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IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON GEN Z'S COSMETIC BRAND AWARENESS

Zhi Wei Lim ¹
Yeu Chin Yong ²
Chi Hau Tan ³
Man Seong Chan ^{*4}

*Corresponding author: mschan@mmu.edu.my

^{1,2,3} Faculty of Business and Finance, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Perak, Malaysia

⁴ Faculty of Management, Multimedia University, Cyberjaya, Malaysia

Abstract

In this era of rapid technological advancement, the number of consumers browsing online information steadily increases. Social media platforms have emerged as a vital channel for communication and sharing information, making them the greatest option for conducting cosmetic business. Due to the scarcity of existing studies discussing the factors affecting brand awareness of cosmetic products, this research paper aims to examine the impact of social media marketing on brand awareness for cosmetic products among Gen Z in Kuala Lumpur. A total of 275 responses were collected using the snowball sampling technique. The data were analyzed through the utilization of multiple regression analysis. The results showed that three dimensions of social media marketing—customization, interaction, and electronic word-of-mouth significantly affect brand awareness. This study contributes to the present body of knowledge by confirming the stimulus-organism-response model. Our study also suggests effective social media marketing strategies can generate brand awareness.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Brand Awareness, Cosmetic, Gen Z

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1.0 Introduction

In this high-speed development information age, the number of consumers browsing online information is continually increasing and is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 11% from 2022 to 2027 (Aman, 2022). Several amounts of online platforms have been utilized to bring benefits to both consumers and sellers throughout a business relationship. Rawat et al. (2021) found that social media platforms act as a good choice for the business to be carried out. Since social media platforms have experienced rapid growth as a fundamental medium for communication and the exchange of information purpose. At the same time, social media marketing become a popular marketing approach that capitalizes on social media platforms, enabling social networking and disseminating information concerning a specific company or brand (Hayes, 2022). Therefore, businesses are beginning to view these social media technologies as effective mechanisms to encourage and increase client interaction (Alalwan et al., 2017).

The growing utilization of cosmetic goods in Malaysia has been driven by the women's workforce, which hovers around 55%, and heightened self-awareness resulting from a high education level (Leavy, 2020). This trend has undoubtedly spurred the introduction of cosmetic products into the consumer market. With a high demand for premium cosmetic products, this industry is projected to experience steady growth in the upcoming years (Sviderska et al., 2023). This increasing trend caused brand awareness to become essential for marketers to enhance product recognition among consumers. The higher the brand awareness, the more significant the proportion of the brand's consumers, leading to increased sales volume. Moreover, Gen Z is recognized as a potential consumer segment that creates substantial influence over decisions related to purchases (Nugroho et al., 2022). Gen Z refers to the demographic cohort comprising individuals born between 1995 and 2012 (Barhate & Dirani 2022). Given Gen Z's characteristics as digitally proficient individuals from a young age, embracing social media marketing might be the appropriate strategy to shape their purchasing behaviors effectively. Apart from that, Kuala Lumpur has achieved a median income which was recorded as RM10,234 above the national level of RM6,338 among other states (DOSM, 2022). Therefore, the research location is considered the stunning capital of Malaysia, especially

for Gen Z which has higher purchasing power to fulfill their needs and demands, such as cosmetic products. But even though social media is powerful, there has not been much research about how it affects brand awareness, especially for Gen Z and cosmetic products in Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, this research fills that gap by exploring a new space where social media and brand awareness meet and focusing on cosmetic products among the young Gen Z group in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2.0 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Underlying Theory

The stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model is a psychological framework explaining how internal and external factors influence human behaviour. According to Woodworth's proposed model in 1929, a stimulus triggers a cognitive and emotional process in the organism, leading to a response. The S-O-R model is an extension of the classic theory of the stimulus-response model that Pavlov (1927) suggested. It assumes that behaviour directly results from a stimulus without considering the organism's role. The model consists of three structures, namely, stimulus, organism, and response, which determine the behavioural outcome of an event. Stimulus refers to the external events or situations that trigger a reaction in the individual. Organism refers to the internal factors of the individual, such as their personality, emotions, attitudes, and beliefs. Response refers to the observable actions or reactions of the individual to the stimulus. Vergura et al. (2020) applied the S-O-R model to discover six environmental stimuli influencing consumers' experiences with organic personal care products as well as their purchase behavior. Throughout the findings, past study concluded that the S-O-R model is a suitable theoretical model for investigating decision-making processes. This statement is reinforced by Armawan and Sudarmiati (2022), who claimed the S-O-R model in developing technology that can leverage social media marketing platforms to enhance various product recognition including cosmetic product brands. Therefore, this research study will exclusively utilize the stimulus and organism components of the S-O-R model to gauge the emotional responses, which is brand awareness triggered by five environmental stimuli. The stimuli under examination include entertainment, customization, trendiness, interaction, and electronic word-of-mouth.

