Chapter 8
Print ISBN: 978-93-49238-37-4, eBook ISBN: 978-93-49238-57-2

The Influence of Emoji Digital Marketing and Demographic Factors on Generation Z's Purchase Intention Decisions

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.9734/bpi/mono/978-93-49238-37-4/CH8

Peer-Review History:
This chapter was reviewed by following the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. This chapter was thoroughly checked to prevent plagiarism. As per editorial policy, a minimum of two peer-reviewers reviewed the manuscript. After review and revision of the manuscript, the Book Editor approved the manuscript for final publication. Peer review comments, comments of the editor(s), etc. are available here: https://peerreviewarchive.com/review-history/3347.8

ABSTRACT

People's online interactions with one another have changed dramatically over the years. As digital technologies advanced, digital communications became an essential part of our daily lives, resulting in the development of new language forms such as emojis. Marketers have begun to use emoji digital marketing (EDM) to simulate digital interaction and purchase intention, especially among young customers. People refer to the Generation Z cohort as mobile prodigies due to their affinity for the digital world and their ability to express themselves through emojis. There is negligible research about emojis in South Africa, particularly considering the impact of emoji utilisation through digital marketing platforms. Accordingly, the study used the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explore the effect of EDM on Generation Z's purchase intention through perceived ease of use and usefulness, as well as the impact of Generation Z's emoji usage and demographic factors on purchase intention. This study employed linear regression (quantitative) analysis to examine the hypotheses, specifically following the descriptive research approach. This study utilised a non-probability sampling strategy that involved snowball sampling. The study used a self-administered questionnaire to gather data and assess the effect of EDM on purchase intention among a sample of 754 young consumers. The study found that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use had a positive influence on purchase intention due to EDM, as well as various demographics (gender) and EDM usage (emoji usage frequency, emoji brand message engagement, online usage hours, and digital spending) factors. Marketers can incorporate emojis into engaging subject lines and distribute them through various digital applications. This method may assist organizations in distinguishing themselves from the competition, attracting attention, and enhancing their PI and digital expenditure.

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This study makes a noteworthy contribution to the expanding realm of EDM research by offering novel insights and enhancing comprehension of TAM attitudes towards and utilisation of emojis, and as the effect of EDM usage and demographic factors. Future research can reduce this study's limitations by using longitudinal research, different product categories and industries, structural equation modelling, and various countries and cohorts.

Keywords: Emoji Digital Marketing (EDM); Technology Acceptance Model (TAM); Generation Z; Purchase Intention (PI); Perceived Ease of Use (PEU); Perceived Usefulness (PU).

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Marketing has become more varied, so organisations are joining the online world and spending more of their resources to strengthen brand and marketing communications via versatility, uniqueness, and digital innovation (Nzeku & Duffett, 2021; Florido-Benítez, 2022). Emojis are one of the most rapidly growing forms of digital communications in the world, paralleling a significant shift in how people communicate and how they want messages delivered to them (Maiberger et al., 2024). Emojis, commonly used in text-based marketing and communication, are visual symbols, images, and characters that represent not only facial expressions but also ideas and thoughts, such as celebrations, climate, feelings, emotions, and many other factors (Li et al., 2019; Pfeifer et al., 2022). A number of recent studies have examined the use of emojis as a rapidly growing symbolic language (Wang et al., 2023; Cavalheiro et al., 2024; García-Carrión et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Yu & Zhao, 2024). Hence, given the utility of emojis, their incorporation into emoji digital marketing (EDM) could result in positive customer attitudes towards brands, increase brand followers, and build a strong customer base that could increase purchase intention (PI) (Almeida et al., 2024; Maiberger et al., 2024). These propositions present an opportunity for organisations and brands to utilise emojis in order to communicate their message to their chosen target markets to improve consumer attitudes; moreover, it helps organisations drive engagement on digital social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Pinterest, X (Twitter), Instagram and many others (García-Carrión et al., 2024; Maiberger et al., 2024; Reunanen, 2024; Xu et al., 2024). However, there is scant research in South Africa about emojis, especially regarding the influence of emoji usage via digital messaging platforms for marketing purposes (Duffett & Maraule, 2024). South African researchers, namely Lawrence (2022) and Nyakana et al. (2023), demonstrate that emojis appear to have a positive relationship with visual content preference and nonverbal communication on observed social media platforms when emojis are in educational contexts. Several South African studies examined the nature and usage of emojis to convey meaning, which included the younger generation among other cohorts (Du Plessis, 2020; Katz et al., 2021; Lawrence, 2022; Nyakana et al., 2023). However, these studies did not focus on the use of EDM, though they did consider various online platforms. Therefore, this study will address these knowledge gaps by exploring the effect of EDM on Generation Z's PI in South Africa.

