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Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

Öznel Normlar ve Algılanan Kontrolün Z Kuşağı Tüketicilerinin Anlık Mesajlaşma Pazarlama İletişimine Yönelik Tutumları ve Davranışsal Niyetleri Üzerindeki Etkisi

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Abstract

Understanding Generation Z consumers' attitudes and behavioural intentions in the new media environment is fundamental to developing effective marketing communication messages. Generation Z consumers are regarded as heavy users of new media technologies. Thus, there is a need for more research on the nexus between emerging marketing communication technologies and Generation Z consumer behaviour. Based on a survey of 410 Generation Z consumers in Zimbabwe, this study examines the influence of perceived control and subjective norms on Generation Z consumers' attitudes and behavioural intentions towards instant message marketing communications. The results revealed that both subjective norms and perceived control positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards instant message marketing communication in Zimbabwe. It was also observed that while perceived control played no significant role, subjective norms and consumer attitudes played an important role in shaping the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. Accordingly, the study provides insights into the influential role of perceived control and subjective norms on Generation Z consumers' attitudes and behaviours.

Keywords: *Perceived Control, Subjective Norms, Generation Z, Consumer Attitude, Behavioural Intentions, Instant Message Marketing Communication.*

Jel Kodları: *M1, M3.*

Öz

Yeni medya ortamında Z Kuşağı tüketicilerinin tutumlarını ve davranışsal niyetlerini anlamak, etkili pazarlama iletişim mesajları geliştirmek için temel bir unsurdur. Z Kuşağı tüketicileri, yeni medya teknolojilerinin yoğun kullanıcıları olarak görülmektedir. Bu nedenle, ortaya çıkan pazarlama iletişim teknolojileri ile Z Kuşağı tüketici davranışları arasındaki ilişki üzerine daha fazla araştırmaya ihtiyaç vardır. Zimbabve'de 410 Z Kuşağı tüketicisiyle yapılan bir anket temelinde bu çalışma, algılanan kontrol ve öznel normların Z Kuşağı tüketicilerinin anlık mesajlaşma pazarlama iletişimlerine yönelik tutumları ve davranışsal niyetleri üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Sonuçlar hem öznel normların hem de algılanan kontrolün Zimbabve'deki Z Kuşağı tüketicilerinin anlık mesajlaşma pazarlama iletişimlerine yönelik tutumlarını olumlu yönde etkilediğini ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, algılanan kontrolün önemli bir rol oynamamasına karşın, öznel normlar ve tüketici tutumlarının Z Kuşağı tüketicilerinin davranışsal niyetlerini şekillendirmede önemli bir rol oynadığı gözlenmiştir. Bu doğrultuda, çalışma algılanan kontrol ve öznel normların Z Kuşağı tüketicilerinin tutum ve davranışları üzerindeki etkili rolüne dair önemli bilgiler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Algılanan Kontrol, Öznel Normlar, Z Kuşaği, Tüketici Tutumu, Davranışsal Niyetler, Anlık Mesajlaşma Pazarlama İletişimi.*

Jel Codes: *M1, M3.*

Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

1. INTRODUCTION

Owing to their socio-cultural background, people tend to consider the social context whenever they decide whether to behave in a certain way (Petrakis, 2020). In this regard, subjective norms, which describe a person's belief that a significant other would expect him/her to perform a particular behaviour (Bosnack et al., 2020), are an important factor that determines future behavioural intention (Irimia-Diéguez et al., 2023). According to Sun et al. (2020), subjective norms are an important social variable guiding consumer behaviour concerning new technologies. It is believed that the support or approval of a specific behaviour by peers is critical in directing the way people behave in a particular way (Zhang et al., 2023). Thus, the effect of subjective or social norms on consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions has been widely reported in past studies on mobile advertising literature (Gera et al., 2023). Khoa (2023) submits that research on online advertising literature increasingly uses subjective norms to determine consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions. In the context of instant message marketing communication (henceforth referred to as IMMC), subjective norms capture the expectation that one would behave in a particular way after exposure to messages. This behaviour may include either viewing a peer's status update, reading a text message, or playing a video or audio message. For example, in WhatsApp, users can only view a peer's status update if they have saved their contact number. Also, users can track through the notification icon whether the recipients of a message have opened, read or viewed the messages through the grey or blue tick icon.

Perceived control has been identified as a strong predictor of consumer attitude toward MC and their behavioural intentions (Hu & Wise, 2021; Hu, 2023). In an online marketing environment, perceived control is reflected by the ability of consumers to control the messages and information directed to them. Some studies on SMS marketing technologies have related perceived control to such factors as consent, risk avoidance and privacy concerns (Sharma et al., 2021). In the context of IMMC, perceived control can be measured by the extent to which MIM users can control their behaviour towards opening, reading or responding to IMMC messages. Unlike SMS technologies, MIM applications allow the user to determine when and whether they can check on MIM messages, view the message contents and respond. Put simply, consumer involvement with MIM messages is largely under the control of the particular consumer. If the consumer is not interested in receiving MC messages from a particular MIM user, they can easily use the block function, which effectively cuts off the communication between them. Accordingly, perceived control is a critical antecedent of consumer attitude and behavioural intention.