2.2 Brand Awareness

As stated in the research conducted by Romaniuk et al. (2017), brand awareness refers to an individual's ability to identify or remember that a particular brand is associated with a specific product category. Several elements are used in creating strong brand awareness, such as the name, symbol, and brand logo. As proven in previous research summarized by Hasanali and Gholamveisy (2023), brand awareness implies the brand's presence in memory, signifying that the product remembers and recognizes the brand. Therefore, brand awareness plays a crucial role in positioning a product or brand in the preliminary stage and enables recognition of a brand in the market, especially for cosmetic products. Therefore, this study used brand awareness as a dependent variable to study the effect of social media marketing among Gen Z in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2.3 Entertainment

Entertainment can be a powerful tool for creating brand awareness as consumers are more likely to remember the experience and the associated brand when entertained. It reflected that entertainment significantly affects creating and enhancing brand awareness in consumers' minds. This is because entertainment can access hedonic product values as discovered by Lin et al. (2012). At the same time, several methods could affect brand awareness, such as emotional connection and viral marketing which were found to effectively increase brand awareness among customers (Yanuar et al., 2021). Presently, entertainment serves as a crucial medium for developing brand awareness, as consumers are inclined to retain experience memories associated with engaging marketing content. This aligned with the research findings of Malarvizhi et al. (2022) claimed that there was a positive and significant effect of entertainment on brand awareness which validated previous studies findings such as Godey et al. (2016) and Seo and Park (2018). As quoted by Zhu and Chen (2015), when people share entertaining content on social media, it can reach a large audience and create buzz around the brand. Such as enjoyable entertainment, people will associate that positive feeling with the brand, which can increase brand advocacy. With the presence of brand advocacy, the brand awareness of

specific brands can be pushed to a higher level. Therefore, the first hypothesis was developed in this study based on the above summary as follows:

H1: Entertainment has a significant effect on brand awareness.

2.4 Customization

Customization refers to the process of establishing consumer satisfaction by tailoring the business's interactions with specific consumers (Seo and Park, 2018). Businesses can successfully communicate the unique characteristics of their product and brands to consumers through peer-to-peer contact on social media channels. When a brand offers customization options to its customers, it creates a more personalized experience, leading to increased brand awareness and advocacy. According to Keller (2001), customization sets a brand apart from its competitors. When a brand offers unique customization options, it can differentiate itself from other brands. However, Simonson (2005) further stated that customized offers that match individual consumer preferences might offer greater value, especially when marketers can uncover these preferences and customers can identify offers that align exceptionally well with their preferences. This can be further comprehended by Bilgin (2018) found that the most significant effect of social media marketing activities is the customization which can influence consumer awareness of the brand, shape their perceptions, and promote brand loyalty. Whenever customers have a positive experience with a customized product, they are more likely to share it with others, which leads to positive word-of-mouth marketing that increases brand awareness. However, this finding contracted to Chuah et al. (2023) who discovered that customization has an insignificant on online purchase intention in the cosmetic industry. Therefore, the second hypothesis was developed for this study based on the above summary as follows:

H2: Customization has a significant effect on brand awareness.

2.5 Trendiness

Trendiness is another factor affecting brand awareness, as the particular brand seen as trendy can attract a lot of attention and create a sense of excitement among consumers. According to Cheung et al. (2020), trendiness is positively associated with brand awareness, which can create favourable word-of-mouth promotion and enhance the probability of viral marketing. Due to the rapidly expanding digital environment, word-of-mouth marketing has sparked a new trend in marketing communication strategies. Viral marketing is defined as a strategy that utilizes this technological capability to facilitate the spread of information across millions of people (Motoki et al., 2020). When a brand is seen as trendy, it can also attract influencers, who can help promote the brand and increase its reach among their followers. Likewise, Yang et al. (2022) found that trendiness positively affects brand image and awareness, which in turn affects repurchase intention. This result similar to Faisal and Ekawanto (2022) also found that trendy marketing strategies increased consumers' brand awareness and purchase intention. Therefore, the third hypothesis for this study was developed based on the summary discussed above as follows:

H3: Trendiness has a significant effect on brand awareness.

