

## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH ON GEN Z'S WATCHING MOVIE DECISION

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### ABSTRACT

This research examines the influence of social media and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on Generation Z's decision-making processes when it comes to movie selection. As digital natives, Gen Z heavily relies on online platforms for information and recommendations, making understanding these dynamics crucial for marketers and filmmakers. Findings reveal that social media platforms significantly shape movie perceptions, with peer reviews and user-generated content playing pivotal roles in the decision-making process. EWOM, particularly through platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, enhances credibility and relatability, ultimately impacting viewing choices. The research concludes that leveraging social media and eWOM strategies can effectively engage Gen Z audiences and drive movie attendance, highlighting the need for targeted marketing initiatives in the digital age.

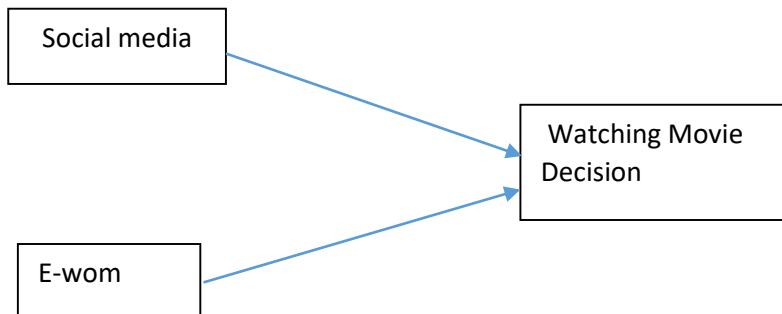
**Keywords:** Social Media, Electronic Word of Mouth, Watching Movie Decision, GenZ

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the context of the media and film industry growing strongly in Vietnam, understanding the audience and developing effective communication strategies are key factors for success. Coupled with the significant advances in technology and social media, these elements greatly influence the decision-making process of moviegoers. Selecting the appropriate media channels to promote films effectively—maximizing resources and aligning content with the specific characteristics of each media platform—has become increasingly complex, especially when the target audience is Generation Z. This generation exhibits distinct characteristics and consumption behaviors compared to previous generations. Born and raised in the digital age, Gen Z has greater access to information and digital media than their predecessors (Ninan, Roy et al., 2020). Thus, this study focuses on evaluating the impact of social media and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)—key elements in the online environment—on the movie selection behaviors of Gen Z. This research not only aims to help businesses better understand how social media and e-WOM influence Gen Z's movie-watching decisions but also provides managerial implications for developing suitable communication strategies to optimize marketing effectiveness.

## 2.0 IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH ON GEN Z'S WATCHING MOVIE DECISION

How do social media and electronic word-of-mouth influence Gen Z's decision to watch films? Below is the research model illustrating the impact of these two factors on Gen Z's watching movie decisions:



### 2.1 Generation Z

Generation Z, born after 1994, is characterized by their early exposure to the internet and substantial influence from social media. They recognize and leverage the power of technology (Williams, Page, Petrosky, & Hernandez, 2010). According to Suvattanadilok (2021), Gen Z—also known as the Net Generation or iGen—connects to the internet more than any previous generation. They use the internet and social media daily, contrasting sharply with older age groups. Priporas, Stylos, & Fotiadis (2017) noted that Gen Z, born into a tech-savvy world, represents the largest segment of online consumers. Statistics from BuzzMetrics in 2018 estimate that by 2025, Gen Z in Vietnam will reach 15 million individuals, constituting 25% of the workforce and 30% of the consumer market. Growing up amidst unique cultural, social, technological, and economic environments, their purchasing behaviors differ significantly (Tabassum, Khwaja et al., 2020). Overall, Gen Z individuals are characterized by problem-solving skills, rapid information access, and adaptability to change. They prioritize living in the moment, focusing on instant gratification and virtual relationships (Hernandez-de-Menendez et al., 2020).