Consumer attitude is an important concept in research on the application of emerging technologies in marketing communication (Duffett & Maraule, 2024). In the theory of planned behaviour, attitude is described as a learned predisposition of people which reflects the way they would respond to an idea or opinion. In the marketing communications literature, the attitude of a consumer can be viewed as a psychological approach of a consumer that portrays their positive and negative responses to the MC messages (Salem et al., 2022). It reflects a consumer's mental willingness and inclination toward acting in a certain way in response to their exposure to marketing communication messages. Previous researchers have identified consumer attitudes regarding marketing communication as an important indicator of the

Govender, K. &   *Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude*
Maruwbwa, J.   *and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication*
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

effectiveness of marketing communication messages (Zhang & Zhou, 2016; Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Duffett, 2020; Febriyantoro, 2020). This means that in general, when a consumer has a positive attitude toward an item or service, they are more likely to buy it. A positive attitude towards marketing communication stimuli entails that the consumer will probably buy the promoted product or brand.

Consumer behaviour scholars believe that the behaviour of a consumer is determined by their intention to carry out a behaviour (Sharma et al., 2022). The stronger the intention to perform the behaviour, the more likely the behaviour will be performed (Arora & Lata, 2020). Thus, behavioural intention has been observed to be one of the foremost outcome variables in most studies on marketing communication, both offline and online (Linardi et al., 2024; Chetioui et al., 2021; Mukherjee & Banerjee, 2017). In the literature, behavioural intention describes an individual's subjective probability that he/she will perform some specific behaviour (Fan et al., 2024). It indicates the willingness of an individual to perform a specific activity or behave in a certain manner (Jiang et al., 2024). Accordingly, past studies have used purchase intention as a key component of consumer behavioural intentions (Yin et al., 2024; Qayyum et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2022; Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Duffett, 2020; Febriyantoro, 2020). Some related studies on the use of SMS technologies in marketing communication suggest that behavioural intentions could be expanded to include: word-of-mouth intention (Mukherjee & Banarjee, 2017). These include such behavioural responses as forwarding intention and contacting intention (Le & Wang, 2020). Accordingly, given the similarities between SMS technologies and MIM applications, this study examines the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers. This is consistent with previous studies on technology-mediated marketing communication (Sharma et al., 2021; Arora & Lata, 2020).

Although researchers have begun to analyse the influence of emerging technology-based marketing communication on consumer behaviour, most studies have emphasized the role of message and content characteristics (Arief et al., 2023; Mo et al., 2023; Lom et al., 2023; Hsu et al., 2022; Salem et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2021; Arora & Agarwal, 2020). A considerable number of these studies predominantly examined online advertising platforms such as social network sites (Chetioui et al., 2023; Gera et al., 2023; Sarfraz & Bano, 2023; Yoon et al., 2023; Khoa, 2023; Sussman et al., 2023; Dogra & Kaushal, 2023) and SMS technologies (Adeline et al., 2023; Lom et al., 2023; Salem et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2022). However, there has been a growing call amongst researchers to investigate contemporary marketing communication such as that propagated via mobile instant messaging (Rehman et al., 2022; Tang & Hew, 2022; Duffett, 2016). It is worth noting that the current stream of research has largely explored the consumer behaviours of millennial consumers (also known as Generation Y) (Duffett & Maraule, 2024; Gera et al., 2023) in developed markets, wherein technology adoption and acceptance are high compared to developing countries. Despite the potency of the Gen Z cohort group and its economic power (Dixon, 2023), there has been limited scholarly research on this fast-growing consumer group. Notwithstanding, studies on the high potential of mobile instant message marketing communication (Kremming, 2020) in developing countries are scarce.

Against this background, the study aimed to enhance the understanding of the implications of instant message marketing communication to practitioners, because of the burgeoning rise

Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

of Gen Z consumers as a new consumer segment. With the help of the planned behaviour theoretical foundation, the study empirically investigates the role of perceived control, subjective norms, and attitudes of Gen Z consumers regarding how instant message marketing communication plays on their behavioural intentions. First, the study sought to examine the influence of the planned behaviour factors, namely, subjective norms and perceived control, on Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards instant message marketing communication. Secondly, the study investigated the relationship between subjective norms, perceived control, consumer attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. This paper continues with a discussion of the related literature, formulation of hypotheses and research design as well as the presentation of results.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) explains human behaviour as shaped by one's attitudes, the presence of social norms and the exercise of volitional control. The key assumption of the TPB is that behavioural intentions are determined by a combination of three factors: attitudes toward the behaviour; subjective norms; and perceived behavioural control (Rozenkowska, 2023; Ajcen, 1991). Therefore, in this study, the TPB provides a sound theoretical basis for understanding the outcome variables of consumer attitude and behavioural intention. The theory was adopted because of its predictive power in terms of the behaviour of customers (Rozenkowska, 2023). Put simply, the TPB proposes a causal link between an individual's attitudes and their actual behaviour mediated by behavioural intentions. In this study, there is a proposed relationship between the attitude of Gen Z consumers and behavioural intentions regarding IMMC. Hence, the TPB provides a theoretical model that explains this relationship. This is supported by past research in the MC field (see Sharma et al., 2021; Arora & Agarwal, 2020), which viewed the TPB as a useful model given its relevance in predicting behavioural intentions instead of actual behaviour. The implication is that when consumers have a favourable attitude toward marketing stimuli, their willingness to purchase increases (Arora & Agarwal, 2020). It is believed that IMMC will generate a positive attitude, which will, in turn, positively influence the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers. This is substantiated by Sharma et al. (2021), who discovered that consumer attitude towards SMS-based commercials influences their behavioural intentions.

Subjective norms, consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions of Gen Z

One of the most significant social influence variables that affect consumer behaviour about emerging technology is subjective norms (Sun et al., 2020). Hashim et al. (2018) contend that research on mobile marketing communication increasingly uses subjective norms to determine consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions. As a result, the impact of subjective norms on consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions has been extensively reported in previous studies on mobile marketing communication (Lom et al., 2023; Kim, 2020; Komulainen et al., 2019). Sharma et al. (2021) emphasized a favourable association between customers' attitudes behavioural intentions and subjective norms in research on SMS advertising. These results are supported by a study on mobile advertising by Kim (2020) which suggests that subjective positively influences consumers' attitudes and behavioural intentions, particularly young consumers. To ascertain this association in the context of instant message marketing communication and Gen Z cohort consumers in Zimbabwe, the study hypothesizes that:

Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

H₁ₐ: Subjective norms will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe

H₁ᵦ: Subjective norms will positively influence the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe

Perceived control, consumer attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z

To understand the influence of perceived control on consumers' attitudes and behavioural intentions, previous studies have related perceived control to factors such as; consent, risk avoidance and privacy concerns (Hu, 2023; Sharma et al., 2021; Le and Wang, 2020). This implies that in an online marketing environment, perceived control measures the ability of the consumers to control the messages and information directed to them (Hu & Wise, 2021). Hence, it is a strong predictor of consumer attitude towards advertising and their behavioural intentions (Yin et al., 2024; Yoon et al., 2023; Hashim et al., 2018). In a study of the application of the theory of planned behaviour, Rozenkowska (2023) observed that perceived control positively influences consumers' attitudes and behavioural intentions. This has been confirmed in past studies (Sreejesh et al., 2020; Wang, 2020; Sharma et al., 2022). Thus, in the context of instant message marketing communication, it is envisaged that a person's perception of their ability to control their behaviour regarding instant message marketing communication messages will influence the attitude toward behavioural intention. Given this background, it is hypothesized that:

*H₂ₐ: Perceived control will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*

H₂ᵦ: Perceived control will positively influence the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe

Consumer attitude and behavioural intentions

Consumer attitudes regarding MC have previously been reported to be an important indicator of the effectiveness of MC (Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Duffett, 2020). In their seminal work, MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) indicated that consumer attitude plays an important role in shaping behavioural intentions toward MC. Their claim is confirmed in a recent study on SMS advertising by Sharma et al. (2021), who affirmed that consumers' attitude positively influences their behavioural intentions. Therefore, in accord with the similarities between SMS technologies and mobile instant message applications, this study examines the influence of consumers' attitudes toward IMMC on behavioural intentions. This is consistent with related past research (see Sharma et al., 2021; Arora & Lata, 2020; Kim, 2019; Mukherjee & Banerjee, 2017; Drossos et al., 2014). Furthermore, evidence from related studies on social media MC by Alalwan (2018), Hamouda (2018), and Duffet (2017) confirm a significant positive relationship between MC, customer attitudes and behavioural intentions. Given the aforementioned, it is hypothesized that:

H₃: Gen Z consumers' attitude towards IMMC will positively influence their behavioural intentions.

Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

The postulated hypotheses are depicted in Figure 1 as the conceptual model.
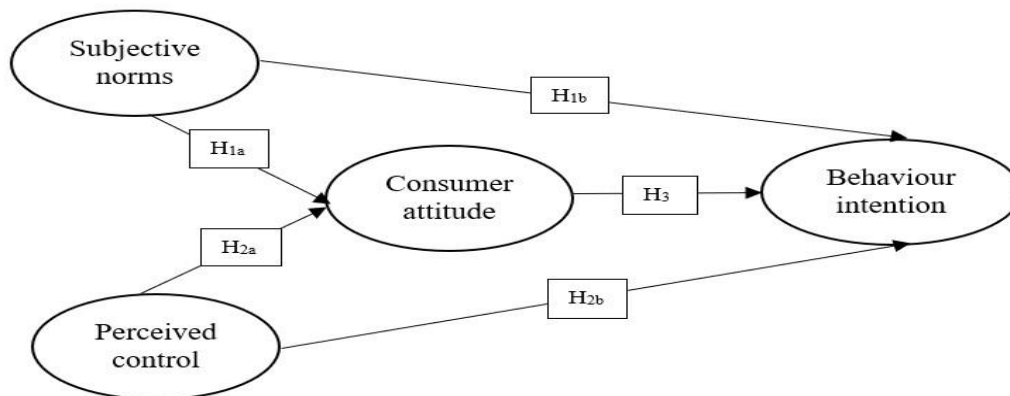
Figure 1. Research Model

3. METHODOLOGY

Following the positivist paradigm and quantitative approach to scientific investigation, a structured questionnaire was used to collect data from a cross-section of Gen Z consumers. The measurement items and scales were adapted from pre-validated measures identified through the literature review. In particular, the items used in past studies on SMS advertising, mobile advertising and social media advertising were adopted and adapted to suit the present study. To measure subjective norms, the measurement items were adapted from Kamphuis and Ramnarain (2012). Perceived control was operationalized using items which were adapted from Le and Wang (2020). The measurement items which were used to measure consumer attitude were adapted from related studies by Wang and Sun (2010) and Sharma et al. (2021). Behavioural intention measures were adopted by Martins et al. (2019) and Sharma et al. (2021). The measures were based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), Neutral (3) agree (4), and strongly agree (5). A sample of 410 older generation Z consumers in the city of Masvingo, Zimbabwe (i.e., over 18 years old) was used to collect the empirical data. Slovin's sample size formula was used to determine the sample size at a 4% confidence interval. The stratified sampling technique was used to select the actual respondents. A customer intercept survey method was used to administer the questionnaire to the respondents with the help of research assistants. The collected data were analysed using the SPSS/AMOS software version 24.0. IBM SPSS Statistics software v26 was used to analyse the results of the demographic characteristics of Generation Z consumers. To test the hypotheses of the study, covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) was conducted.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The results revealed that 52% of the survey respondents were males and 48% were females. In terms of the range, the majority of the respondents (35.4%) fell into the 18 to 22 years age category, whilst the 28 to 32 years age category had the least number of respondents (31.7%). As for the study mode, the results reflect that the highest number of survey respondents (35.9%) were enrolled in the weekend class study mode, and the least (30.1%) were enrolled in the block release study mode.

Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

The results in Table 1 reflect the mean scores for the measurement statements on the latent constructs. Construct validity and reliability measures for the study were estimated. These measures include Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). The results also indicate the Cronbach's alpha values, the average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Items	Mean	Std. Dev	Cronbach's alpha	AVE ≥ .50	CR
Subjective Norms	SN1	3.86	1.8	0.966	0.977	0.935
	SN2	3.94	1.9			
	SN3	3.76	1.8			
	SN4	3.88	1.9			
	SN5	3.82	1.8			
Perceived Control	PC1	3.76	1.9	0.959	0.989	0.888
	PC2	3.62	1.9			
	PC3	3.84	1.9			
	PC4	3.78	1.8			
	PC5	3.66	1.9			
Consumer Attitude	ATT1	3.64	2.0	0.989	0.966	0.967
	ATT2	3.86	2.0			
	ATT3	3.92	2.0			
	ATT4	3.72	2.0			
	ATT5	3.84	2.0			
Behavioural Intent	BI1	3.60	1.9	0.985	0.960	0.913
	BI2	3.72	1.9			
	BI3	3.59	1.9			
	BI4	3.89	1.9			

The results in Table 1 reflect that the mean scores for the measurement statements on 'behavioural intent' (BI1-BI4), 'consumer attitude' (ATT1-ATT5), 'perceived control' (PC1-PC5), and 'subjective norms' (SN1-SN5) were rated above 3.5. It is apparent from the results shown in Table 1 that the study participants concurred with all the statements. This can be observed from the fact that the mean scores for all the measurement statements were above 3.5. To evaluate the reliability of the scales used to measure the research constructs, Cronbach's alpha was employed. Nunally (1978) recommended that for a scale to be reliable, it should have a value of at least 7. Accordingly, the results in Table 1 show that all the reliability index values exceeded the recommended values. In particular, the reliability scores ranged from the lowest (i.e., subjective norms = .966 to the highest score (i.e., consumer attitude = .989). Therefore, it can be deduced that all the reliability scores for the variables were reliable. Hence, it can be said that, for all the constructs in this study, the C.R. values exceeded 0.7, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. This implies that the coefficients for all the latent constructs

Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

met the criteria for both Cronbach's alpha and C.R. measures. As can be seen in Table 1 above, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were also above 0.7.