2.6 Interaction

Interaction is a vital component of social media marketing. When a brand interacts with its customers on social media, it creates a more personalized experience and increases engagement. Masa'deh et al. (2021) found that engaging with customers on social media can result in positive word-of-mouth marketing and heightened brand awareness. This happens when businesses give customers room to share their thoughts with others and respond to individual customer requests. Additionally, when a brand responds promptly to customer inquiries and concerns, it can build trust and enhance its reputation. The result can be supported by Chatterjee et al. (2021), who found that interactive social media posts positively affected brand awareness and purchase intention. Another study by Samarah et al. (2022) also found that interaction positively influenced consumer brand

awareness and brand loyalty. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis was developed based on the above studies as follows:

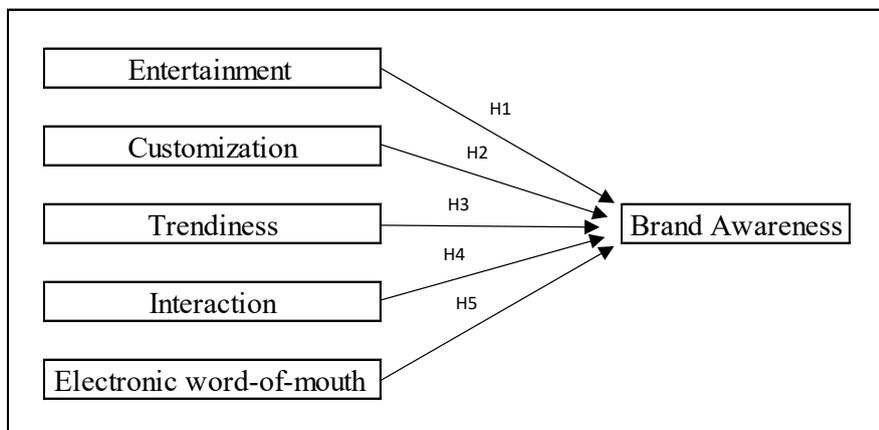
H4: Interaction has a significant effect on brand awareness.

2.7 Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Electronic word-of-mouth refers to the ongoing and interactive sharing of information regarding a company, product, or service among potential, current, or past consumers (Ismagilova et al., 2017). This sharing can occur through the Internet, making it accessible to diverse consumers and playing a role in shaping brand awareness (Seo et al., 2020). A previous study conducted by Godey et al. (2016) examined the social media marketing strategies of luxury brands and successfully identified that reinforcing the influence of electronic word-of-mouth can significantly enhance brand recognition and perception. Shifting to the aviation industry perspective, Lee (2012) delved into the effect of electronic word-of-mouth activities on brand image and brand awareness and claimed that positive electronic word-of-mouth exercises can significantly impact brand awareness and purchase intentions among customers. Therefore, the last hypothesis was developed based on the above studies as follows:

H5: Electronic word-of-mouth has a significant effect on brand awareness.

Figure 1: Proposed Research Framework



3.0 Research Methodology

This research study focused on Malaysian Gen Z consumers falling within the age range of 18 to 24 years located in Kuala Lumpur. This selection is based on the understanding that this demographic wields substantial influence within the cosmetic product market, possessing significant purchasing power and shaping the buying choices of their families and peers (Biondi, 2021). A self-administered questionnaire was adopted in this study with a total of 275 respondents involved by using the snowball sampling technique. The questionnaire consists of three sections. The questionnaire items were adapted from past studies. Brand awareness was assessed through a 4-item instrument from Hutter et al. (2013) and Godey et al. (2016), while this paper used a 5-item questionnaire from Kim and Ko(2010) to measure entertainment. In addition, customization was assessed using the 4- item scale developed by Kim and Ko (2010) and Kim and Ko (2012). A 3-item questionnaire was adapted from Kim and Ko (2010), Yadav and Rahman (2018), and Ladhari and Lajante (2019) to measure the trendiness variable, while the interaction used a 5-items scale developed by Kim and Ko (2010) and Yadav and Rahman (2018). Lastly, electronic word-of-mouth was assessed through a 4-item from Seo and Park (2018), Hutter et al. (2013), and Kim and Ko (2010). This quantitative research study analyzed descriptive, reliability, and multiple regression using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

4.0 Results

4.1 Demographic Profile

Table 1 illustrates that the respondents comprised 56% (154) males and 44% (121) females. Concerning the respondents' racial demographics, 76.7% (211) of the total respondents are Chinese, followed by 11.6% (32) of the respondents who are Malays respondents. Additionally, 11.3% (31) of the respondents are of Indian ethnicity, while 0.4% (1) belong to other racial groups. Most respondents use social media multiple times daily, 74.5% (205) of the total respondents. Then, there are 12% (33) once per day,

followed by 8.7% (24) a few times per week using social media, and lastly, a total of 4.7% (13) used social media once per week or even less.

