
Rethinking Marketing Education for Gen Z: New Learning Approaches to Developing Future Digital Marketers

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Abstract

The rapid growth of the digital economy has significantly transformed the marketing profession, creating increasing demand for graduates with digital marketing competencies. However, interest among Generation Z students in pursuing marketing-related programs has not always kept pace with these industry developments. This divide brings up the following critical questions regarding the way marketing education might be more aligned to the learning styles, career expectations and motivations of the current student generation. Thus, this paper will investigate the effects of new methods of learning and career-related perceptions of Gen Z students on their interest in studying marketing in the digital marketing era. The study will be guided by the Self-Determination Theory to investigate the importance of career perception, program awareness and exposure, parental influence, and the perception of the job market on the intention of students to enroll in Diploma in Marketing programs. A structured questionnaire was used to distribute in random 301 SPM leavers to a structured questionnaire and this was the quantitative research design used. Data gathered was analyzed in SPSS, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were done to determine the relationships and predictive power of the variables selected. The results suggest that the students tend to show positive attitudes towards marketing professions and industrial employment. The mean score using descriptive analysis indicates that career perception had the highest score of (3.98), then job market perception (3.92), career information and exposure (3.87) and parental influence (3.54) respectively. The results of regression also indicate that job market perception ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$) then job market perception (3.92), career information and exposure (3.87) and parental influence (3.54) respectively. The results of regression also indicate that job market perception ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.001$) and program awareness and exposure ($\beta = 0.214$, $p = 0.002$), are the next most significant and positively related. Conversely, parental influence ($\beta = 0.087$, $p = 0.091$) does not have a noteworthy impact on the enrolment intentions of students. These results indicate that Gen Z students will be more inclined to think about marketing education when they have a proper vision of relevance of marketing careers in the current transforming digital economy and when they have access to pertinent career information. The paper emphasizes the need to embrace new methods of learning that will merge real life marketing experiences, exposure to digital industry and demarcation of the programs positioning to improve the interaction of the students. The findings of this study can provide useful recommendations to higher education institutions that need to restructure marketing education to prepare the generation of digital marketer in the future.

Keywords : *Marketing Education; Gen Z; Career Perception; Programme Awareness; Labour Market Perception; Self-Determination Theory.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The marketing environment has experienced a radical change due to the fast technological development and the growth of the digital economy. Modern organizations are increasingly relying on digital platforms, data analytics, personalization (artificial intelligence) and interactive social media interaction as a method to attract and keep customers. Due to this, the skills demanded in contemporary marketers have changed drastically. To be competitive in an ever more digital market place, professionals in this industry are now expected to have some experience in areas like content strategy, search engine optimization (SEO), targeted digital advertising and data-driven decision making [1]. The trends in the global labor market can be seen to reflect these developments as the categories of labor demanded in the market increasing at a quick pace, including performance marketers, marketing analysts, and digital campaign strategists, which are constantly experiencing shortages of abilities in the sector [6]. Despite the fact that marketing has become an essential pillar of the contemporary digital economy, the universities are in a weird stall: the number of students taking up marketing courses is not rising in line with the enormous growth of the sector. It's a bit of a paradox. The profession is now more relevant than it has never been before but according to the research, the interest of the students is either stagnating or even declining in certain aspects [9]. The result of this incongruity is a literal disparity between market needs and what the education system is churning out. This is exactly what is happening in Malaysia. On record, the national higher education sector is poised to become a bomb, which will record a CAGR of 21.53%. Nevertheless, the demand towards marketing degrees is not as high as it should be given the current state of desperate lack of digital talent among local SMEs who are already facing digital transformation [10], [11]. There is obviously the demand but the seats are not filled by the students. Much of this disconnection is likely to reduce to **Generation Z** These young students who are between the age of 1997 and 2012 have had a screen in their hand since the age of birth, and they have extremely high expectations of how

they want to study. Traditionally, they do not find it sufficient to sit in the conventional hour-long lecture any more. They are seeking something more practical and more of a hands-on experience and these deem the more dynamic kind of environment as opposed to the chalk and talk approaches that were used by the past generation.

