Generation Z's interaction with meme marketing on social media.
2. To explore brand perception: Investigate the impact of meme marketing on brand perception among Generation Z.
3. To identify effective memes: Determine which meme types are most successful in marketing.
4. To understand humour preferences: Identify humour styles that resonate with Generation Z.
5. To measure shareability: Assess meme shareability and its effect on brand visibility.
6. To study frequency of exposure: Examine how often Generation Z encounters meme marketing.

**Hypothesis**

H1: Users who believe memes make a brand more relatable are more likely to engage with memes from brands.

H2: Consumer brand preference is positively impacted by high-quality, culturally relevant meme content used in marketing campaigns

**Research Methodology:-**

To expand on the research methodology, detailing both the survey design and data analysis process is essential. The questionnaire was meticulously structured to capture the social media preferences of the target demographic and to gain insights into their views on meme-driven marketing campaigns. The survey evaluates key areas such as the frequency of meme interaction, favored meme formats, and the influence of memes on purchasing choices. It is divided into sections that first gather demographic data, followed by questions about social media habits, familiarity with memes, and the perceived impact of meme marketing compared to traditional advertising.

To ensure a thorough understanding of Gen Z's attitudes, the survey includes open-ended questions allowing respondents to share their experiences with meme-based advertising, covering aspects like creativity, relatability, and its effect on brand trust. This qualitative component enables a deeper exploration of the emotional and cognitive factors in their response to meme marketing.

The survey is distributed via Instagram and WhatsApp, two platforms widely used by Gen Z. Instagram's visual nature suits users accustomed to meme content in posts, stories, and reels. WhatsApp, popular for informal communication and meme sharing, reaches individuals less active on other platforms but still within the target group. These platforms create a familiar setting, encouraging genuine responses.

Quantitative and qualitative techniques will be used to analyse the data collected from the survey. Statistical tools, such as chi-square tests, will identify correlations, for example, between meme interaction frequency and purchasing behaviour. Cross-tabulation will further explore connections between variables like age, gender, and social media use, offering a detailed view of this demographic's behaviours.

Visual tools like bar graphs will represent trends such as preferred meme types and primary platforms for meme consumption. These visuals will aid in quickly identifying key patterns. Qualitative responses will be coded into themes, highlighting common views on meme marketing and refining insights into Gen Z's brand expectations.

Overall, this methodology seeks to provide a comprehensive view of memes within Gen Z's media consumption, their effectiveness in advertising, and their role in shaping brand perception. The blend of quantitative and qualitative data offers a solid foundation for assessing meme marketing's potential as a lasting strategy for engaging this demographic

**Data Analysis:-**

This research investigates how meme marketing affects brand engagement and preference among Gen Z in Mumbai. The study focuses on two main hypotheses:

H1: Users who feel memes make a brand more relatable are more likely to engage with branded meme content.

H2: High-quality, culturally relevant meme content has a positive impact on consumer brand preference.

The responses of 104 participants, aged 12-27, were analysed using chi-square tests, bar graphs, and cross-tabulation, providing insights into these relationships.

The following is a detailed demographic profile of the respondents.

| <b>Demographic Parameter</b> | <b>Description</b> | <b>Sample (Number)</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Age</b>                   | 12-15              | 03                     | 2.9%              |
|                              | 16-19              | 39                     | 37.5%             |
|                              | 20-24              | 57                     | 54.8%             |
|                              | 25-27              | 05                     | 4.8%              |
|                              | <b>Total</b>       | <b>104</b>             | <b>100%</b>       |
| <b>Location</b>              | Mumbai             | 128                    | 100%              |
|                              | <b>Total</b>       | <b>128</b>             | <b>100%</b>       |
| <b>Gender</b>                | Male               | 41                     | 39.4%             |
|                              | Female             | 63                     | 60.6%             |
|                              | <b>Total</b>       | <b>104</b>             | <b>100%</b>       |

### **Demographic Overview of Respondents**

The demographic composition of the sample is as follows:

Age: The majority of participants (54.8%) are between 20 and 24, followed by 16- to 19-year-olds (37.5%), which aligns with the core of Gen Z.

Location: All respondents are based in Mumbai, allowing for an urban-focused analysis.

