






Influencing Gen-Z Consumer Perception of Online Course Participation: The Impact of Freebies, Social Proof, and Authority Bias in Social Media Promotion Captions

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Abstract. Unravelling the appeal of promotional advertising remains a marketing puzzle even in the age of digitalization. Behavioural economics exposes consumer irrationalities, notably the paradox of information abundance fostering confusion and decision complexity. Surprisingly, as choices multiply, consumers lean towards reactive rather than reflective decision-making, a tendency astutely exploited by marketers in social media captions. This study hones in on the influence of specific words freebies, social proof, and authority bias—on Gen-Z perceptions of online courses. Its aim is to distil practical insights for Digital Marketing and Search Engine Optimization classes, underscoring the critical role of captions and keywords in navigating the fierce competition for consumer attention in the digital landscape. Findings indicate that these factors contribute significantly to Gen-Z decisions, with "free" emerging as a powerful marketing tool. Social proof, driven by peer influence, plays a pivotal role, while authority bias has a modest impact. Understanding this interplay is crucial for Edtech success. However, the study acknowledges limitations, urging caution in generalizing to other demographics. Future research avenues include cross-generational comparisons, diverse examinations of authority bias, and global exploration for cultural nuances, aiming to enrich our understanding of Gen-Z preferences in online education marketing.

Keywords: Consumer Bias, Social Proof, Authority Bias, Freebies, Social Media Captions, Online Course, Gen-Z.

1 Introduction

The attraction of customers to promotional advertising remains an enigma within the marketing domain, complicated by the technological sophistication ushering in the era of digitalization. Discerning the specific categories of advertisements that capture consumer attention and prompt immediate action is a challenging pursuit within this technologically evolved landscape. Kahneman's seminal work [1], unveiling various biases inherent in consumer decision-making processes, has notably transformed the marketing paradigm. This delineation of biases presents an emerging research area in economics that has thus far received limited scholarly attention.

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In contrast to conventional perspectives on consumer irrationality, as expounded by Ariely [2], it is essential to underscore that such irrationalities do not render consumer behaviour arbitrary. On the contrary, these irrationalities exhibit a systematic and predictable nature. This conceptual shift demands a nuanced exploration of the intricacies surrounding consumer decision-making, reframing it as a systematic process characterized by identifiable patterns of irrationality. The implications of these insights extend beyond mere unpredictability, elucidating a structured framework for comprehending and strategically addressing consumer responses to promotional advertising in the contemporary digital marketing milieu. Within the contemporary digital landscape, consumer behaviour assumes a heightened level of complexity, owing to a multitude of influencing factors such as technological advancements, the pervasive presence of social media, and the rapid evolution of the digital environment [3]. This complexity introduces a paradox, wherein the proliferation of information accessibility pertaining to products and services, paradoxically, engenders a state of confusion and decisional intricacy among consumers [4].

The observable trend reveals an increasing proclivity towards irrationality in decision-making processes, manifesting prominently when confronted with an expanding array of choices. Contrary to the conventional expectation that heightened choices would prompt increased consumer reflection, the empirical reality indicates a predisposition towards reactivity. This inclination towards reactivity, however, begets a concomitant vulnerability to cognitive biases and errors in decision-making [5]. In the burgeoning field of behavioural economics, Thaler [6] expounds on several biases inherent in consumer decision-making such as availability bias, confirmation bias, anchoring bias, framing bias, endowment effect, loss aversion bias and choice overload bias. These biases are increasingly integrated into marketing strategies, particularly evident in social media marketing programs [7]. Marketers strategically leverage insights into consumer decision-making vulnerabilities to craft captions that guide consumers toward anticipated choices [8]. For instance, recognizing the loss aversion effect, marketers employ captions suggesting potential losses if consumers refrain from purchasing their products. Additionally, framing bias is utilized by presenting the original price alongside discounted products, creating the perception of a substantial price reduction and enticing consumers with optimal offers. [9]. This exemplifies a fraction of instances wherein decision biases are employed across diverse marketing tactics.