They also appreciate flipped classes, project-based learning, interactive online assets, and learning experiences that are highly integrated with the skills needed in their career environment [7]. Therefore, marketing education would have to reevaluate their pedagogical practices to be relevant and attractive to this new generation of learners and, at the same time, equip them to take up the rapidly changing digital marketing industry. Students do not often act independently when it comes to making choices in a particular field of study. The relevance, opportunities, and value of a career determine their decision. Career perception is a very important factor in the context of marketing education when it comes to determining the interest of the students in taking up marketing related programs. When students perceive marketing as dynamic, innovative, and focused on the future in the digital economy, they have a higher chance of finding marketing as a valuable and rewarding career option [5]. On the other hand, lack of knowledge or wrong perception about the career can deter students to consider marketing as a possible field of study and career choice. Program awareness and exposure is another factor. A large number of those planning to study marketing possess a vague idea of what a marketing diploma is and how it can be translated to the real-world career development. In the absence of sufficient exposure via school briefings, career talks, or through digital media marketing program could go unnoticed even as they become increasingly relevant in the digital economy. Moreover, student attitudes toward the job market perspective have a very prominent impact on academic decisions. The students are more likely to be confident in their decision to pursue the program when they are convinced that graduates of the marketing field can find stable and competitive jobs even in digital

marketing-related jobs [2]. Other than personal views, parental factors are also significant in the determination of educational choices especially in collectivist cultures like Malaysia where family views tend to govern major life choices. Parents often serve as important consultants in the fourth stage of the transition between secondary and higher education, and their views on the career stability, employment prospects, and professional status may affect students in choosing the program [5]. Taking into consideration the fast development of the digital marketing environment, the consideration of these factors has become even more significant to higher education institutions. Universities and colleges will have to reconsider the way marketing program is being communicated and delivered so that it can meet the expectation of Generation Z learners. This generation tends to value experiential learning, industry exposure, and opportunities to develop practical digital skills that directly connect with future employment [4][3]. Traditional lecture-based approaches alone may no longer be sufficient to capture students' interest or prepare them effectively for contemporary marketing careers. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the factors that influence Generation Z school leavers' intention to enrol in marketing diploma programmes. Specifically, the study investigates the role of career perception, programme awareness and exposure, job market outlook, and parental influence in shaping students' enrolment intentions. By identifying these key drivers, the findings are expected to provide insights for higher education institutions in designing marketing programmes that are more relevant, engaging, and aligned with the demands of the digital marketing industry.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Self-Determination Theory

Understanding students' motivation to pursue a particular field of study has become increasingly important in higher education research, particularly when examining Generation Z learners. This study adopts Self-Determination Theory as the theoretical foundation to explain how students develop interest and engagement in marketing education. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasizes that individuals are more likely to participate in activities when their intrinsic motivation is supported through feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness [2]. Within educational settings, SDT suggests that students' academic choices are strongly influenced

by their perception of meaningful learning experiences and future career relevance. When learners perceive that a programme offers opportunities to develop valuable skills and provides clear connections to professional pathways, their motivation to pursue that field tends to increase [3]. Applying to marketing education, it is more probable that students will feel more inclined to participate in marketing program when they perceive the importance of marketing skills in the digital economy and are willing to think that it is possible to use such program to secure career success. Recent research also notes that Generation Z students focus on learning settings that are more focused on gaining a practical experience, using technology, and industry applicability (Seemiller and Grace, 2022). Such attributes are quite compatible with the principles of the Self-Determination Theory that underline the significance of positive environments stimulating the confidence and relevance of learners. This means that career perception, awareness of program and awareness of labor market might have an impact on the motivation of students to undertake marketing education. In addition, research in higher education marketing suggests that students often evaluate academic programmes based on perceived career opportunities and future employability (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2022). Therefore, examining these factors within the framework of Self-Determination Theory provides a useful perspective for understanding how educational institutions can design more engaging learning approaches that attract Generation Z students to marketing programmes.