Generation Z are people born between the years 1997 and 2015. The Generation Z cohort is highly attuned to communication and media technology, such as the internet, text messaging, and instant messaging, as well as mobile phones and mobile applications (apps) (Marthinus et al., 2014; Lerm, 2022; Duffett & Charles, 2024). Generation Z makes more extensive use of emojis than other cohorts, which compels organisations to use these icons in their marketing to create appeal and stimulate PI among the rapid increase in young mobile users (Maiberger et al., 2024; Reunanen, 2024; Sia et al., 2024). Therefore, organisations need to be innovative if they are to attract the attention of prospective customers and build relationships with current customers, especially the young, technologically sophisticated ones, which will be the focus of this study. Kang et al. (2022), Maiberger et al. (2024), Madadi et al. (2024); and Reunanen (2024) posit that digital technologies and emojis have a major influence on the consumer experience of Generation Z. This generation is referred to as emotional communicators because they are very active in sharing content and engaging with posts that resonate with them (Madadi et al., 2024). This young cohort uses emojis and interprets them to connect their personal background with their views and opinions. Lee and Hsieh (2019) and Maiberger et al. (2024) agree that the use of branded emojis and emoticons in engaging with young consumers leads to their willingness to buy. Therefore, it is vital for brands and organisations to understand the use of emojis as part of the brand's marketing tactic and their influence on young customers' attitudes. Hence, this study investigates EDM because younger consumers extensively use this digital language on digital messaging platforms, so emojis have huge potential for marketers to target Generation Z to stimulate PI.

Prada et al. (2022); Almeida et al. (2024); and Liu et al. (2024) conclude that further studies could broaden the range of settings in which emojis can be employed, with a particular focus on their application in relation to brands and organisations. Additionally, Naidu (2022) investigates the potential for emojis on social media conduits and further forms of digital marketing to harbour misleading and false information that consumers could act upon. Emojis are generally effective when used by a brand to engage with younger consumers, such as Generation Z (Kang et al., 2022; Maiberger et al., 2024). In order to enhance the likelihood of PI, brands must possess a comprehensive understanding of the specific circumstances that resonate with their target audience, allowing them to establish strong connections. While various aspects of this research topic have been previously considered, emojis are an important form of marketing for brands, which still necessitates further research from scholars around the world (Casado-Molina et al., 2022). Several other studies have also investigated emojis and how they affect behaviour or PI (Huang et al., 2022; Mladenović et al., 2023; Madadi et al., 2024; Maiberger et al., 2024; Shuqair et al., 2024; Sindhu & Bharti, 2024). However, further research is required to understand how young consumers, representing diverse emoji and online usage patterns, demographics, and countries, employ emojis in digital marketing in relation to PI. The aim of this study was to reduce the above-mentioned research gaps by using the Technological Acceptance Model (TAM)

to examine different types of EDM usage and how demographic factors influence Generation Z's PI. Therefore, the study's main research objectives are as follows:

- To determine the influence of perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU) on PI due to EDM among the South African Generation Z cohort.
- To ascertain what influence demographical factors have on PI due to EDM among the South African Generation Z cohort.
- To establish the influence of usage factors on PI in relation to the use of EDM among the South African Generation Z cohort.

8.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

8.2.1 Emojis Digital Marketing

Emojis can be regarded as one of the latest innovations to be used as a digital marketing tool (García-Carrión et al., 2024). A number of digital channels, including blogs, social media, mobile text messages, and other digital conduits, are increasingly using emojis (Ko et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2024). Emojis have become a standard part of business-to-user and user-to-user social media marketing on digital conduits like Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and others (Akgün & Arslan, 2022; Distel et al., 2022; Phillips, 2024; Reunanen, 2024). Zhang et al. (2022) underline the potential benefits of adding emojis in microblogs, both in private communication and in corporate microblogs. Casado-Molina et al. (2022) and Liu (2023) posit that emojis appear to be especially helpful to marketers in three situations: positive contexts, posts on customer care and service, and when used to emphasise points. Emojis, commonly perceived as light-hearted forms of communication, have become essential components of global digital marketing, particularly among young consumers (Wang et al., 2023; Maiberger et al., 2024). Furthermore, by providing a digital communication medium in which customers feel comfortable and free to express their ideas, emojis can help businesses build mutual trust (Gamage, 2021). Customers who are connected to a brand feel more at ease because it resonates with them, which leads to customer loyalty, long-term relationships, and purchases. Young customers have a greater tendency to respond positively to recognisable visual objects, such as images with smiling faces that depict emotions they can easily relate to in their daily lives (Gamage, 2021; Maiberger et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2024). Their success means that there has been a substantial rise in the adoption of emojis by young consumers, and there is a greater number of campaigns using emojis in marketing strategies (Cavalheiro et al., 2022; García-Carrión et al., 2024). The younger generation understands emojis, and when their favourite celebrities or influencers use them, brand credibility increases, as do engagement and purchase intention (Cavalheiro et al., 2022; Alkan & Ulas, 2023; Liu et al., 2024; Shafie et al., 2024). Hence, emojis are a means of connecting with young cohorts, so study examines the impact of EDM on the PI of Generation Z.