### 2.2 Social Media

#### 2.2.1 The Impact of Social Media on Gen Z's Watching Movie Decision

According to a 2018 report by GenHQ, Generation Z utilizes various social media platforms daily to fulfill their needs. Notably, 95% of Gen Z engage with social media at least once a week, and one-third allocate a significant amount of their time to social media outside of work and academic commitments. Gen Z exhibits a preference for social media advertising over traditional advertising (Ninan, Roy et al., 2020). Furthermore, the rapid advancement of technology and the user-friendly nature of social media platforms contribute to an overall increase in customer satisfaction (Milewicz & Saxby, 2013).

The influence of social media extends to Gen Z's decision-making regarding product purchases and service usage (Ninan, Roy et al., 2020). Suvattanadilok (2021) indicates that potential viewers are more likely to attend films in theaters after engaging with social media pages and the official websites of movies. When comparing the desire to watch a specific film after viewing its trailer to the desire to see another film, individuals are more inclined to choose the film that was advertised, particularly if they have previously viewed its trailer (Oja, 2019).

Khawaja (2020) notes that marketers can better engage Generation Z on social media and more effectively influence their purchasing decisions through digital platforms. Social media advertising positively impacts customers' purchase intentions and actual buying behaviors (Duffett, 2015). However, providing inadequate information and a lack of clarity in social media content can negatively affect customer decision-making (Krishnan, 2014).

As social media has become a dominant factor in marketing and advertising in recent years, several major film studios have successfully leveraged its popularity to create effective marketing campaigns for their films (Baker, 2016). Deshmukh (2013) recommends that managers develop appropriate strategies before marketing their products and services through social media to ensure higher success rates and foster personal relationships with customers.

Promoting films to Generation Z via social media is an essential strategy that filmmakers cannot overlook. Filmmakers should harness the power of social media platforms to generate highly shareable content and create positive communication effects with audiences, thereby reaching a broader base of potential customers.

## 2.2.2 Social Media Platforms in Vietnam

Understanding the characteristics of social media platforms allows businesses to develop more effective marketing strategies tailored to each platform, thereby enhancing the success of sales, communication, and marketing efforts. According to the Digital 2023 report by We Are Social, alongside statistics from Statista on social media users by age and region, as well as reports from Nielsen and Kantar, the following popular social media platforms in Vietnam are characterized by their user demographics:

**1. Facebook:** Facebook is the largest social media platform in Vietnam, widely used for connecting with friends, family, and professional contacts. It offers numerous features such as status updates, image and video sharing, live streaming, and community groups. As of 2023, Facebook has approximately 60-70 million users in Vietnam, with 20-25 million being Gen Z. Despite a decline in usage compared to previous generations, Facebook remains a popular platform among Gen Z.

**2. YouTube:** YouTube is the most popular video-sharing platform, where users can watch, upload, and share videos. Over 50 million users in Vietnam access YouTube monthly, including 25-30 million Gen Z users. YouTube is highly favored by Gen Z for video viewing, educational content, and entertainment.

**3. TikTok:** TikTok is a short-form video platform popular for its features that allow users to create and share brief videos with various special effects. It attracts a significant number of

young users and has become a prominent trend in marketing campaigns. TikTok has approximately 20-30 million users in Vietnam, with 15-20 million being Gen Z. It is particularly appealing to Gen Z due to its engaging and entertaining short videos.

**4. Instagram:** Instagram focuses on image and video sharing, especially through stories and reels. It is a preferred platform among young people and enthusiasts of fashion, travel, and food. Instagram has about 10-15 million users in Vietnam, including 7-10 million Gen Z users.

**5. Zalo:** Zalo is a messaging and social media application native to Vietnam. In addition to messaging and free calling, Zalo integrates features such as a timeline, marketplace, and public services. As of 2023, Zalo has over 60 million users, with 10-15 million being Gen Z. While popular for messaging and calls, Zalo is less appealing to Gen Z compared to other platforms.

**6. LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is a professional networking platform where users can search for jobs, connect with professionals, and share industry-related articles. LinkedIn has approximately 4-5 million users in Vietnam, with 1-2 million being Gen Z. It is less popular among Gen Z, typically utilized by recent graduates seeking employment.