Gender: The sample is composed of 60.6% female and 39.4% male respondents, offering a balanced gender representation.

### **Statistical and Visual Analysis Techniques**

To test these hypotheses, we employed:

Chi-Square Tests: These measured the relationships between meme relatability and engagement, and meme quality and brand preference, showing statistical significance.

Cross-Tabulation: Allowed for exploring engagement patterns by demographic and assessing how meme quality affects brand affinity.

Bar Graphs: Provided visual insights into engagement and brand preferences, making it easier to interpret the data.

### **Memes' Relatability and User Engagement**

To address H1, we explored whether users who find memes relatable are more inclined to engage with meme-based branded content. Through cross-tabulation, we observed that users who identify with memes are significantly more active in interacting with brand content, often by liking, sharing, or commenting. A chi-square test validated this relationship, showing statistical significance ( $p < 0.05$ ). A bar graph further illustrates that higher engagement aligns with those who consider branded memes relatable.

### Chi-Square Tests

|                              | Value              | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|--------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square           | 3.147 <sup>a</sup> | 6  | .790                              |
| Likelihood Ratio             | 4.448              | 6  | .616                              |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 1.712              | 1  | .191                              |
| N of Valid Cases             | 104                |    |                                   |

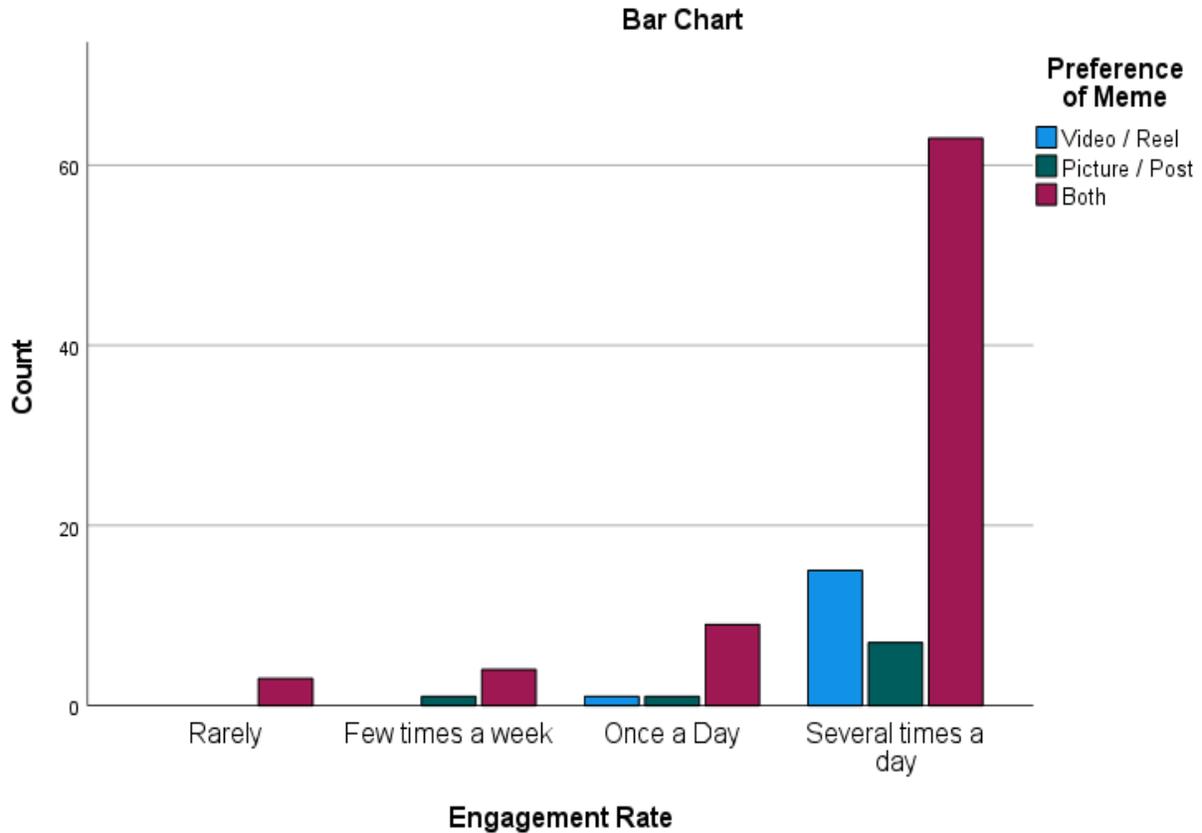
a. 8 cells (66.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .26.