Additionally, as young consumers spend increasing amounts of time on their mobile devices, marketers are launching innovative campaigns to engage

customers efficiently (Smits, 2021). Emojis, according to Mathews and Lee (2018), aim to illustrate and, in some cases, replace words sent digitally. They provide automated signals, express the warmth of face-to-face communication, and add profundity to the message. In the digital context, emojis can enhance and improve awareness of the message and communication (Muhammad & Najim, 2023; Yang, 2023). Consequently, the inclusion of EDM has experienced significant growth, leading to positive outcomes for organisations and brands (Almeida et al., 2024; García-Carrión et al., 2024; Madadi et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2024). Brands can strategically use symbolic languages such as emojis to communicate through digital platforms such as social media and messaging because these visual stimuli have a strong ability to capture people's attention (Casado-Molina et al., 2022; Shuqair et al., 2024). Additionally, emojis can streamline messages used in marketing, humanise brands, improve interaction, and increase consumer willingness to purchase (Gamage, 2021; Mladenović et al., 2023; Maiberger et al., 2024). As a result of the subsequent increase in emoji use in advertising, society's exposure to emojis grows, particularly among the Generation Z cohort, the digital influencers, who have accepted these cues as part of their language, which has interested marketers and brands as a new way of appealing to this group. Emojis can complement or replace a text, and they are extremely popular among Generation Z because they prefer communicating via mobile devices rather than desktop computers. Emoji function buttons are available in advanced personal computers and on mobile devices (Danesi, 2022; Muhammad & Najim, 2023; Wang et al., 2023; Sia et al., 2024). While the Unicode Consortium develops meanings for each emoji, the creativity of the Generation Z cohort often gives these emojis new interpretations (Muhammad & Najim, 2023). Consequently, in a study on how appropriately younger participants were using emojis, the findings indicated that the use of emojis by brands also depended on the situation (Cavalheiro et al., 2022). Naidu (2022) further found that emojis are often open to different interpretations, especially on a cultural and global scale, which can lead to ambiguity and make it difficult to determine an individual's intentions. Again, context is critical in determining the intended use of the relevant emoji. Hence, this study also establishes if various usage factors positively influence PI owing to the utilisation of EDM among the Generation Z cohort.

8.2.2 Technological Acceptance Model

Davis (1989) developed the TAM to elucidate the key factors that influence the adoption of new innovations. This model provides insights into user behaviour across various consumer computer technology. Venkatesh and Davis (2000) indicate that the TAM describes the perception of PU and PEU in relation to instrumental procedures, public influence, user intentions, and usage behaviour. Many existing studies have widely adopted the TAM model, demonstrating its applicability to online marketing (Dos Santos, & Duffett, 2021; Al-Gasawneh et al., 2022; Kang et al., 2022; Chocarro et al., 2023; Duffett & Thomas, 2024, Marthinus et al., 2024). This paper's research scope, i.e., EDM, has characteristics of both online media and social media, so the TAM is a judicious choice. Second, the TAM's essential factors, namely PU and PEU, are

appropriate for distinguishing the effectiveness of emojis in digital advertising and the impact of these digital cues in new and advanced technologies, as well as how this affects customer attitudes towards marketing communications that include emojis. Emojis are useful because a large number of words can fail or cause confusion, whereas emojis are simple. The TAM demonstrates that PEU attitudes influence PU; therefore, the more specific the device and the ease of emoji usage, the higher the effectiveness (Scherer et al., 2019). The TAM suggests that the system's PU and PEU drive the intention to use an innovation, thereby determining behaviour (Scherer et al., 2019). However, there is a need for further research on the TAM that specifically examines EDM, particularly in relation to PI (Jung et al., 2021; Sawmong, 2022; Boutet et al., 2024). To investigate EDM among Generation Z, this study employed TAM factors, namely PU, PEU, and PI.