In the realm of social media, the escalating creation of promotional content and advertisements underscores the intensified competition among marketers for consumer attention. Notably, the strategic incorporation of the term "Gratis" or "Free" in social media campaigns, as observed in Kotler et al.'s initiatives [10], is indicative of a deliberate targeting of consumers' availability bias and framing bias. The utilization of the term "free" introduces a cognitive bias, instigating the perception among consumers that the products they procure possess augmented value [11]. Concomitantly, marketers frequently employ social proof techniques as a means to captivate consumer attention and foster brand trust [12]. Social proof, characterized by a proclivity to trust or emulate actions endorsed by others, plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions. When a brand asserts on social media that its product or service boasts widespread usage, consumers are inclined to place greater confidence in trying and recommending the offering. This resonance is attributed to individuals' innate inclination to seek

affirmation and validation from their social milieu. Witnessing congruent actions or beliefs among peers on social media serves to bolster their confidence in aligning with similar actions or beliefs [13]. This nuanced understanding elucidates the sophisticated interplay of psychological factors in the strategic orchestration of social media campaigns.

Within the Indonesian context, a compelling practice meriting examination is the utilization of authority bias in social media captions. Indonesia, characterized by a relatively high level of power distance according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions [14], manifests a propensity among its populace to place heightened credence in advertising captions accentuating the authority of prominent figures or public personalities. In this cultural milieu, the persuasiveness of a message is not solely contingent upon its content but significantly hinges on the identity of the communicator. The prevailing inclination is for individuals to accord greater trust to information disseminated by authoritative figures, thereby emphasizing the pronounced influence of authority bias in shaping consumer perceptions within the Indonesian social media landscape.

1.1 Research Problem

The We Are Social [15] report underscores that a substantial 77% of Indonesia's population, totalling 212.9 million individuals as of January 2023, actively engages with the internet. The catalysing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the online education industry, or EdTech, is evident, with Statista [16] projecting industry revenue in Indonesia to reach US\$1.8 billion (Rp. 27.7 trillion) by 2023. In 2022, Tech in Asia [17] identified at least 51 local technology companies actively contributing to the Edtech services sector. These ventures span diverse niches, including online vocational courses, digital ability/skill certification, education loans, language-specific platforms, K-12 learning platforms, and administration software services. The expansive market opportunities within the EdTech domain emanate from diverse segments, particularly elementary and secondary students, universities, and professionals [18]. For students, offerings include digital assessments, high-tech teaching tools, online tutoring, independent training, teacher resources, and facilitated learning communities. At the university level, engagement involves leveraging Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), furnishing independent training for students to acquire certificates like SKPI (Deployment Accompanying Certificate), and providing ICT evaluations for campuses. In professional spheres, the imperative is digital training to cultivate 9 million digital talents by 2030, fostering work-ready human resources equipped with essential skills needed by 2025, encompassing soft skills in creativity, communication, adaptation, and analytics, alongside hard skills in cloud computing, data management, design, video production, and programming [19].

Online course services emerge as a pivotal industry within the digitalization landscape of Indonesia. A nuanced comprehension of why consumers participate in online courses becomes imperative for marketers. Notably, given the dominance of Gen-Z in Indonesia, understanding this generation becomes pivotal for effective engagement in the EdTech sector.

Based on the various narratives presented above, researchers then see that there is a special attraction in raising research topics in the field of behavioral economics, especially when they are relevant to the field of marketing. Studies on this topic are considered to be able to provide different contributions and perspectives, especially in social media marketing. Currently, the choice of words and keywords used in creating captions or copywriting in posts on social media is increasingly crucial. Not only in social media orientation but understanding the use of keywords is also substantive in SEO development practices. For this reason, the researcher then raised the topic "Influencing Gen-Z Consumer Perception of Online Course Participation: The Impact of Freebies, Social Proof, and Authority Bias in Social Media Promotion Captions".

