

Impact of Content Marketing on Purchase Intention and Brand Loyalty among Generation Z

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Abstract. Digital content now shapes how Gen Z hears about brands, makes a choice, and decides to return. This paper reviews recent studies on young consumers. It asks a simple question: when does content move intention, and when does it build loyalty? Across the literature, three patterns repeat: clear information that reduces doubt, emotion and story that make a message stick, and social cues that travel through peers. Context matters. In high-involvement or tech markets, how-to guides and specs drive decisions. In tourism and other experience goods, vivid and persuasive framing works better. Loyalty needs more than a one-off post. It forms when good experiences become trust. Engagement keeps that trust alive, especially in places where people can interact, co-create, and return. Creator voice and visible honesty help. Over-scripted promotions hurt. Platform rules shape delivery. Long video supports story and depth. Short feeds reward an early moment of value and light interaction. This review turns the patterns into practice: pair one fact with one human scene; keep a steady cadence; host small community spaces; measure saves, replies, replays, and returns, not only views. In short, effective content for Gen Z blends clarity, feeling, and participation. It can spark intention today and earn loyalty over time.

Keywords: Content marketing, Generation Z, purchase intention, brand loyalty, digital engagement

1. Introduction

Brands do not always meet young consumers in stores first. They often meet them in the feed. Generation Z discovers products, thinks about them, and talks about them in short bursts of attention on video, social media, and community spaces. Digital content marketing is no longer just an add-on; it has become the main stage where most impressions are formed and many choices begin. The stakes are simple: clear content reduces doubt, engaging stories make messages stick, and social cues help ideas spread. When these pieces work together, intention moves. When they repeat, loyalty can grow.

The importance is practical and pressing. Budgets continue to shift toward creator collaborations, short-form video, and always-on brand channels. Yet outcomes are uneven. Some posts get views but no action. Some campaigns spark advocacy; others fade after a week. Young consumers reward authenticity and interaction, but turn away from over-scripted promotion. Marketers and researchers

therefore share the same core question: under what conditions does content move intention today and build loyalty over time?

Prior work points to three recurring value routes. Informational value lowers uncertainty and clarifies benefits. Emotional value—through narrative, humor, or aesthetics—keeps attention and builds warmth. Social value travels through peers, creators, and community talk. Evidence also shows that context matters. In high-involvement or high-tech categories, clear guidance and credible demonstrations are decisive. In tourism and other experience-led sectors, vivid and persuasive framing tends to outperform plain facts. Platform conditions shape execution: long-form video supports story and depth; short feeds reward an early moment of value and light interaction. Engagement often acts as the link from content features to outcomes, while trust is the bridge from positive attitude to stable behavior.

Even so, important gaps remain. Many studies focus on single platforms or regions, limiting cross-cultural generalization. Short-term metrics (views, likes) are often used as endpoints, while deeper signals (saves, replays, returns, community participation) receive less attention. The roles of creator voice and small, persistent brand communities are discussed but not consistently measured. Finally, the literature often separates “information” and “persuasion,” while practice suggests that young audiences respond best when useful facts and human framing appear together.

This review is focused on Generation Z and what they see and do every day. It does not add another model; instead, it looks at recent work in marketing, media, tourism, and information systems and asks a simple question: which parts of content make people want to buy now and keep them coming back later? The evidence follows a simple pattern. Content should be clear enough to reduce doubt, strong enough to make people feel something, and open enough to let them join in. The importance of each part changes depending on the industry and platform. The effects permeate lived experience, trust, and engagement. This is a structured narrative review of recent empirical and conceptual studies, with a focus on research concerning young users and digital channels.

The contributions are practical. First, the review sketches a small, usable map that links everyday content choices to intention and loyalty in plain language. Second, it turns platform differences into concrete guidance on story shape, posting cadence, and creator partnerships, and it highlights the quiet value of small but durable community spaces. Third, it shifts measurement toward behaviors that signal loyalty—saves, replays, replies, and returns—rather than headline reach, and it points to a short agenda for cross-platform and cross-cultural tests.

The paper then unfolds in three steps. Chapter 2 reviews how content marketing shapes young consumers’ purchase intention through informational, emotional, and social routes, noting differences across industries and platforms. Chapter 3 examines loyalty formation, showing how trust and engagement help attitudes turn into repeat behavior. Chapter 4 gathers the practical implications, offers strategy suggestions, marks the limits of current evidence, and suggests directions for future work.