8.2.3 Hypothesis Development

This investigation largely developed its conceptual model based on Davis's (1989), Venkatesh and Davis's (2000), and Duffett's (2015b; 2017) constructs. Three hypotheses aim to answer the research question: "What influence do PU and PEU have on PI due to EDM among Generation Z in South Africa?".

PEU considers whether a person believes the technology is simple to use and useful to consumers, whereas PU considers whether an individual perceives that making use of a particular technology will help them perform better (Chang & Hamid, 2010). Kato et al. (2018) postulate that the main explanation for emojis usefulness is their ability to easily convey emotions. Al-Gasawneh et al. (2022) discovered that PEU and PU significantly influence consumer service usage. The study hypothesises that, given the nascent stage of EDM, it is crucial to examine the impact of PEU on the PU of emojis in a South African context.

H1. PEU positively influences PU due to EDM among the Generation Z cohort.

Purwanto (2020) and Al-Gasawneh et al. (2022) discover that there are positive connections, either direct or indirect, between the PEU and the intentions to engage in behaviours or make purchases in digital contexts. Kang et al. (2022) suggest that stickers, comprising emoticons and emojis, can serve as beneficial tools for digital marketing. These studies confirmed that PEU, facilitated by emojis and emoticons, has a positive impact on behavioural or PI. Given the novelty of emoji usage in digital marketing in South Africa, it is crucial to investigate whether the PEU of using emojis in this type of digital marketing affects the purchasing intentions of young consumers.

H2. PEU positively influences PI due to EDM among the Generation Z cohort.

Kang et al. (2022) confirmed that the PU has a positive influence on behavioural or PI as a result of emojis and emoticons. However, Jung et al. (2021) reveal that emojis fail to exert a substantial impact on the PU and PI associations among Generation Z consumers. Additional research on e-commerce and digital usage

also indicated positive relationships between PU and behavioural or PI (Bravo et al., 2021; Leso & Cortimiglia, 2022). Therefore, it is hypothesised:

H3. PU positively influences PI due to EDM among the Generation Z cohort.

8.2.4 Demographic and Usage Factors

Chen et al. (2024) report that women displayed greater accuracy in classifying emojis. Oleszkiewicz et al. (2017), An et al. (2018), and Sharma et al. (2020) found that gender influences young customers' perceptions, indicating that women find emojis more appealing and use them more frequently. Phillips (2024) confirms that women display greater partiality for emoji reactions. Zheng (2022) suggests that male and female users exhibit different behaviours when using emojis, according to the different usage patterns of emojis across genders. Cavalheiro et al. (2022) confirm that women use emojis more frequently, and they perceive emojis to be more useful, enjoyable, and simple to use. Chen et al. (2024) indicate that younger consumers show greater accuracy in classifying emojis. An et al. (2018) affirm that consumers aged 16 to 25 have the highest emoji usage frequency. Du Plessis (2020) also reveals that emoji interpretations vary across platforms and age groups. Boutet et al. (2024) verify that older users are less likely to use emojis and perceive them as more difficult to use. Misra et al. (2022) emphasise that a college education is associated with a higher likelihood of making bookings through apps. Veytia-Bucheli et al. (2020) conducted a study to determine the frequency of emoji use among graduate students, and the findings confirm an increase in the use of emojis in WhatsApp conversations between students. Sia et al. (2024) reveal that emojis improve communication between students and instructors and enhance education. Furthermore, Cavalheiro et al. (2024) and Chen et al. (2024) recommend collecting and cross-tabulating demographic information, including usage frequency and comprehension of emoji communication. Hence, this study endeavours to answer the research question, "What influence demographical factors have on PI due to EDM among Generation Z in South Africa?"

Emojis perform prominent appeal and courtesy functions in push, notice, and questionnaire requests, and Su and Chen (2021) show a correlation between the intensity of the expression and the frequency of use. However, Liu (2023) points out that, despite the same frequency of emoji use, the intensity and type of expression can differ. Cavalheiro et al. (2022) reveal that younger respondents who made use of emojis more frequently, as well as those who believed emoji use was more useful and formal, had more favourable perceptions. Mathews and Lee (2018) indicate that the primary goal of using emojis in marketing practices is to increase the engagement of consumers. McShane et al. (2021) demonstrate that emojis increase tweet engagement, with more emojis resulting in more likes and retweets. The nature of the interaction between emojis and text determined the varying effects of emojis on brand engagement. Huang et al. (2022) investigated the effects of emoji emotional intensity on consumer PI in social media advertising, and they found that young consumers spend at least five hours per week on Instagram. Kantar (2021) reports that Generation Z is the

fastest-growing cohort of local online shoppers. These younger buyers shop through their mobile phones and digital media. Dabija and Lung (2019) highlight differences in online shopping behaviour among Millennials and Generation Z in an emerging market, and the findings show that the Generation Z cohort prefers to order online via their smartphones. This study will make a contribution to the limited research that examines the cross-tabulation of emoji usage factors in digital marketing with young consumers' attitudes. Therefore, this inquiry aims to answer the research question, "What influence do usage factors have on PI due to EDM among Generation Z in South Africa?"