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Characteristics	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	121	44.0
Male	154	56.0
Race		
Chinese	211	76.7
Malays	32	11.6
Indians	31	11.3
Other Races	1	0.4
Frequency of using Social Media		
Multiple Times Per Day	205	74.5
Once Per Day	33	12.0
A Few Times Per Week	24	8.7
Once Per Week or Even Less	13	4.7

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Before testing the hypotheses, we conducted a reliability test to ensure the instruments were reliable. As shown in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha of brand awareness is recorded as 0.857, and independent variables, which include customization (0.862), trendiness (0.814), and electronic word-of-mouth (0.889), are deemed good in the reliability assessment. The following independent variables consist of entertainment (0.900) and interaction (0.904), categorized as excellent in the reliability outcome (Stephanie, 2021).

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items	Reliability Results
Entertainment	0.900	5	Excellent
Customization	0.862	4	Good
Trendiness	0.814	3	Good
Interaction	0.904	5	Excellent
Electronic word-of-mouth	0.889	4	Good
Brand Awareness	0.857	4	Good

4.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

A p-value below 0.05 indicates a significance level of 95% (Di Leo & Sardanelli, 2020). The results showed a non-significant relationship between (1) entertainment and brand awareness ($t=1.159$, $p>0.05$) and (2) trendiness and brand awareness ($t=-1.961$, $p>0.05$). Consequently, H1 and H3 are rejected. Interestingly, in this study, customization positively affects brand awareness ($t=2.002$, $p<0.05$). Thus, H2 is accepted. The regression results also showed that interaction ($t=3.765$, $p<0.05$) and electronic word-of-mouth ($t=8.767$, $p<0.05$) have significant effects on brand awareness. Consequently, H4 and H5 are accepted. Nevertheless, electronic word-of-mouth demonstrates a t-value of 8.767, indicating that it holds the highest level of influence compared to the other variables. R^2 value reflects the influence of the selected independent variables on the dependent variables. Referring to Table 3, the model summary of multiple regression analysis indicates that the variables of entertainment, customization, trendiness, interaction, and electronic word-of-mouth predict 75.4% of the variance in brand awareness. A simple indication of a larger F-value and smaller significance value presented easily affirms the data validity. The F-value attained in the ANOVA test was 164.892, which indirectly proves that the five independent variables used in the presented data are not equivalent to each other and, thus, can be utilized to impact the dependent variable. In short, the relationship of dependent variable (Brand Awareness) and independent variables (Entertainment, Customization, Trendiness, Interaction and Electronic word-of-mouth) can be interpreted by developing:

$$y = \alpha + \beta_2(X_2) + \beta_4(X_4) + \beta_5(X_5)$$

$$y = 0.210 + 0.145 (\text{Customization}) + 0.256 (\text{Interaction}) + 0.570 (\text{Electronic word-of-mouth})$$

Based on the provided equation as above, a one-unit increase in Customization, Interaction and Electronic Word-of-Mouth is projected to lead to respective increases of 0.145, 0.256 and 0.570 in Brand Awareness, respectively, while holding the other variables constant.

Table 3 Regression Analysis for Impact of Social Media Marketing on Cosmetic Brand Awareness

Coefficients					
Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.210	0.132		1.596	0.112
Entertainment	0.079	0.068	0.076	1.159	0.248
Customization	0.145	0.072	0.140	2.002	0.046*
Trendiness	-0.131	0.067	-0.124	-1.961	0.051
Interaction	0.256	0.068	0.248	3.765	0.001*
Electronic word-of-mouth	0.570	0.065	0.572	8.767	0.001*
a. Dependent Variable: Brand Awareness					

$R^2 = 0.754$; F-value = 164.892, $p < 0.000$

* Significant at p-value 0.05

5.0 Discussion

Table 3 illustrates entertainment has a significant effect on cosmetic brand awareness among Gen Z in Kuala Lumpur was not supported. The results had the opposite findings found by Yanuar et al. (2021) stated that viral entertainment content can effectively increase brand awareness. The effectiveness of entertainment could vary depending on

the specific context, target audience, and execution of the entertainment content. As Loken and John (2023) stated entertainment alone might be insufficient to enhance consumers' awareness of a specific brand, as it could face several limitations, such as lack of relevance, inconsistent messaging, and poor execution. Trendiness was also found that a non-significant effect on cosmetic brand awareness among Gen Z in Kuala Lumpur. It demonstrates that the result is inconsistent with the previous study of Husain et al. (2022), who proposed that trendiness is positively associated with brand awareness; however, trendiness can have both positive and negative effects on brand awareness, depending on the factors involved.