2. The impact of content marketing on young consumers’ purchase intention

2.1. Theoretical foundation

Purchase intention refers to consumers’ self-reported likelihood of buying a product in the near future, commonly measured by items such as “I plan to buy” or “I intend to buy” [1]. In contemporary digital environments, content marketing aims to inform, persuade, and engage target audiences by providing relevant, value-laden information that reduces uncertainty and aids decision making [2]. Evidence from high-tech contexts, such as the smartphone and SaaS industries, shows

that value-rich content disseminated via social and mobile media can raise awareness, inform customers, and help them make more informed purchase decisions online [3]. In short, purchase intention is not only a proximal outcome in consumer behavior research but also a key indicator that well-designed digital content can meaningfully influence through information, trust, and engagement pathways [4].

2.2. Mechanisms of influence

Content marketing shapes purchase intention through three value dimensions.

The first is Information value. For high-involvement products, informative content (e.g., tutorials, feature explanations) strengthens consumers' evaluation of the brand, a mechanism closely linked to downstream behavioral intentions [5].

The second is emotional value. Entertaining and storytelling-based content enhances consumer experiences by stimulating positive emotions and encouraging identification with brand narratives. This effect holds across both high- and low-involvement offerings and often becomes the most salient value dimension in branded videos, making young consumers more receptive to subsequent calls-to-action [5].

The third is social value. Peer influence and sharing matter strongly in low-involvement categories, especially given young consumers' reliance on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. Moreover, social processes like electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) directly predict purchase intention in tourism contexts [1].

Taken together, value-laden content improves how young consumers experience the brand (informational + emotional + social cues), which in turn elevates their willingness to buy. These mechanisms are particularly visible on video platforms where branded content is consumed in-feed and evaluated experientially [5].

2.3. Contextual variations

This section clarifies “context” along three dimensions that condition the effects above.

Industry differences. In high-tech industries, content marketing improves product development effectiveness by facilitating customer feedback integration, accelerating idea testing, and informing iterative improvements. These processes indirectly facilitate consumers' purchase decisions. However, e-trust did not mediate the link between content and effectiveness in Iranian IT firms [3]. In tourism, by contrast, content reliability and eWOM directly and positively predict purchase intention, whereas persuasion knowledge or skepticism show little effect [1].

Cultural differences. Current evidence comes from limited locales (e.g., Iran and Türkiye), so generalization across young consumers worldwide remains tentative. More cross-cultural comparisons are needed [1,3].

Platform differences. YouTube-based studies highlight informative and entertaining value in long-form branded videos, while short-form platforms such as TikTok emphasize brevity, interactivity, and creator-led norms, which may moderate content effects [5].

2.4. Empirical evidence

High-tech (indirect pathway). A study of Iranian high-tech firms shows that social content marketing significantly increases product development effectiveness—often measured by indicators such as the speed of new product launches, the rate of successful commercialization, and market acceptance of

innovations—but e-trust does not act as a mediator [3]. Complementary findings emphasize that relevant, up-to-date content educates customers, reduces perceived risks, and helps them make better purchase decisions—linking upstream development effects to downstream intention [3].

Tourism (direct pathway). Using the Persuasion Knowledge Model, which explains how consumers activate and apply their knowledge of persuasion attempts to evaluate marketing messages, research in Türkiye demonstrates that content reliability strongly and positively predicts tourists' purchase intention, while disbelief or skepticism does not. Moreover, eWOM exerts a substantial positive effect on purchase intention, whereas persuasion knowledge itself is non-significant [1].

Synthesis. Across contexts, informational and social processes appear pivotal: informational value informs and reassures (especially for high-involvement/tech), while social transmission (eWOM) directly nudges intention (especially in tourism). Emotional value complements both by sustaining attention and positive affect, priming intention formation in video-rich environments [5].