8.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach was used in this inquiry because it involves collecting and generalising numerical data across a group of people (Babbie, 2010). The purpose of the study was to evaluate the attitudes and actions of the Generation Z cohort. Babbie (2010) and Bhattacherjee (2012) explain that quantitative approaches rely on objective measurement and statistical analysis of data obtained by surveys. Hence, the study used a structured questionnaire to collect primary quantitative data. Descriptive analysis presents a picture of the precise details of a scenario, social setting, or relationship. It is directed at carefully surveying and detailing the documentation of an object of interest (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Hence, this study sought to investigate the impact of EDM usage and demographic factors on PI among the Generation Z cohort, who had already adopted this digital language.

The study's population included Generation Z digital platform users in South Africa who had previously interacted with EDM, but the research commenced in Cape Town via snowball sampling. The snowball sampling technique's goal is to access populations that are difficult to reach and that come through one individual via a chain of reference to the next (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Respondents were asked for the contact details of other potential respondents in order to send the self-administered questionnaire electronically. The COVID-19 crisis severely limited face-to-face activities, which led to the online data collection method for the current study. The study targeted a large sample size due to the non-probability sampling and to ensure that there was a sufficient number of respondents for each of the EDM usage and demographic factors cross-tabulations regarding Generation Z's PI. The research was able to obtain a high response rate from the respondents by using the above-mentioned sampling technique and ended with a final sample size of 754 respondents.

The format of the questionnaire was primarily derived from Zareen et al. (2017). The questionnaire included a screening question, demographic, and EDM usage factor multiple-choice closed-ended questions. The Likert scale questions assessed attitudes via the EDM constructs using a five-point Likert scale. The attitude constructs were derived from multiple sources, specifically the constructs of PU (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), PEU (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), and PI (Duffett, 2015, 2020, 2022; Ghouse et al., 2022). The study employed diverse digital platforms, including SMS, Instagram, Facebook, email,

and WhatsApp, to distribute the questionnaire. The questionnaire was primarily administered through Google Forms to ensure its simplicity and comprehensibility for different segments of the Generation Z population, considering variations in age and education levels.

The software programme SPSS was utilised to perform confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and evaluate the validity and reliability statistics via average variance extracted (AVE), factor loadings (FL), Cronbach's Alpha (α), composite reliability (CR) values, and the component correlation matrix versus the square root of AVE, as described in the following section. The subsequent section details the statistical assessment of the three hypotheses using linear regression analysis. Wald's Chi-Square (X^2) and Bonferroni pairwise correction analyses were utilised to assess whether there were any notable differences in EDM usage among Generation Z participants, in addition to the impact of demographic factors on PI through a generalised linear model (GLM). The subsequent section also presents these findings.

8.4 FINDINGS

8.4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The predominant demographic factors were: an even spread between males and females; most were 21–25 years old; and a majority had completed school and had a higher qualification. Refer to Table 8.1 for an overview of the sample's main EDM usage and demographic factors. The findings show that among Generation Z respondents, a majority always used emojis; over half rarely or sometimes engaged in brand messages that included emojis; most spent over 3 hours a day online; and monthly digital spending was largely less than R1 000 per month.

Table 8.1. EDM usage and demographic factors

EDM demographic and usage factors	Demographic and usage items	n	%
Gender	Male	366	48.5
	Female	388	51.5
Age group	16–20 years	185	24.5
	21–25 years	569	75.5
Education	Grade 8–11	38	5.0
	Grade 12	31	4.1
	Completed Grade 12	164	21.8
	Post-matric/diploma/certificate/degree	356	47.2
	Postgraduate degree	165	21.9
Emoji usage	Rarely	9	1.2
	Sometimes	71	9.4
	Often	230	30.5
	Always	444	58.9
Emoji brand message engagement	Rarely	161	21.4
	Sometimes	249	33.0
	Often	142	18.8