**7. Twitter:** Twitter is a social media platform that allows users to post and read short messages (tweets). It is commonly used for news updates, event tracking, and following current trends. Twitter has around 2-3 million users in Vietnam, with 1-2 million being Gen Z.

**8. Pinterest:** Pinterest is a platform for sharing images and ideas, where users can "pin" photos related to their interests, projects, or creative concepts. Pinterest has about 1-2 million users in Vietnam, with approximately 0.5-1 million being Gen Z. It is used by Gen Z to seek inspiration and ideas for creative projects and personal interests.

## 2.3 E-WOM

### 2.3.1 The Impact of E-WOM on Gen Z's Watching Movie Decision

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) define electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) as "any positive or negative statements made by potential, current, or former consumers about a product or company that are made available to others via the Internet." According to Fan and Miao (2012), e-WOM encompasses all informal communications directed at consumers regarding the use or characteristics of specific goods and services or sellers, based on internet technology. This includes communication between producers and consumers as well as among consumers themselves, both of which are essential components of e-WOM.

Nuria Huete-Alcocer posits that e-WOM is a form of online evaluation and commentary that can spread if the message is persuasive or impressive enough. This mode of communication is particularly significant in the development of online platforms, making it one of the most influential sources of information on the Internet. Huete-Alcocer (2017) emphasizes that e-WOM differentiates itself from traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) by facilitating rapid dissemination of information through accessible online channels.

Various forms of e-WOM positively influence audience trust, impact consumer attitudes, activate behavioral intentions, and affect willingness to pay (Poddar, Banerjee, & Sridhar,

2019). Ansary and Hashim highlight that many important consumer decisions, such as those related to the purchase of products or services, are influenced by e-WOM (Tabassum, Khwaja et al., 2020). Most consumers read online reviews before deciding to purchase a product or service (Poddar, Banerjee, & Sridhar, 2019).

As consumers seek and access information through e-WOM, the quality of that information can significantly influence how they perceive its usefulness in meeting their needs (Ngo, Vuong et al., 2024). Each generation experiences unique circumstances and events that shape distinct values, beliefs, and preferences, which define their behaviors and attitudes. Generation Z is the first generation to grow up alongside technology from an early age (Tabassum, Khwaja et al., 2020). E-WOM significantly impacts Gen Z's purchase intentions (Tabassum, Khwaja et al., 2020), as they often rely on reviews and recommendations from peers on social media before making decisions, including which films to watch (Ng, Hong et al., 2019). This generation places a higher value on authenticity and real user opinions compared to traditional advertising (Yeap, Ignatius et al., 2014).

Basuroy, Chatterjee, and Ravid (2003) found that both positive and negative reviews correlate with weekly box office revenues over eight weeks, although the impact of negative reviews diminishes over time, unlike positive reviews. Liu (2006) explained that e-WOM accounts for significant variance in both overall and weekly box office revenues, particularly in the initial weeks following a film's release.

Moon, Bergey, and Iacobucci (2010) investigated the influence of film ratings from professional critics, amateur communities, and viewers on box office revenues and subsequent film ratings. They found that higher early box office revenues enhance subsequent film ratings, while high advertising costs supported by high ratings maximize film profits. Karniouchina (2011) examined both film buzz and star buzz, revealing that while film buzz drives box office revenues throughout a film's theatrical run, star buzz can boost box office revenue during the opening week and build public anticipation before a film's release (Yeap, Ignatius et al., 2014).

The rapid increase in positive e-WOM significantly impacts the potential for box office revenue growth (Zhang, Yuan et al., 2020). E-WOM influences Gen Z's behaviors, particularly their decisions regarding film selection, which are often shaped by online word-of-mouth information. Filmmakers should focus on generating favorable e-WOM in their marketing and communication campaigns.

### 2.3.2 Forms of Word-of-Mouth Marketing

There are various forms of word-of-mouth marketing, understanding and applying these in the online environment can lead to successful marketing campaigns for filmmakers. Below are some forms of word-of-mouth marketing:

**1. Buzz Marketing** This approach generates interest, excitement, or controversy about a product or service to stimulate conversations among consumers. The goal is to create a "buzz" or "rumor" in the marketplace.