However, the customization variable's result has a significant effect on cosmetic brand awareness among Gen Z in Kuala Lumpur. These findings are aligned with Alzoubi et al. (2022), that customizing businesses' marketing strategies could be a good method to increase client loyalty and boost the level of customer satisfaction simultaneously. These findings also reinforced by the earlier findings of Febriyantoro (2020) emphasized that a brand offering customization options to its customers creates a personalized experience, leading to increased brand awareness. Furthermore, interaction has significant effects on brand awareness of cosmetic products among Gen Z in Kuala Lumpur which is consistent with previous studies such as Jasin (2022), who claimed that interaction on social media can result in effective word-of-mouth marketing and raise brand awareness. Hence, the result shows that interaction is essential for a brand or company to build and boost brand awareness among consumers' markets. Last but not least, the research findings also prove that electronic word-of-mouth has a significant effect on domestic brand awareness among Gen Z in Kuala Lumpur. Building upon existing research, these results align with earlier studies, such as Rizq and Muslichah (2023), which found that electronic word-of-mouth can influence brand awareness in either positive or negative perspectives, enabling social sharing to disseminate related messages and content. Consumers can share positive experiences, reaching a wider audience and thereby increasing brand visibility and awareness. Conversely, consumers might also create a negative impression, eroding trust in the brand through negative word of mouth (Malesev & Cherry, 2021).

6.0 Implications of Study

Despite the significant contribution of previous studies, this research has theoretical implications that contribute valuable insights to both academics and businesses. By adopting the S-O-R model to investigate the impact of social media marketing on cosmetic brand awareness, the study verified the significance of stimulus and organism elements in shaping consumer perceptions. In the future, scholars and professionals may use these findings to enhance their approaches by adapting stimuli and methods to correspond with the unique attributes of the target audiences. While entertainment and trendiness did not have significant effects on brand awareness, this underscores the need for marketers to consider other factors in order to enhance brand visibility and engagement among Gen Z consumers in Kuala Lumpur. These research findings also bear significant managerial implications for cosmetic product businesses and marketers seeking to boost brand awareness among Gen Z consumers in Kuala Lumpur through social media marketing. The identified factors, such as customization, interaction, and electronic word-of-mouth, have emerged as key drivers influencing brand awareness, providing actionable insights to optimize marketing strategies effectively. To capitalize on the potential of customization, marketers should prioritize designing their cosmetic products and marketing efforts to align with the individual preferences of Gen Z consumers. Simultaneously, companies can implement personalized marketing strategies, such as offering customizable cosmetic products or providing personalized recommendations, to foster a sense of uniqueness and strengthen brand-customer relationships. Emphasizing the power of stimuli discussed in this study, influencers also play a crucial role in social media marketing, especially in the cosmetic product industry. They can amplify brand messages, reaching a wider audience and building trust based on the identified factors. Leveraging influencers who align with the values and preferences of Gen Z consumers can further enhance the effectiveness of social media campaigns. Additionally, actively monitoring and addressing online reviews and feedback can mitigate the impact of negative sentiments and safeguard brand reputation. Throughout these findings, businesses can tailor their social media marketing strategies to the specific needs of Gen Z by establishing a long-lasting connection that goes beyond traditional marketing methods.

7.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research showed that customization, interaction, and electronic word-of-mouth significantly affected brand awareness, providing valuable insights for marketers seeking to enhance their brand visibility and engagement among Gen Z consumers in Kuala Lumpur. Customization emerged as a crucial factor highlighting the importance of personalized marketing strategies and tailoring products to meet individual preferences. Interaction underscored the significance of two-way communication with consumers, fostering brand loyalty and community building. Lastly, electronic word-of-mouth played an essential role in shaping brand awareness, emphasizing the need for positive online word-of-mouth and influencer collaborations. However, it's noteworthy that entertainment and trendiness did not significantly impact cosmetic brand awareness among Gen Z in Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, it may require further exploration of certain factors that contribute significantly to brand awareness or may have a limited effect in this specific context.

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