2.5. Summary

Digital content marketing generally elevates young consumers' purchase intention through information (usefulness and reliability), emotional (entertainment and storytelling), and social (eWOM and peer cues) value. Effects vary by industry (indirect via product development in high-tech vs. direct in tourism), platform (long-form YouTube vs. short-form TikTok), and likely culture (current evidence limited to Iran and Türkiye). Overall, content marketing consistently increases purchase intention, though mechanisms and contexts differ. Future research should expand to cross-industry and cross-cultural comparisons and test whether intention gains persist over time [2,4].

Since purchase intention often serves as a precursor to brand loyalty, the next chapter turns to how content marketing fosters loyalty among young consumers.

3. The impact of content marketing on young consumers' brand loyalty

3.1. Theoretical foundation

Brand loyalty is commonly conceptualized along two complementary dimensions: attitudinal loyalty (enduring preference and psychological commitment) and behavioral loyalty (repeat purchase and advocacy behaviors). In digital environments, content marketing can nurture attitudinal loyalty by shaping favorable brand beliefs and feelings, and convert it into behavioral loyalty through continuous engagement and value delivery [5]. A widely observed chain is that value-laden content improves brand attitude and perceived credibility, which fosters brand trust. As a result, this trust stabilizes loyalty over time [6]. For Gen Z consumers—heavy users of social and mobile platforms—loyalty formation is tightly bound to their lived media experiences, where authenticity, interactivity, and peer cues often determine whether positive attitudes translate into repeat patronage [7]. Finally, consumer engagement—encompassing cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social facets—serves as a mechanism linking content experiences to loyalty outcomes. For example, users co-creating content through brand challenges or participating in online brand communities often demonstrate stronger loyalty [8].

3.2. Brand attitude

Content marketing shapes brand attitude through meaning-rich narratives (e.g., user stories or brand origin tales), sensory cues (e.g., music, color schemes, and visuals), and participatory formats (e.g.,

polls, comments, or UGC prompts). For high-involvement offerings, informative content clarifies benefits and reduces perceived risk; for low-involvement categories, entertaining content enhances liking and warmth, which later supports attitudinal loyalty [5]. Visual storytelling and creator-led videos are especially potent among young audiences, where identification with the storyteller can spill over to the brand. On platforms with short-form video, episodic storytelling (series, behind-the-scenes, day-in-the-life) sustains attention while gradually building favorable beliefs.

Recent evidence highlights that narrative and interactivity both play a crucial role in shaping brand attitude. A recent study compared three brand-owned content strategies—conversation, storytelling, and consumer interaction/participation—and found that storytelling and participatory formats were particularly effective in enhancing consumers' brand perceptions and attitudes [9]. Narrative elements such as coherent plots and character development created stronger emotional connections, while interactive features encouraged active involvement and reinforced engagement. Together, these mechanisms demonstrate that brand attitude is not only informed by the informational or entertaining value of content but is also significantly strengthened when consumers are invited into stories and interactions [9].

3.3. Brand trust

Trust is the central psychological bridge from positive attitude to durable loyalty. In content marketing, authenticity (e.g., real customer voices, minimally edited demos), transparency (e.g., clear disclosures, honest limitations), and responsiveness (e.g., timely replies, visible problem-solving) are key trust drivers for young consumers who are highly sensitive to persuasion attempts. Empirical findings from a survey of 242 young social media users in China (134 females, Mage = 25.15, 93.8% aged 18–35) show that brand trust mediates the relationship between social media content marketing and brand loyalty. Content that consistently delivers useful, credible, and engaging value enhances trust, which then predicts loyalty intentions and behaviors [6]. Trust cues are particularly salient when brands invite UGC or collaborate with creators; if the collaboration appears transactional or over-scripted, perceived authenticity drops, weakening the trust–loyalty pathway [7]. Sustained trust requires message–experience consistency across touchpoints, not just isolated “viral” posts [5].

3.4. Gen Z characteristics & experiences

Gen Z came of age inside algorithmic feeds, where brand impressions land in quick, bite-size moments across stories, chats, and short videos. They tend to respond favorably to content that feels genuine and lets them do something with it—react, remix, or talk back—rather than sit through a one-way broadcast. In practice, creator collaborations that keep the creator's own voice, and UGC that puts real customers up front, usually travel farther than polished brand monologues [7]. Many also check claims before committing, triangulating review videos, peer talk, and eWOM. For this cohort, loyalty is not a one-off conversion but a string of kept promises: steady usefulness and quick, transparent fixes when things go wrong matter as much as the first spark [5,7].