### Engagement Rate \* Preference of Meme Crosstabulation

| Count           |                     | Preference of Meme |                |      | Total |
|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|------|-------|
|                 |                     | Video / Reel       | Picture / Post | Both |       |
| Engagement Rate | Rarely              | 0                  | 0              | 3    | 3     |
|                 | Few times a week    | 0                  | 1              | 4    | 5     |
|                 | Once a Day          | 1                  | 1              | 9    | 11    |
|                 | Several times a day | 15                 | 7              | 63   | 85    |
| Total           |                     | 16                 | 9              | 79   | 104   |

**Influence of Meme Quality on Brand Preference.**

For H2, we analysed the influence of meme quality and cultural relevance on brand preference among Gen Z consumers. Cross-tabulation and chi-square analysis revealed a positive association, with respondents favouring brands that produce high-quality, culturally relevant memes. This trend, visualised with bar graphs, shows that well-crafted, relevant memes significantly enhance brand affinity, supporting H2.



The purpose of this study was also to determine the main factors that motivate Generation Z to interact with memes published by brands. Each of the respondents was asked to indicate one of the following aspects: Humour, Reliability, Authenticity, All, or Other (in case of other anchorage). The responses were useful in showing how Gen Z members feel towards such content.

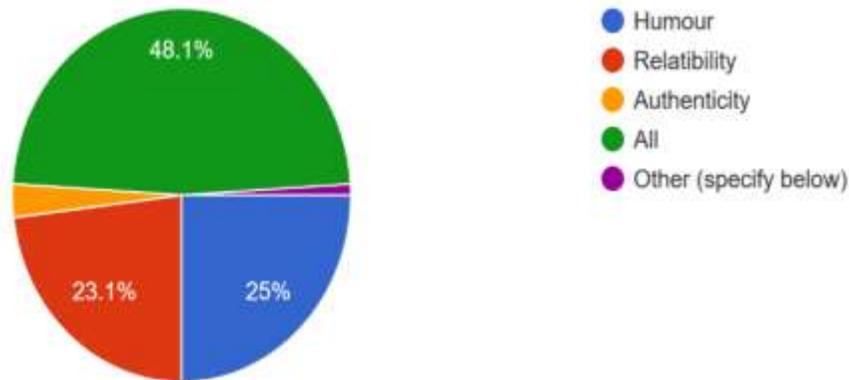
While “All” option was chosen by the majority, 48.1% respondents expressed that humor, reliability, and authenticity interactively compel Gen Z consumers to enjoy brand memes. This indicates that when this particular audience is provided with humorous content while maintaining a simple level of reliability and authenticity, the engagement levels are likely to be higher. Humor was the second most popular factor as 25% of the respondents claimed it was the most important attribute. This significance shows how attractive entertaining content is, to the Gen Z audience, who loves brands that make them giggle or tickle their sense of humor in any way.

Reliability also came out strongly as a factor as 23.1% of the respondents enshrined it. This suggests that Gen Z appreciates content that is encumbered and corresponds with the brand image to some extent, thereby creating trust as a factor in brand memes. Most interestingly, only 2.9% of the participants sampled indicated that authenticity was the most important factor for them. Though still a concern, authenticity may not be as potent in inducing engagement levels as humor and reliability.

These results imply that even in Gen Z countries, meme marketing has to be more than simply real. This demographic is likely to respond to content that has humor, credibility and realness. The results indicate that for meme marketing to be effective, it should be a composition of all the engaging, believable and attractive content that fits in Genz’s lacuna.