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Impact of 'Freebies' on Consumer Perceptions

The impact of the term "free" on consumer behavior is intriguing. Shampanier, et al [20] suggest that when individuals face choices among various products, the conventional perspective is to opt for the option with the highest cost-benefit difference. However, when it comes to decisions involving free (zero-price) products, consumers deviate from this norm. Rather than merely subtracting costs from benefits, they perceive the benefits associated with free products to be inherently higher. This distinction highlights a significant consumer mindset wherein free-labelled products are deemed more valuable than those with zero value. Building on this insight, Mazar et al. [21] found that consumers not only prefer products promoted with free discounts over non-free alternatives but also tend to make more purchases in the former scenario. This aligns with the findings of Lee et al [22], who observed that promotions featuring the word "free" effectively stimulate demand. Collectively, these perspectives emphasize the influential role of the term "free" in shaping consumer perceptions and driving purchasing decisions.

2.2 Power of Social Proof: Influencing Consumer Behaviour in the Digital Era

In the realm of social psychology, Amble & Bui [23], introduce the concept of Social Proof, elucidating how individuals tend to be influenced by and emulate the actions of a collective. Applied to social media, Social Proof becomes a phenomenon where individuals or groups are inclined to adopt specific beliefs or actions upon witnessing a consensus of similar behaviour on social platforms. The underlying motivation lies in the conviction that aligning with the actions of the majority is synonymous with making the right choices.

Naeem's research delves into the pivotal role of social proof, particularly during the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic, where it emerged as a driving force behind public perceptions. This resonates with the findings of Talib and Saat [24], who assert that elements of social proof, including follower count, celebrity endorsements, and recommendations from social communities, wield substantial influence over the purchasing intentions of online consumers. This nuanced exploration underscores the enduring impact of social proof in shaping consumer behavior, especially in the dynamic landscape of digital interactions.

2.3 Authority Bias: Shaping Consumer Perceptions

Juarez [25] explores the complex nature of authority bias, emphasizing the significant influence that authoritative figures' opinions have on individuals. This concept is identified as a social cognitive bias, where individuals assign greater credibility to the perspectives of authority figures, consequently giving more weight to their viewpoints and showing a higher propensity for compliance. Kruekemeier et al. [26] further elucidate the mechanism of authority bias within the marketing sphere. In this context, authority bias is strategically employed to enhance the legitimacy of product claims. A prime example is seen in toothpaste advertisements, where companies like Sensodyne enhance the credibility of their assertions by featuring dentists in lab coats. This intentional association increases consumer trust, leading to a higher likelihood of product purchase. This investigation delves into the sophisticated strategies that exploit authority bias, illuminating its role in shaping consumer trust and purchasing behavior.

2.4 The Relationship Between Social Media Captions and Marketing

Social media captions are short texts that accompany content, providing context, engagement, and additional information [27]. These concise messages enhance the impact of visual or written content, encourage user interaction, and convey the message the creator intended. Social media captions are an important element in effective marketing, offering a variety of benefits [28]. They increase engagement by adding context and personality to posts, thereby encouraging interaction. Captions also serve as a storytelling platform, fostering a strong connection between the brand and its audience [29]. Reinforcing brand identity, providing effective calls to action, and increasing discoverability through relevant keywords are additional benefits. Text humanizes the brand, displays its relevant side, and conveys a promotional message, drawing attention to the product or service [30]. Additionally, they encourage community building by facilitating conversation and engagement, fostering loyalty among followers. In essence, social media captions are a versatile and powerful tool, contributing significantly to marketing success in the digital landscape.