For the examination of construct validity, both convergent and discriminant validity were tested. We employed average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) to test the convergent validity, and all the values were above .5 and .7 as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). In particular, behavioural intent had the lowest score (.960) on AVE, whereas perceived control had the highest score (.989). In terms of the composite reliability, perceived control had the lowest score (.888), whilst consumer attitude had the highest score (.967). However, it is worth noting that all the scores were above the recommended scores of .5 and .7 as decreed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Hence, the measurement model satisfied the requirements of convergent validity.

Assessment of measurement model using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Before the development of the structural model to test the hypotheses, CFA was conducted to examine the measurement model's fitness (Saliya, 2022). The Maximum Likelihood Estimation technique was employed, which enables the simultaneous estimation of model parameters by the researcher (Frey, 2022; Thakkar, 2020). As part of the CFA procedure, several measurement model fit indices were examined in this study. Every latent variable was correlated with another to examine if the measurement model met the minimum requirements for CFA. The results of the measurement model fit indices are fully explained below.

Measurement model fit indices

Several measurement model fit indices were examined in this study. Table 2 below shows the CFA model fit indices and the comments made concerning the minimum standards.

Table 2. CFA Model Fit Indices

Name of Index	Estimated model indices	Comments
Chi-Sq/df	2.942	Good fit since the value is less than 5.0
RMSEA	0.069	Good fit, value less than 0.08.
SRMR	0.031	Good fit, value less than 0.05.
NFI	0.932	A good fit, value above 0.90
TLI	0.947	A good fit, value above 0.90
CFI	0.954	Good fit, value above 0.95

The results in Table 2 above show that the CFA model developed for this study met the minimum requirements for all the above model fit indices. The Chi-square/DF was 2.942, which was below the minimum threshold of 5 and this suggested that the model was acceptable. The RMSEA and SRMR are 0.069 (less than 0.08) and 0.031 (0.05), suggesting a good model fit. The NFI and TLI were 0.932 and 0.947, respectively. These indices were above the minimum threshold of 0.9, suggesting good model fit. Additionally, the CFI value of 0.954 was above the recommended threshold of 0.950, suggesting a highly satisfactory model fit.

Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

The results of the measurement model suggested that the items used in this study were the true representations of the underlying constructs. By the same token, these indices suggested that the model fit the data well, as recommended in running structural equation modelling (Denis, 2021; Yang & Luo, 2022). The next step was to examine the factor loadings.

Table 3. CFA Factor Loadings

	BI	ATT	PC	SN
BI1	0.782			
BI2	0.689			
BI3	0.732			
BI4	0.793			
ATT1		0.872		
ATT2		0.714		
ATT3		0.756		
ATT4		0.773		
ATT5		0.814		
PC1			0.774	
PC2			0.831	
PC3			0.756	
PC4			0.794	
PC5			0.763	
SN1				0.766
SN2				0.749
SN3				0.778
SN4				0.773
SN5				0.826

Table 3 shows the CFA Factor loadings. The Factor loadings show which questionnaire items are mini-representations of the underlying construct (Hair et al., 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2020). Values above 0.7 are satisfactory for an item to be included in the modelling framework (Denis, 2021; Hair et al., 2021; Hamaker et al., 2021). According to Mehmetoglu and Venturini (2021)Factor loadings assist the researcher in the selection of items that can explain the highest variance in the underlying construct. The higher the factor loading, the better the item is a mini-representation of the underlying latent construct. In our study, the results in Table 3 indicate all the constructs had items with factor loadings above 0.7, except for BI2, which scored 0.688. The study retained this measurement item to preserve model validity and reliability as well explanatory power of the construct. The results of the factor loadings in Table 3 above suggest that all the items included in the analysis had acceptable values in explaining the respective constructs.

Correlation coefficients between latent constructs

After examination of the factor loadings, the next step was to observe the correlation coefficients between the variables of interest. Table 4 shows the correlation coefficients between the different sets of latent constructs.

Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

Table 4. Correlation Coefficients of Exogenous Latent Constructs

	BI	ATT	PC	SN
BI	1			
ATT	0.927	1		
PC	0.485	0.528	1	
SN	0.899	0.911	0.453	1

The purpose of running a correlation analysis in SEM is to observe the extent to which the latent constructs are related and detect multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2020). In structural equation modelling, latent constructs should be allowed to correlate but should not suffer from multicollinearity. In this study, both exogenous and endogenous constructs were included as part of the correlation analysis. The highest correlation was observed between behavioural intention and consumer attitudes, with a coefficient of 0.927. In this study, most of the constructs had weak to moderately strong correlations, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a major concern. Therefore, this study observed that the exogenous constructs included in the analysis were independent of each other.
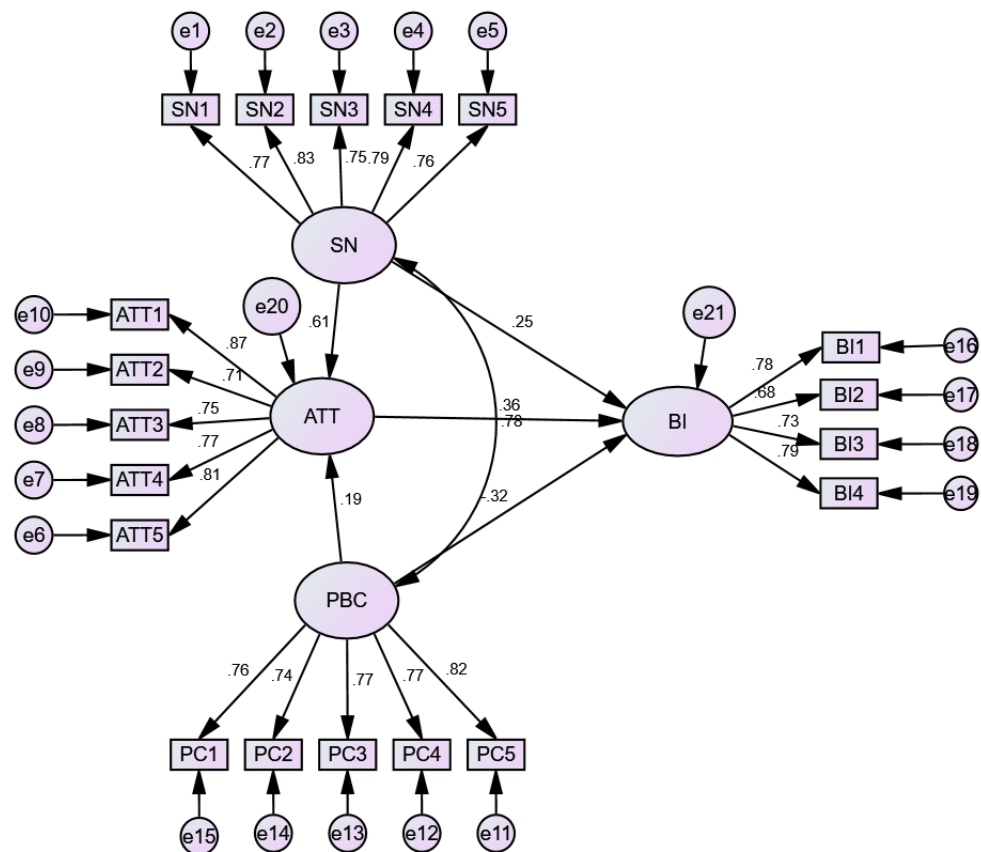
Structural Equation Model (SEM)

After examination of the CFA model, the next step was to develop the structural model. Before interpreting the standardized regression coefficient, the study went on to examine the model's explanatory power through the examination of the R-squared values for the outcome variables. As previously noted, the outcome variables for this study were behavioural intention and consumer attitude, and subjective norms and perceived control are the predictor variables.

Table 5. R-Square Value

Outcome variables	R-square
Behavioural Intention (BI)	0.614
Consumer Attitude (CA)	0.653

It can be observed that behavioural intention had an R-square value of 0.61 while consumer attitude had a value of 0.65. These results suggest that about 61% of the variation in behavioural intention could be explained by the predictor variables around the theory of planned behaviour. Additionally, the variables could also explain about 65% of the variation in consumer attitudes. These values suggest that the explanatory variables had very high influences on the outcome variables.

Govender, K. &   *Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude*
Maruwbwa, J.   *and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication*
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Figure 2. Structural Equation Model

Figure 2 illustrates the standardized regression coefficient (β-values) of the hypothesized model. As indicated, this study established that subjective norm had a significant positive influence on consumer attitudes ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) and behavioural intention ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$). Hence, the empirical results support hypotheses H_{1a} and H_{1b}. With regards to perceived control, the results revealed a significant positive influence on consumer attitude ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$) and a non-significant negative influence on behavioural intention ($\beta = -0.32$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, whereas the results confirmed hypothesis H_{2a}, H_{2b} was rejected.

Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

Table 6. Hypothesis Test Results

Construct	Statement of hypotheses	Decision
Subjective norms (H₁ₐ)	*Subjective norms will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.*	Accepted
Subjective norms (H₁ᵦ)	*Subjective norms will positively influence the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.*	Accepted
Perceived control (H₂ₐ)	*Perceived control will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.*	Accepted
Perceived control (H₂ᵦ)	*Perceived control will positively influence the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.*	**Rejected**
Consumer attitude (H₃)	*Gen Z consumers' attitude towards IMMC will positively influence their behavioural intentions.*	Accepted

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

To understand the role perceived control, subjective norms, and attitudes of Gen Z consumers regarding IMMC play on their behavioural intentions, a couple of objectives were formulated. First, the study sought to examine the influence of the TPB factors, namely, subjective norms and perceived control, on consumer attitude. Secondly, the study investigated the relationship between subjective norms, perceived control, consumer attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers. The results are explained below.

First, it was observed that subjective norms positively influence the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe towards IMMC. Owing to the interactive nature of MIM apps, marketers can expect the 'significant others' to influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers after exposure to IMMC messages. This is unsurprising given that Gen Z consumers like to exchange interesting promotional messages with friends and family as a good way of socializing (Kim, 2020). After exposure to IMMC messages, there is a high likelihood that Gen Z would share the experience with their peers. This may include updating their 'status or profile' or forwarding the content to others. In this regard, the expectations of the significant others shape Gen Z consumers' behaviour. This implies that Gen Z consumers who consider sending, receiving and forwarding promotional messages in MIM apps a way of socializing with friends and family are more likely to buy the promoted products. Following the rapid explosion of smartphone devices and the impressive improvements in mobile communications, favourable consumer attitudes can be triggered by the expectations of significant others to act or behave in that particular way (Adeline et al., 2023). Thus, Gen Z consumers can exhibit certain behavioural traits to conform to social influence and the expectations of others.

Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

This outcome is similar to those reported by Hashim et al. (2018), Komulainen et al. (2019), Kim (2020), and Sharma et al. (2021). Collectively, the aforementioned authors supported the view that subjective norms had a significant positive influence on the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers. Hence, the empirical findings affirm the predictive power and propositions of the planned behaviour theoretical perspective. This is validated by empirical evidence, which points to the view that an individual's behavioural intent can be influenced by the consideration of the responses of essential social referent groups to a particular behaviour (Liu et al., 2020). Based on these findings, one can argue that there is a high chance that Gen Z consumers who hold positive subjective norms are more likely to demonstrate high behavioural intention towards IMMC messages.

Secondly, it emerged from the study that perceived control had a significant positive influence on consumer attitude. These results suggested that an increase in perceived control among Generation Z consumers will result in attitudes towards MIM apps being enhanced. This therefore means that the attitude of Gen Z consumers is directly influenced, among other factors, by perceived behavioural control factors such as consent, risk avoidance and privacy concerns. It appears that in emerging marketing communication environments, consumers' attitude towards inherent content is shaped by the degree to which they believe that they are in charge of their own decisions regarding message exposure, processing and assimilation (Srejeesh et al., 2020). Therefore, favourable consumer responses can be triggered by impressing upon consumers the notion that they are in control of the MC messages they are exposed to and how they consume and process them. This will, in turn, positively influence their behavioural responses, such as involvement with MIM messages. Contrarily, negative behavioural responses can emerge when the consumer is not interested in receiving marketing communication messages from a particular MIM user. With the introduction of the 'block' function in most MIM apps, consumers can easily cut off communication. This finding is in line with observations reported by Humbani and Jordaan (2015) and Srejeesh et al. (2020), who all argued that in an online marketing environment, perceived control measures the ability of consumers to control the messages and information directed to them. As such, a higher degree of user-perceived control enables consumers to select the messages they will view, reply to, process, engage with, forward to or share with peers, without which disengagement and avoidance are inevitable.

The findings also established that perceived control had a non-significant negative influence on behavioural intention. It therefore follows that the hypothesis H2b was rejected. This means that perceived control does not have any significant effect on behavioural intention among Gen Z consumers. A plausible explanation of this finding is that the cohort group under study (Gen Z), has been thought of as the first generation born into a digital world (Feger, 2024). As such, they interact comfortably with their favourite brands and spend a large portion of their lives online (Roth-Cohen et al., 2022). Equipped with relatively higher digital competencies, Gen Z can comfortably navigate the online marketing environment, which renders perceived behavioural control a less important consideration. This has been enhanced by the emergence of control functions embedded in most MIM apps, which allow consumers to 'skip' or disregard promotional messages. Although this outcome contradicts Khoa (2023), Murillo-Zegarra et al. (2020), and Soliman (2021), it supports the results reported by Dhir et al. (2020) and Kaur et al. (2018), who concluded that behavioural response towards MIM apps amongst

Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

young people was not directly or significantly influenced by perceived behavioural control. One can speculate that highly tech-savvy and digitally experienced consumers may be sceptical about the influential role of behavioural control.