**2. Viral Marketing** This strategy encourages consumers to share your content or promotional messages with friends, family, or their social networks. The content often includes videos, articles, or images that can spread rapidly across online platforms.

**3. Community Marketing** This form focuses on building and maintaining a loyal community around a product or brand. Members of this community share experiences and information with each other, helping to disseminate the marketing message.

**4. Brand Blogging** Utilizing personal blogs of influencers to promote and share information about products or services. These posts can include reviews, experiences, or usage guides, fostering trust and encouraging readers to make purchases.

**5. Evangelist Marketing** This occurs when an individual becomes an "evangelist" for a brand, product, or service. They possess a strong passion and belief in the product, voluntarily sharing and recommending it to those around them.

**6. Grassroots Marketing** This strategy focuses on building support from small, local groups. It often employs direct and personal approaches, leveraging local relationships and influential individuals within the community.

**7. Influencer Marketing** This form utilizes social media influencers or individuals in specific fields to promote products or services. These influencers often have large followings and can significantly impact their audience's purchasing decisions.

In conclusion, developing effective eWOM marketing strategies is essential for filmmakers. They need to select appropriate word-of-mouth marketing strategies to achieve high effectiveness in their marketing campaigns upon film release. Creating impactful eWOM campaigns tailored to each social media platform and the Gen Z audience will enhance communication outcomes.

## 2.4 Watching Movie Decision

Before selecting a movie to watch, audiences seek information from various sources across media platforms. After viewing a film, they are inclined to share their cinematic experiences through personal blogs, social media platforms, discussion forums, and interpersonal communication (Suwanto, 2012). References on social media significantly influence viewers to enjoy recommended films, social media affects audience decisions to watch movies (Suvattanadilok, 2021). Online reviews play a crucial role in guiding consumer decisions, including product purchases and movie selections (Cui et al., 2012). Berger (2014) proposed that word of mouth serves as a valuable social networking tool for independent film audiences and enhances film narratives. Filmmakers should pay attention to discussions occurring within online communities focused on films across all periods to gain a better understanding of consumer attitudes, perceptions, opinions, and more regarding their films. Highly rated films with positive reviews are likely to remain in theaters for a longer duration (Gavilan et al., 2019).

## 3.0 SOLUTION FOR BUSINESS

Through research on the impact of social media and electronic word-of-mouth on the film-viewing decisions of Generation Z, filmmakers must carefully consider effective communication channels and marketing strategies. Focusing resources on targeted campaigns and suitable social platforms will significantly enhance the effectiveness of information dissemination and film promotion, which are critical to the success of a film project.

Social media serves as a powerful communication platform; thus, leveraging and producing appropriate content to engage Gen Z is essential. Filmmakers should develop multimedia communication channels across various platforms and employ diverse marketing methods to maximize the effectiveness of their promotional campaigns. Additionally, creating targeted word-of-mouth campaigns aimed at achieving effective communication corresponding to each stage of the film's release will amplify the film's visibility and improve box office revenue for the filmmakers.

To effectively reach Generation Z, filmmakers should concentrate on creating engaging content on platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and other social networks where Gen Z frequently interacts online.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

The continuous development of technology and social media, along with demographic shifts, poses challenges for filmmakers to constantly update and innovate to attract audiences. This study has evaluated the impact of social media communication and electronic word-of-mouth on Generation Z's film selection decisions. This provides filmmakers and businesses with insights to formulate appropriate strategies for their communication and marketing campaigns to achieve better effectiveness.

In addition to developing marketing strategies and producing engaging content to draw audiences to their films, filmmakers must also focus on the quality of their productions. This research can pave the way for a more comprehensive assessment for filmmakers by incorporating additional film-related factors into the evaluation within a unified model. Thus, the combination of intrinsic strengths, such as film quality, and robust communication and marketing tools can lead to a comprehensive impact on the overall effectiveness of a film campaign.

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