3 Research Method

This research employs a questionnaire as the primary instrument, targeting Generation Z students (born between 1995 and 2010) [31]. The study aimed to gather responses from 100 individuals, based on Arikunto's [32] recommendation that a sample size smaller than 100 may not sufficiently represent the population. This aligns with Sekaran and Bougie's [33] guidelines, which suggest that the sample size should be more than 30 but less than 500. The chosen sampling method is non-probability sampling, recognizing that not all elements of the population have an equal chance of selection [34]. This method was specifically selected to focus on Generation Z individuals, aged 15-24 years, who are using or interested in online learning platforms such as Ruangguru, RevoU, Binar, and Coursera. These criteria ensure the relevance and specificity of the insights gathered from the selected demographic.

The questionnaire uses a Likert scale, a common tool in research to measure respondents' agreement with various statements. The scale ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree," 2 "disagree," 3 "neutral," 4 "agree," and 5 "strongly agree" [35]. Data analysis is performed using a multiple regression approach, with statistical validity tests, reliability tests, and hypothesis tests (including coefficient of determination analysis, F test, and T test) conducted using the SPSS application.

4 Results

4.1 Respondent Characteristics

Among the 100 respondents in this study, females constituted the majority at 56%, while males comprised 44%. Students were the dominant group, representing 72% of the total respondents. Geographically, most respondents resided in Central Jakarta and Tangerang, indicating a significant concentration in urban areas. In terms of internet access, 63% primarily used smartphones, reflecting the widespread reliance on mobile technology, while the remaining respondents utilized a combination of desktop and smartphone devices. Awareness of online courses was predominantly attributed to social media, with 71% of respondents learning about these courses through direct advertisements from service providers or shared experiences from peers. This highlights the pivotal role of social media in disseminating information and influencing educational choices. The remaining respondents discovered online courses via search engine queries or recommendations from educational institutions, showcasing the diverse pathways through which individuals become aware of online learning opportunities.

The primary motivation for opting for online courses was to enhance their on-campus learning experience, with an additional emphasis on obtaining certifications to bolster their resumes. This insight reveals a strong desire among respondents to complement their traditional education with additional qualifications, enhancing their employability and professional profiles. Overall, this data provides a comprehensive snapshot of the respondents' demographics, behaviors, and motivations in the context of online learning, offering valuable insights into the factors driving the adoption of digital education platforms.

4.2 Validity Test

Validity is a measure that shows that the variable being measured is truly the variable that the researcher wants to study. Validity test is carried out by looking at the calculated R which must be greater than the R table to be said to be valid. The results of the validity test on 100 respondents are as follows:

Table 1. Pearson's Correlation Value of the Variables

Variables	Items	R	R-Table	Results
Freebies (X1)	X1.1	0.633	0.164	VALID
	X1.2	0.625	0.164	VALID

	X1.3	0.567	0.164	VALID
	X1.4	0.715	0.164	VALID
	X1.5	0.586	0.164	VALID
	X1.6	0.664	0.164	VALID
Social Proof (X2)	X2.1	0.705	0.164	VALID
	X2.2	0.795	0.164	VALID
	X2.3	0.757	0.164	VALID
	X2.4	0.673	0.164	VALID
	X2.5	0.591	0.164	VALID
	X2.6	0.640	0.164	VALID
Authority Bias (X3)	X3.1	0.723	0.164	VALID
	X3.2	0.626	0.164	VALID
	X3.3	0.658	0.164	VALID
	X3.4	0.645	0.164	VALID
	X3.5	0.651	0.164	VALID
	X3.6	0.643	0.164	VALID
Decision Making (Y)	Y.1	0.700	0.164	VALID
	Y.2	0.506	0.164	VALID
	Y.3	0.586	0.164	VALID
	Y.4	0.697	0.164	VALID
	Y.5	0.737	0.164	VALID
	Y.6	0.707	0.164	VALID

Source: SPSS Data Processing Results, 2023

Based on Table 1, it is known that the validity test on 100 respondents used the R table with a significance of 10% and was at 0.164. In this test, both the free word variables (X1), social proof (X2), authority bias (X3), and also the decision to use (Y) have a calculated R that is greater than the R table, so that the entire data is in X1, and Y is declared valid.