EDM demographic and usage factors	Demographic and usage items	n	%
Online usage hours	Always	202	26.8
	< ½ hour	25	3.3
	½-to-1 hour	53	7.0
	2 hours	135	17.9
	3 hours	270	35.8
	≥ 4 hours	271	35.9
Digital spending	≤ R250	125	16.6
	R251–R500	214	28.4
	R501–R750	223	29.6
	R750–R1 000	148	19.6
	R1 001–R2 000	40	5.3
	R2 001–R3 000	3	0.4
	> R4 001	1	0.1

8.4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The study conducted a CFA to assess validity and reliability measures, which is shown in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2. EDM constructs CFA

EDM constructs	Items	M	SD	FL	AVE	CR	Cr. α
Perceived ease of use	PEU1	4.12	0.978	0.952	0.803	0.942	0.935
	PEU2	4.07	0.974	0.915			
	PEU3	4.00	0.991	0.879			
	PEU4	4.04	0.989	0.834			
Perceived usefulness	PU1	4.03	0.983	0.900	0.815	0.946	0.945
	PU2	4.00	0.994	0.970			
	PU3	3.99	1.023	0.907			
	PU4	4.00	1.006	0.829			
Purchase intention	PI1	3.85	1.023	0.873	0.878	0.966	0.958
	PI2	3.84	1.028	0.935			
	PI3	3.84	1.047	0.969			
	PI4	3.85	1.073	0.968			

The AVE and FL values obtained from the CFA analysis were higher than 0.8, surpassing the recommended value of 0.5. This indicated strong convergent reliability, as shown in Table 8.2. The values of Cronbach's α and CR were all greater than 0.9, indicating a high level of internal consistency, as they exceeded the acceptable level of 0.7. The constructs' average mean values were all greater than 3.80, indicating an overall positive sentiment towards EDM among Generation Z respondents (Table 8.2).

Table 8.3. Component correlation matrix

Constructs	PEU	PU	PI
Perceived ease of use	**0.896**		
Perceived usefulness	0.497	**0.903**	
Purchase intention	0.570	0.679	**0.937**

Table 8.3 displays the construct correlations and the corresponding AVE square root values of the constructs. The prevalence of discriminant validity was demonstrated by observing that the square root of the AVE values for each construct exceeded the correlations between the constructs.

8.4.3 Linear Regression

H1 and H2 were supported by the linear regression analysis, which found that PEU positively impacted PU (t=19.911, β=0.710, p<0.001) and PI (t=16.367, β=0.513, p<0.001). H3 was supported by the linear regression analysis, which also revealed that PU positively impacted PI (t=27.677, β=0.712, p<0.001). Additionally, PU and PEU accounted for 36.35% of the variance (R^2) in PI, while PEU explained 50.5% of the PU variance. Fig. 8.1 provides a visual representation of the hypotheses and variance.

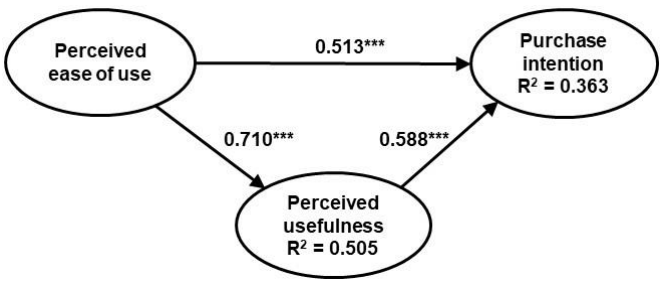

Fig. 8.1. Linear regression analysis
****p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05*

8.4.4 Generalised Linear Model

The Bonferroni post hoc analysis and Wald's X^2 were applied to determine if there were any significant differences between the EDM usage of Generation Z respondents as well as the influence of demographic factors on PI via a GLM. As shown in Table 8.4, the Wald X^2 test revealed a significant difference (p<0.001) for PI (M=3.78, SD=0.763). This confirmed that there were many significant differences in EDM usage and demographic factors.

Table 8.4. EDM usage and demographic factors influence on purchase intention

EDM usage and demographic factors	X^2	df	Purchase intention
Gender	5.803	1	0.016*
Age	1.230	1	0.267
Education	3.222	4	0.521
Emoji usage	8.986	3	0.029*
Emoji brand message engagement	10.531	3	0.015*
Online usage hours	10.171	4	0.038*
Digital spending	17.553	6	0.007**

**** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05*

Gender (p<0.05): Generation Z female respondents (M=3.09, SE=0.191) showed more positive PI attitudes due to EDM compared to the male respondents (M=2.92, SE=0.193).