3.5. Empirical evidence

First, experiential evaluations appear to precede loyalty formation. Using product involvement as a lens, Lou and Xie show that informational and entertaining qualities in digital content lift consumers' experiential evaluations; those evaluations, in turn, scaffold both attitudinal and

behavioral loyalty. The balance shifts with involvement—information tends to matter more for high-involvement decisions, while entertainment often carries low-involvement categories [5].

Second, trust functions as the mediating bridge. In sectoral evidence from a developing-market context, Ashraf and Ansari find that social media content marketing and brand awareness bolster brand trust, and that trust mediates their effects on loyalty. The practical takeaway is straightforward: design for credibility—clear claims, visible sources, and follow-through—rather than chasing reach alone [6].

Third, how people engage—and where—matters. Bowden and Mirzaei report that self-brand connection feeds consumer engagement (cognitive, affective, behavioral, social), and engagement in turn predicts loyalty. Crucially, the engagement–loyalty link is stronger inside online brand communities than in brand-initiated content streams such as email; affective and cognitive engagement are especially influential in community settings. For Gen Z, this tilts strategy away from pure one-way feeds toward participatory spaces—community servers, fandom hubs, ambassador programs—where engagement can accumulate and convert into loyalty [8].

Finally, studies focusing on young cohorts highlight authenticity, interactivity, and UGC as loyalty drivers, with creators and peers acting as credibility anchors [7]. Together, these findings converge on a multi-stage mechanism: content → experience/attitude → trust/engagement → loyalty, moderated by platform norms and community structures [5-8].

3.6. Summary

For young consumers, brand loyalty emerges when content marketing delivers experiential value, trust cues, and opportunities to engage. Attitudinal loyalty is shaped by narrative and entertainment (and, according to prior studies, interactivity also plays a role in this process.), while trust consolidates these attitudes into behavioral loyalty [6]. Engagement serves as the engine that converts self-brand connection into loyalty, especially in community-based channels [8]. Future work should compare platform norms (e.g., short-form video vs. communities), test long-run effects, and incorporate cross-cultural Gen Z samples to generalize the mechanisms identified [5,7].

4. Discussion and suggestions

4.1. Discussion

Findings across Chapters 2 and 3 converge on one central point: engagement is the link that connects content features to downstream outcomes. When young consumers meet content that is easy to understand, emotionally appealing, and socially shareable, they are more willing to buy and more likely to stay loyal. Prior work on branded YouTube channels shows how interactivity, attention cues, emotional tone, and clear messages can be combined to build sustained engagement on a video platform [10]. This aligns with the evidence that emotional and social value often carry intention formation, while information reduces uncertainty and supports the quality of consumer choices by enhancing confidence in decision making.

Content type matters. In tourism, persuasive posts outperform purely informative posts on Instagram, and informative posts only work well when paired with persuasive elements [11]. This supports the mechanism in Chapter 2: information value helps people evaluate, but attention and affect keep them involved long enough to act. In other words, clarity gets a foot in the door; feeling keeps the door open.

Platform conditions also shape outcomes. Long-form video supports narrative build-up and richer cues; short-form feeds favor quick, vivid appeals. On YouTube, differences in subscriber base, posting cadence—such as weekly versus monthly uploads—and production resources are directly tied to engagement performance [10]. On Instagram, the way a post frames the destination—inviting, vivid, and emotionally resonant—can outweigh follower counts [11]. These patterns are consistent with Chapter 3, where loyalty grows when people experience value repeatedly, feel that the brand is credible, and find places to participate.

Taken together, when content pairs clear facts with a persuasive, human framing, it prompts real engagement—people notice, think, respond, and share. That engagement not only strengthens attitudes and builds trust but also lays the foundation for sustained brand loyalty over time. As trust takes hold, purchase intention rises and, with repeated good experiences, settles into brand loyalty.

Trust remains the bridge from good feelings to stable behavior. Young users are quick to reward useful, honest, and responsive brands, and quick to ignore content that looks staged or purely promotional, which often results in low retention and weak brand attachment. When creator voice is preserved, and when claims match real experiences, trust forms and repeat behavior follows. When these signals are missing, even high reach delivers weak retention.