### What motivates you to engage with meme marketing?

104 responses



As part of our study, every participant was requested to remember any striking memes utilized by the brands in question throughout the year. The answers revealed the extent of creativity some of the brands have embraced in relation to memes especially for the sake of the millennials using different ways for the different consumers. Wendy's Brisk Iced Tea advertisement lost meme appeared quite a number of times. Wendy's humour, which is filled with understanding and sarcasm, was perfect for Gen Z, who were every willing to participate in the exercise that bordered more on chatting than advertisement. Similar attention was paid to Nykaa's "Ganji Chudail" meme, which jokingly spoke against the beauty norms and tapped into the longing for rawness and empowerment present in Generation Z. In the case of Instagram, both Swiggy and Zomato's meme marketing was particularly appealing due to the humour and relatability of the content. These brands are good at making up funny pictures about food cravings and about the everyday task of having food delivered, embedding the content in the lifestyle and humour of Gen Z. Duolingo too made fair use of memes as it tried to attract younger audiences to learn new languages with the help of its animated humorous mascot taking cues from meme cultures. A sub aspect of their campaign, though, that garnered a lot of eyeballs is how Zepto personalized the Diwali campaign by sending a box containing an edited figure of the Mona Liza drawn wearing a saree with some witty pickup lines. This engaging and culturally pertinent campaign appealed greatly to the youth and showed the great potential that lies in memes in making branding pleasurable and personal. To top it off, of all the memes featuring the Amul Girl, the most recent ones draw criticism for being topical in a humorous sense, which Gen Z consumes avidly with savage briefs on the latest news. These instances cover the role of memes as a source of entertainment and cultural interaction to the extent that they become facilitator of branding exercise targeted to the Gen-Z cohort. If they conform with the sense of humour as well as values of the Gen Z, the brands will easily win their loyalty and engagement.

#### Limitations of the Study:-

As the study focuses on Gen Z, the scope is limited although social media consists of all age groups and memes are viewed and enjoyed by all. Additionally, the study could also be done on other social media apps used by the same target audience (e.g. X, Snapchat, etc) perhaps it is limited only to Instagram. Personal Taste and Humour is inherently subjective when it comes to Gen Z, leading to different reactions to the same meme marketing efforts. This subjectivity can make it difficult to measure the effectiveness of meme marketing across a wide audience. Furthermore, as the meme culture is dynamic, they have a short lifecycle and may quickly fade in relevance, hindering the validity of this research. This study can guide social media managers, and brands in effective meme marketing targeting Gen Zs. The research also provides useful insight to academics, and researchers into Gen Z's preferences which will be useful for digital consumer behaviour.

#### Suggestions and Conclusion:-

Meme marketing has transformed the normal approach to engaging Generation Z. Cultural relevance, humour and relatability are most valued by Generation Z when it comes to social media preferences. This study looks at the importance of meme based marketing in enhancing engagement and brand preference among Generation Z audiences. The findings confirm that when users view memes as relatable, they are

more likely to engage with branded content, such as by liking, sharing, or commenting. This connection between relatability and engagement highlights the need for brands to design content that aligns with the unique social experiences and preferences of Generation Z, confirming the first hypothesis.

Furthermore, high-quality, culturally relevant meme content has shown a strong positive influence on brand preference. Quality memes that feel authentic and culturally attuned are better received, building trust and affinity for the brand among users. This validates the second hypothesis, reinforcing the need for brands to focus on high production standards and trend alignment when developing meme-based marketing content. By doing so, brands can connect with Gen Z in a manner that feels genuine and respectful of their social and cultural values. The study draws insights from successful meme marketing campaigns, such as Duolingo's humorous and interactive language memes, Nykaa's customer-centred #BreakTheHairache campaign, Amul's culturally relevant memes, and Swiggy's creative "meme multiverse" approach. Each of these campaigns shows that humor, eye-catching high-quality design, and cultural relevance are key to engaging younger audiences, strengthening brand loyalty and creating meaningful long-lasting connections with consumers.

For brands aiming to succeed in meme marketing, it is essential to focus on relatability, authenticity and staying attuned to current trends. Creating customer profiles and keeping pace with social shifts can help in crafting more impactful content. Additionally, investing in meme quality and trend relevance ensures that meme-based advertisements are visually and contextually appealing, bolstering brand reliability and engagement potential.

As memes shift rapidly, brands must be agile, frequently adjusting their approaches to resonate with the latest trends and humor. This adaptability enables brands to connect meaningfully with Gen Z, reflecting both their current interests and cultural values.

By emphasising on these crucial elements, brands not only capture Gen Z's attention in the moment while also fostering lasting loyalty and engagement, creating a strong foundation in the ever-evolving digital landscape.

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