4.3 Reliability Test

After passing the validity test, reliability testing is then carried out on the measuring instrument to determine the level of reliability and consistency of the instrument used in this research if repetition is carried out in the measurement process [36]. This reliability test was carried out by comparing the Cronbach's alpha value with the general agreement value for data reliability (0.7).

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Results of the Variables

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Results
Freebies (X1)	0.697	Reliable
Social Proof	0.786	Reliable
Authority Bias	0.729	Reliable
Decision Making	0.711	Reliable

Source: SPSS Data Processing Results, 2023

The analysis reveals that the Cronbach's alpha values for all statements corresponding to the variables in this research surpass 0.7. This aligns with the widely accepted standard for data reliability, signifying that every statement in the research questionnaire—serving as the measuring tool—is not only reliable but also consistently depicts the variables under consideration. This robust level of reliability enhances the confidence in the accuracy and consistency of the research instrument, reinforcing the credibility of the data and the subsequent findings.

4.4 Hypothesis Test Results

Following the confirmation of validity and reliability through rigorous testing, the acquired data underwent hypothesis testing. The hypothesis testing process involves linear regression analysis, encompassing various analyses and tests. These include an examination of the coefficient of determination, the F-statistical test conducted simultaneously, and the t-statistical test conducted individually. This comprehensive approach ensures a thorough exploration of the relationships and significance levels within the data, contributing to a robust and well-rounded assessment of the research hypotheses. The collective R-Square value for the variables in this study is 0.549. This implies that the three independent variables—namely, the words free, social proof, and authority bias—account for 54.9% of the variance significantly influencing the dependent variable, the decision to use online courses.

Table 3. Overall R Square Value of Research Variables

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.741 ^a	.549	.535	2.118

a. Predictors: (Constant), X3, X1, X2

Source: SPSS Data Processing Results, 2023

With an R-Square surpassing 50%, it suggests that the impact of the words free, social proof, and authority bias alone is substantial in determining Generation Z's interest in opting for online courses. However, to substantiate this claim, simultaneous hypothesis testing utilizing the ANOVA test or F-statistical test becomes essential. This

statistical validation will establish the joint influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable, providing a robust confirmation of their collective impact.

Table 4. Overall ANOVA Test (f-Test) Results

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	524.107	3	174.702	38.931	.000 ^b
	Residual	430.803	96	4.488		
	Total	954.910	99			

a. Dependent Variable: Y

b. Predictors: (Constant), X3, X1, X2

Source: SPSS Data Processing Results, 2023

Analyzing the table above, it is evident that the significance value in the F-test (simultaneous) is 0.000, a value lower than 0.05. Simultaneously, the calculated F is 38.931, surpassing the critical F-table value of 2.14. Consequently, it can be deduced that the variables—free, social proof, and authority bias—jointly exert a significant influence on the decision to use online courses. This leads to the acceptance of the hypothesis, reinforcing the understanding that these variables, when considered together, play a substantive role in shaping Generation Z's inclination towards online course utilization. Variables of freebies, social proof and authority bias together or simultaneously have a significant influence on the decision to use online courses and this means that the hypothesis is accepted.

For a more granular understanding of each variable, it is imperative to conduct partial hypothesis testing through the coefficient test or t-statistical test. In this partial testing, the calculated t value derived from the t-statistical test is compared with the critical t value obtained from the t-table. Similar to the F-statistical test, the significance of the t value is also compared with the alpha value. The conclusion mirrors that of the F-test—specifically, if the calculated t value surpasses the t value from the table and the significant t value is less than 0.05, it signifies that the independent variable has a significant positive impact on the dependent variable in a partial context. The ensuing results of the t-statistical test for the dataset are presented below.