Emoji usage (p<0.05): Generation Z respondents who often (M=3.30, SE=0.183) used emojis displayed higher positive PI attitudes due to EDM than those who rarely (M=2.43, SE=0.354) used emojis.

Emoji brand message engagement (p<0.05): Generation Z respondents who always (M=3.20, SE=0.197) engaged in brand messages that included EDM exhibited more favourable PI attitudes compared to those who had rarely (M=2.85, SE=0.198) done so.

Online usage hours (p<0.05): Generation Z respondents who spent half to one hour online (M=2.76, SE=0.227) showed less favourable PI attitudes regarding EDM than those who spent four hours or more online (M=3.20, SE=0.196).

Digital spending (p<0.01): Generation Z respondents whose average online monthly digital spending was R750–R1 000 (M=3.56, SE=0.135) showed more positive PI attitudes due to EDM compared to those whose average online monthly digital spend was less than R250 (M=3.23, SE=0.123).

8.5 DISCUSSION

The current study showed that EDM caused a positive relationship between PEU and PU among Generation Z respondents. Ngubelanga and Duffett (2021) and Widiar et al. (2023) affirm that PEU is a significant predictor of PU in mobile and digital marketing. Fan et al. (2020) suggest that the PEU and PU of emojis and stickers can assist users in establishing an emotional tone, reducing semantic ambiguity, and improving context appropriateness. The results also demonstrated that PEU in EDM positively influenced PI among members of Generation Z. Purwanto (2020) and Al-Gasawneh et al. (2022) confirm this result, finding positive relationships between PEU and behavioural or PI. Both Kang et al. (2022) confirm that emoticons and emojis serve as valuable digital marketing tactics. This study also found that PU has a favourable influence on PI in EDM among Generation Z respondents. Bravo et al. (2021) and Leso and Cortimiglia (2022) also affirm the same positive association between PU and behavioural or PI across various digital marketing platforms. Sawmong (2022) confirms that the PU has a positive influence on behavioural or PI as a result of emojis and emoticons. Therefore, the study supported its three hypotheses, suggesting that Generation Z consumers perceive emojis as easy to use and useful, which in turn positively influences their PI in the context of EDM and an African developing country.

The results showed that Generation Z females displayed significantly more favourable PI sentiment due to EDM in South Africa. This finding is in alignment with research by Oleszkiewicz et al. (2017), An et al. (2018), Cavalheiro et al. (2022), Chen et al. (2024), and Phillips (2024), who also report that females

exhibit greater precision in emoji classification, emoji reactions, frequency of use, usefulness, and enjoyment. The inherent nature of cohort theory, which deems members of a cohort to be analogous, rationally led to the finding of no significant differences in terms of age and education (Edu et al., 2021; Ngubelanga & Duffett, 2021; Ionescu et al., 2023; Duffett et al., 2024). The findings confirmed that Generation Z members who used emojis more frequently displayed more positive PI inclinations as a result of EDM. This result is consistent with Su and Chen (2021) and Cavalheiro et al. (2022) research, which found that a higher frequency of emoji use leads to more positive sentiment among young consumers. The results verified that Generation Z respondents who engaged in brand messages with greater frequency showed a greater positive PI propensity owing to EDM. Mathews and Lee (2018) and McShane et al. (2021) substantiate that higher consumer engagement results in more positive behaviour and intentions in terms of EDM across several online platforms. The findings affirmed that members of the Generation Z cohort who spent longer periods of time online exhibited larger PI predispositions due to EDM. Yakın and Eru (2017), Duffett et al. (2019), and Huang et al. (2022) verify that young consumers spend an extended period of time on social media, which could have a positive influence on PI due to EDM or other forms of digital marketing. The results substantiated that members of Generation Z who have greater online monthly digital spending displayed more positive PI tendencies due to EDM. Several studies agree that the Generation Z cohort is comfortable and shows a preference to make online purchases (Dabija & Lung, 2019; Kantar, 2021;), so it is a logical result that young consumers who spend greater online amounts show high levels of PI sentiment as a result of EDM. Hence, the results above make an original addition to the scant knowledge that considers the cross-tabulation of EDM usage factors and behavioural consumer attitudes among members of Generation Z.

8.6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study's first research objective was to determine the influence of PEU and PU on PI due to EDM among Generation Z in South Africa. The study concluded that there were positive associations between the three TAM consumer attitude constructs, and young consumers found that emojis used in digital marketing were easy to use and useful, which increased their PI. Organisations and brands should constantly monitor the types of marketing that have a positive impact on Generation Z's consumer attitudes. Emojis aim to provide an enjoyable and light-hearted experience, effectively conveying a wide range of emotions that words may not always be able to, thereby boosting the PEU, PU, and PI within the Generation Z demographic. This type of marketing contributes positively to a brand's marketing strategy and effectiveness, as it makes the task less daunting and more entertaining for both the marketer and the customer. Emojis allow a brand to communicate with customers in their own language. Organisations and brands can create their own emojis to match what they want to communicate and relate to their younger customers in ways that could elicit positive responses to increase the PEU, PU, and PI.