Context still matters. Product involvement shifts the weight on information vs. entertainment. Sectors differ in how reliability, eWOM, and risk shape intention. Platform norms set tempo and style. Yet across these differences, one regularity stands out: people act on content that helps and moves them, not on content that only tells them. The practical debate, then, is not “information or persuasion,” but how to present necessary facts in a form people want to watch, save, and share.

4.2. Suggestions

A practical approach to applying these findings for young audiences is to maintain simplicity and ensure alignment with their typical media usage patterns.

First, marketers should combine a clear fact with a small hook. They can use short pieces that show either how something works or why it's important. Marketers are supposed to make one claim that can be checked and then add a moment of humanity. For a destination post, for example, practitioners might list the route, price, or time window and pair it with a real scene, like a traveler catching the first bus at sunrise. This method is in line with what people see on tourism Instagram, where posts with persuasive framing get more interaction than just facts, and the mix works best [11].

Second, creators should make sure that the format fits the platform and the space. On video platforms, they should plan for a story arc and add small interactive moments (e.g., chapters, cards, comments). A regular cadence and basic production discipline are important because they build engagement over time by creating expectations and fostering habitual interaction [10]. In short-form feeds, creators should begin with the moment of value—demonstration, reveal, or relatable use—and keep the copy minimal.

Third, brands should show that they are real by keeping an authentic and transparent voice. They should maintain the creator's tone, disclose partnerships, answer questions when they appear, and follow up when problems arise. These actions are simple, but they are the cues young users rely on when deciding whether to trust. When trust is visible, intention can turn into action and loyalty is more likely to last.

Fourth, marketers should provide audiences with a place to gather beyond the main feed. A small but active community space (e.g., a club, server, or challenges hub) allows cognitive and affective

engagement to build, ultimately turning short-term attention into a habit. This kind of participation helps stabilize attitudes and support consistent behavior.

Fifth, practitioners should measure what people actually do rather than relying only on surface metrics. They should look beyond likes and views, paying attention to saves, replays, replies, and returns. These signals are stronger indicators of engagement that predict intention and loyalty. Practitioners can also run small A/B tests on framing—such as starting with information, persuasion, or both—and then keep the version that audiences watch through and respond to.

4.3. Limitations and future work

The synthesis leans on studies from specific regions and sectors. More cross-cultural tests are needed to see whether these pathways hold in different markets. Cross-platform replications would clarify how the same message travels across YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. Longitudinal designs can show whether persuasive engagement today becomes repeat behavior months later. Finally, hybrid content strategies deserve closer study: when and how do factual clarity and emotional framing work best together, and for whom?

4.4. Summary

For young consumers, there are three essential points to make effective content: conveys something concrete, evokes a response, and points to a simple next step. Evidence from branded YouTube channels shows that narrative structure plus basic execution—regular uploads, clear messaging, and active comment management—sustain engagement over time [10]. In tourism-focused Instagram accounts, posts that frame destinations with persuasive, vivid cues draw more interaction than posts that only list facts; mixing the two works best [11]. Ultimately, setting expectations with clear facts, getting attention with persuasive framing, and delivering consistently and responsively build trust, which leads to long-term brand loyalty. As the trust accumulates, purchase intention becomes repeated behavior and, over time, brand loyalty.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is about people. Young audiences stay with brands that teach something useful, notice them, and give them a place to gather. Plain facts ease doubt. A brief, warm story holds attention. A comment thread where names are remembered turns a crowd into a circle. When these parts come together, moments become experience, experience becomes trust, and trust shows up as engagement—then intention, and, in time, loyalty.

This path does not go in a straight line. It changes based on the platform, the culture, and the product. That's why the best moves are also the most human: tell the truth, tell small true stories, keep a steady beat, and give people places to talk to each other, not just with a logo. Instead of just reaching, pay attention to the signals that last, like saves, replays, replies, and returns. When promises are kept in public, trust grows.

There are some limits. A lot of studies are done in one country, on one platform, and over a short period of time. Work in the future should cross cultures and channels and keep an eye on people for longer than a campaign cycle. But one rule is true everywhere: content that informs, moves, and invites participation helps a young viewer buy today—and remember, return, and recommend tomorrow. People remember how a brand made them feel and if it kept its promise.

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