Table 5. Overall Coefficient Test Results (t-test)

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.743	2.746		-.271	.787
	X1	.478	.154	.320	3.109	.002
	X2	.395	.107	.394	3.705	.000
	X3	.117	.116	.105	1.007	.317

a. Dependent Variable: Y

Source: SPSS Data Processing Results, 2023

To determine the t-table in this research, the formula used is $t(\alpha/2; n-k-1) = t(0.10/2; 100-3-1) = t(0.05; 96) = 1.660$. Evaluating the partial t-test results:

a. Hypothesis 1:

The significance value for the free word variable is 0.002, smaller than 0.05. The calculated t-value is 3.109, exceeding the t-table value of 1.660. Thus, it is concluded that the free word variable significantly influences the decision to use online courses, and the hypothesis is accepted.

b. Hypothesis 2:

The significance value for the social proof variable is 0.000, smaller than 0.05. The calculated t-value is 3.705, surpassing the t-table value of 1.660. Hence, the social proof variable significantly influences the decision to use online courses, leading to the acceptance of the hypothesis.

c. Hypothesis 3:

The significance value for the authority bias variable is 0.317, greater than 0.05. The calculated t-value is 1.007, smaller than the t-table value of 1.660. Therefore, it can be concluded that the authority bias variable does not significantly influence the decision to use online courses, resulting in the rejection of the hypothesis.

4.5 Discussion

The analysis and tests conducted on the questionnaire results revealed several intriguing findings in this research. Notably, the R Square calculation indicates that the variables—free words, social proof, and authority bias—account for 54.9% of the influence, leaving 45.1% influenced by external variables not explored in this research. The concurrent positive impact of these variables is further validated by the f test results. As these three variables represent more than 50% of the factors influencing the consideration of using online course services among Generation Z, it can be concluded that online course services, by strategically incorporating the words free, social proof, and authority bias in their social media promotions, play a crucial role in addressing why Generation Z opts for their applications.

Navigating the Impact: How "Free" Influences Consumer Usage Decisions

In this study, we uncover the insight that "free" promotions serve as a potent marketing tool, capturing the attention of potential customers and prompting consideration for purchase. However, the decision to purchase is multifaceted and extends beyond the allure of a free offer alone. Customers evaluate the value and quality of the product or service, considering how well it aligns with their needs and desires. Emotional factors and customer engagement also significantly influence purchasing decisions. Shampanier et al's [37] research highlights that, when confronted with various product choices, individuals typically opt for the option with the highest cost-benefit difference. Decisions involving free (zero price) products diverge, as consumers not only weigh costs against benefits but perceive the associated benefits of free products to be higher. For Gen-Z consumers, there exists a distinction between products with zero value and those labelled as free, with the latter holding greater perceived value.

The strategic use of free promotions should not only attract but also foster long-term relationships with customers, aligning seamlessly with broader marketing

strategies. Transparency and credibility in delivering free promotions are crucial to establishing and maintaining customer trust, especially among Gen-Z. Recognizing that free promotions are a component of the overall customer experience, Edtech services can integrate them judiciously into their strategy to achieve broader marketing goals.

Social Proof's Impact on Gen-Z's Online Course Consideration

The revelations from this research underscore the substantial impact of social proof on usage decisions, particularly in the realm of products or services. Building on the insights of Amble & Bui [38], where social proof elucidates that individuals tend to be influenced by the actions of others, it becomes apparent that social influence is paramount for Gen-Z, especially when intertwined with their favoured communities or influencers. The work of Talib and Saat [39] further elucidates that social proof, encompassing factors like follower count, celebrity endorsements, and recommendations from social communities, significantly shapes the purchasing intentions of online consumers. As potential users of online courses, Gen-Z individuals are swayed positively when witnessing a considerable number of their peers choosing a particular product. This observation significantly bolsters their confidence in the product's quality and value.