This study's second research objective was to determine the influence of demographical factors on PI due to EDM among Generation Z in South Africa. The study concluded that EDM significantly enhanced the positive PI attitudes of women, while age and education showed no significant differences. Organisations and brands should consider the differences between women and men and adjust their EDM strategies to target specific genders with specific marketing offerings. Gender has a large influence on the effectiveness of emojis for emotional responses, emoji classification accuracy, alluringness, specific emoji expectations and reactions, usefulness, usage frequency, gratification, mood, and PI resulting from emoji use or non-use (Oleszkiewicz et al., 2017; Zareen et al., 2017; An et al., 2018; Cavalheiro et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2024; Phillips, 2024). Therefore, organisations must incorporate these factors into their EDM strategies.

This study's third research objective was to determine the influence of usage factors on PI due to EDM among Generation Z in South Africa. The study concluded that greater emoji usage frequency, higher emoji brand message engagement, longer online usage hours, and larger online digital spending displayed the most positive PI attitudes due to EDM. Organisations and brands using emojis in their marketing messaging can add an extra level of personality and relatability to their products or services, which can extend usage and message engagement. Emojis, as part of the younger generation's digital language, encourage organisations and brands to use them. Brands can ask members of Generation Z to interact with their posts, and using emojis is an easy way to encourage usage, engagement, and PI. Brands could use emojis in interactive subject lines and transmit them via instant messaging, social media, mobile apps, and other digital channels. This strategy could help brands stand out from the clutter, capture attention, and keep young consumers online longer, thereby increasing their PI and digital spending. Smaller businesses that lack digital marketing expertise could make use of student-led advertising agencies (Duffett & Cromhout, 2022a; 2022b; Duffett et al., 2023b; Thomas & Duffett, 2024) or marketing-related service learning projects (Cromhout et al., 2021; Cromhout & Duffett, 2022; Duffett & Cromhout, 2022c; Duffett et al., 2023a) to assist with the use of emojis in digital marketing campaigns. Furthermore, digital influencers can initiate consumer usage and engagement by displaying emojis individually or in combination, which can entice consumers to participate in interactions. Hence, the study encourages organisations and brands to leverage digital influencers from the same Generation Z cohort, who regularly share content featuring emojis, potentially increasing PI.

8.7 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Future research can investigate the study's various limitations. This investigation used a cross-sectional survey and quantitative self-reported information to measure PEU, PU, and intention to purchase attitudes, which could result in biased data. Therefore, we propose that future research should explore experimental and longitudinal quantitative data collection approaches to mitigate potential bias (Chaturuka et al., 2020; Duffett & Miller, 2022). A qualitative

investigation also has the potential to elicit more detailed responses from participants, enabling researchers to explore a wider range of factors that can impact how young consumers perceive EDM. Future research should focus on examining different product categories and industries, as the study did not investigate a specific product category or industry when considering the effect of EDM on Generation Z's purchase intention. This study used linear regression analysis to examine the findings; future research could also use more advanced statistical analysis techniques, such as structural equation modelling, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the EDM model's effects. The investigation exclusively consisted of individuals from Generation Z (16–25 years old) in South Africa. However, future research could prioritise examining the younger members of the Generation Z cohort (10–15 years old), as well as other cohorts (such as Generation Y and X) in South Africa and in other countries, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of different generations, regions, and cultures (Duffett, 2015a, 2016).

CONFERENCE DISCLAIMER

Some part of this manuscript was previously presented in the conference: 10th International Conference on Business and Management Dynamics (ICBMD) dated 11-12 September 2024 at Sun City Resort, North West Province, South Africa.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

The authors declare that they used QuillBot Premium to identify and correct language, grammar, and spelling errors in the manuscript. The authors also used Turnitin to assess the originality of the manuscript and found it to be at a satisfactory level.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-Review History:
This chapter was reviewed by following the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. This chapter was thoroughly checked to prevent plagiarism. As per editorial policy, a minimum of two peer-reviewers reviewed the manuscript. After review and revision of the manuscript, the Book Editor approved the manuscript for final publication. Peer review comments, comments of the editor(s), etc. are available here: https://peerreviewarchive.com/review-history/3347.8