Regarding the attitude-intention relationship, the empirical analysis confirmed a positive and significant relationship. Thus, H3 was accepted. These results suggest that attitude towards IMMC is a significant predictor of behavioural intention. This implies that IMMC messages that trigger positive consumer attitudes have a greater chance of driving the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers. According to Duffett (2020), digital MC practitioners must understand the attitude-intention relationship, as this helps to create sustainable MC campaigns. More importantly, this provides essential insights into future behavioural predispositions. Hence, MC practitioners can now better understand the transmittal effect of consumer perceptions and attitudes on behavioural intentions (Sreejesh et al., 2020). The benefit of this to marketers is that it also fosters better decision-making to devise strategic and effective mobile MC campaigns using mobile messaging applications (Safieddine et al., 2021).

This finding can be corroborated by outcomes reported by Nguyen-Viet and Nguyen (2023), Arora et al. (2020), Duffett (2020), Hamouda, (2018), Sharma et al (2021), Wang et al. (2019) and Sreejesh et al. (2020). All the aforementioned researchers concur that young consumers' favourable attitude towards mobile MC significantly and positively influences their behavioural intentions. This also validates consumer behaviour theories (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; Rogers, 1985; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Ajzen, 1991) and other previous empirical studies. For example, Duffett (2020) concluded that technology-mediated MC had an impact on the cognitive, affective, and behavioural attitude components of young consumers in South Africa. Thus, from an MC perspective, this infers that when Gen Z consumers have a positive attitude toward an MC stimulus, they will probably or definitely buy the promoted product or brand, and or even transmit the message to other Gen Z consumers through online word-of-mouth.

Implications for theory and practice

This investigation made several contributions to theory and practice. In a world with mobile instant messaging, the study has also added new perspectives on current marketing communication methods and strategies. It is believed that this widens and deepens the understanding of mobile marketing appeals and the broad impact of MIM technologies on the field of marketing communication. By applying the TPB, the study enriches the understanding of the predictive power of the TPB constructs in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly in the digital marketing context. This adds valuable insights to the literature on the interaction relationships between subjective norms, perceived control, and consumer and behavioural intentions. The research setting also provided a fertile ground for deepening the relevance and applicability of the TPB in emerging marketing communication contexts, particularly in developing countries. This is further enhanced by the empirical examination of Gen Z consumers who comprise a huge portion of the global population and digital market. As such, the study validates and strengthens the link between TPB and marketing communication discipline in general and mobile marketing in particular.

For marketing practitioners, the study makes notable contributions. Because the study results confirmed that subjective norms positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe towards IMMC, it is recommended that MC practitioners should be wary of the

Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

role played by an individual consumer's significant others, such as peers and family. These social influences play a critical role in influencing the attitude and behavioural responses to MC messages. More so, the inherent MIM app affordances entail that these 'significant others' will be both online and onsite. It is therefore advised that MC practitioners constantly assess and monitor both online and offline consumer behaviours as this would assist in designing effective and appealing MC messages and campaigns. Also, it is therefore recommended that MC practitioners consider the extent to which consumers believe they are in control of what MC they receive, when and how. This is pivotal in shaping the consumers' attitudinal responses to MC messages. It is proposed that MC practitioners should be abreast with key factors predicting consumer attitudes. The benefit of this is that it helps to predict behavioural intention. Thus, the empirical results help marketers in developing countries to comprehend what Gen Z consumers value most when it comes to IMMC. This will culminate in the design and implementation of effective MC strategies and tactics.

Limitations of the study and further research

Even though this study was premised on sound theoretical and methodological foundations, certain shortcomings and limitations were considered. These are highlighted in the ensuing discussion. First, the participants in this study were drawn from a population of Gen Z consumers situated in the city of Masvingo, Zimbabwe. This may compromise the representativeness of the research population and the generalizability of the research findings. Furthermore, the focus on one particular cohort group (Gen Z) may negatively affect the generalizability of the research results, as this suffers from a lack of representation. It would be interesting to see how a comparative study of different consumer groups, such as Gen X, Gen Y, along Gen Z, would yield important insights that would guide MC strategies in a world of MIM apps. Perhaps more importantly, future studies may consider expanding the scope of the cohort groups under investigation by extending to other Gen Z consumers in rural areas, as this would deepen the insights gained from the study. In addition, the use of MIM apps in the broader and more general marketing communications field was uniquely addressed in this study. Several MC elements are used to influence the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers. Future studies can therefore explore these elements individually, rather than collectively. For example, MIM advertising, omni-channel advertising features and stakeholder relations management. In the same vein, this study did not investigate specific product or brand MC campaigns. Rather, the general instant message marketing communications were examined. Hence, future studies could address this gap by analysing particular product or brand IMMC campaigns.

DECLARATION OF THE AUTHORS

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Govender, K. &
Maruwbwa, J.
PIAR'2025 / 12(1)

Influence of Subjective Norms and Perceived Control on Generation Z Consumers' Attitude
and Behavioural Intentions towards Instant Message Marketing Communication

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Maruwbwa, J.
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Govender, K. &
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