Social proof not only guides potential users who may feel uncertain or limited in their knowledge of available options but also, for Edtech targeting Gen-Z, diminishes the perceived risk in decision-making. The familiarity of a product being successfully adopted by many others makes potential customers more comfortable in trying it themselves.

The Dynamics of Authority Bias in Gen-Z's Usage Decisions

In our exploration of Authority bias and its influence on Gen-Z's decision to use online course services, we encountered unexpected findings. Contrary to previous studies that positioned Authority Bias as a significant factor encouraging service adoption, our research revealed a lack of a direct relationship in the partial analysis. This suggests that the evidence supporting the influence of Authority on Gen-Z's decision-making regarding online courses is relatively modest. Unlike Juarez's [40] assertion that individuals are highly influenced by authoritative figures, with their views deemed credible and impactful, our study shows a unique perspective. While positive recommendations from experts or authorities typically enhance customer trust, in the realm of online courses, Gen-Z seems to rely more on peer reviews for building trust in services. The trustworthiness of well-known public figures or influencers appears to have a less significant impact on their decision to adopt the course service. This prompts a valuable reflection for Edtech marketers, urging a reevaluation of the dominance of public figures and experts in social media promotions, particularly concerning customer conversion strategies.

5. Conclusion, Managerial Implications and Future Work

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research investigates the complex dynamics of free promotions, social proof, and authority bias, and reveals their impact on Generation Z's consideration of online course services. Comprehensive analysis reveals that these three variables collectively contribute to 54.9% of the factors influencing Gen-Z decisions, providing valuable insights for Edtech marketers. The “free” appeal is emerging as a powerful marketing tool, grabbing attention and driving purchase consideration among Gen-Z. However, the decision-making process goes beyond free offers, including evaluating product value, quality, and emotional factors. The distinction that Gen-Z has between zero-rated products and those labelled as free underscores the nature of their different perceptions. Social proof is emerging as an important influencer, as Gen-Z is highly influenced by the actions of their peers, favorite communities, or influencers. The impact of social proof includes reducing perceived risk in decision making, making potential customers more comfortable trying a product that has been successfully adopted by many others. Surprisingly, authority bias, often considered an important factor in service adoption, showed relatively little influence on Gen-Z's decision to use online course services. Contrary to previous research, Gen-Z appears to rely more on peer reviews to build trust in services, prompting a re-evaluation of the prevalent use of public figures and experts in social media promotions. In essence, understanding the interplay between “free” social proof, and authority bias is critical for Edtech services that aim to capture and retain the interest of Generation Z. Strategic integration of these elements into marketing strategies can address the many considerations Gen-Z, who ultimately contributing to the success of online course services.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Edtech companies should leverage free promotions to capture Generation Z's attention, ensuring the value and quality of these offerings convert interest into paid subscriptions. Emphasizing social proof, marketing strategies should showcase positive experiences from peers and influencers, prioritizing authentic peer reviews over expert endorsements. Highlighting the inherent value and quality of educational offerings, companies must clearly differentiate between genuinely free products and zero-rated services. Building a community around online courses, monitoring trends, and adapting strategies to reflect changes in technology and social media behavior is crucial. Incorporating global and cross-generational insights, conducting longitudinal studies, and integrating emerging technologies like AI, VR, and gamification can enhance the learning experience and address the multifaceted considerations of Generation Z, ultimately driving the success of online course services.

5.3 Future Work

Our study on Generation Z's adoption of online courses has limitations. It focuses on Generation Z, and generalizing to other demographics should be done cautiously. While correlations are found, causation remains unexplored, and external factors may

influence perceptions. The study's timeframe is specific, and external trends could alter Generation Z's considerations. Assuming uniform experiences across platforms may overlook variations in impact. Future research could explore cross-generational comparisons, delve into authority bias with diverse figures, conduct longitudinal studies for evolving perceptions, extend globally for cultural nuances, and consider emerging technologies in Generation Z's online course decisions. These steps enhance the understanding of marketing dynamics and Generation Z preferences.

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