B. Students' Intention to Enrol in Marketing Programmes (Dependent Variable)

The intention of students to pursue marketing diploma is an important indicator of the direction they would want to take in marketing as a career in the future. To the Generation Z school-leavers, such an intention is not spontaneously developed, but it arises out of a critical decision-making with regards to career prospects, relevance of the programmes and employability. The choices students make in most situations are also dictated by the bigger picture like family pressures and the perceived security of job opportunities in most situations, especially in Malaysia [5]. The students will be more motivated to pursue a marketing diploma when they are convinced that it can enable them to get meaningful professional opportunities. The emergence of the digital economy has enhanced the

significance of marketing capabilities in all industries because of its rapid growth. The use of digital channels, data analytics and social media tactics by businesses to communicate with consumers is gaining more and more popularity, which drives high demand among professionals who possess digital marketing skills. Due to this, the digital marketing strategists, content creators, and marketing analysts have become increasingly visible both in start-up and established organizations [1][6]. Nevertheless, even with these increasing possibilities, a few institutions of higher learning have still indicated a low enrolment into marketing courses. This could imply that not all potential students are well aware of the immediate relation between marketing education and the changing demands of the digital economy [2]. To Generation Z learners, a program should show obvious career relevance to be an appealing program. Students are more inclined to such programs that provide them with a practical exposure, technological skills, and the possibility to interact with the actual marketing practices. Students who learn in settings with combined application of digital tools, industrial partnership as well as experiential projects are also more likely to build confidence in their pursuit of marketing education [7] [4]. The motivation of the students to enroll is stronger and more planned when marketing diplomas are seen to offer them not only creative opportunities but also career skills in the future. It is necessary to know these motivations, as universities and colleges aim to establish marketing courses as topical, vibrant, and in line with the needs of the upcoming generation of digital workers.

C. Career Perception toward Marketing (IV1)

Career perception is significant in influencing the choices of students in their areas of study choices especially among the school leavers in Generation Z who are exploring career choices. Career perception in the framework of marketing education is the ability of students to assess the attractiveness, relevance and future promise of marketing as a profession. Students will be more interested in taking marketing diploma program when they perceive marketing as an opportunity and dynamic area [5]. The fast growth of the digital economy has changed the characteristics of marketing professions greatly. The contemporary marketing functions are characterized by a greater number of digital platforms, consumer data, social media strategies, and creating consumer engagement digital content.

The tasks demand an analytical, technological and creative ability that is in great demand in the current competitive business world [1]. With companies evolving to digital strategies in an effort to enhance customer relationships, marketing professionals will also have strategic role to play in ensuring business growth and innovation [2]. Nevertheless, there are still a large number of students with poor or archaic perceptions of marketing careers, who tend to think that the industry is limited to conventional sales and marketing. These stereotypes can make students less interested in the study of the marketing related program. It is thus possible to provide correct information on the current marketing opportunities, digital skills, and career prospects and thereby reinvent the attitudes of students towards the profession [4]. When marketing is viewed as an opportunity to work as a creative, technologically-oriented, and strategically-thinking worker, students tend to perceive marketing education as an opportunity to secure a well-developed future career.

D. Program Awareness and Exposure (IV II)

Awareness and exposure of the program are very instrumental in forming the perception of the students concerning the available academic opportunities. In the case of Generation Z school leavers, the awareness of a program means more than just knowing that it is there; it is also about knowledge of the structure of the curriculum, the competencies that can be developed and the career pathways that are related to the field. In cases where students are knowledgeable on the content and applicability of a program, they will be in a better position to assess whether it is in line with their interests and future goals. It has been indicated that the more a program is aware the better the intention students have towards pursuing specific academic program [5]. When it comes to marketing education exposure to program content and industry relevance can determine the perception of students to the value of marketing diplomas. The modern marketing program have started focusing more on the digital skills like social media management, data analytics, search engine optimization, and digital campaign strategy. The skills indicate the increasing needs of marketing practitioners who can move in the digital business world [1]. Whenever prospective students are introduced to such learning outcomes during career talks, workshops and program briefings, they tend to appreciate the fact that marketing education

is relevant to their career prospects. To Generation Z learners, communication of information is also critical. They being digital natives are very sensitive to interactive and visually stimulating channels of communication like social media, online seminars and shows of student experience. Through these platforms, institutions are able to illustrate the linkages between marketing programmes and the actual industry practices and future job prospects [7][4]. In a situation where the learners have a clear understanding of the competencies and career opportunities offered by marketing diplomas, program awareness is one of the major factors that determine their desire to enroll in marketing programs [2].

E. Job Market Perception (IV III)

Job market perception plays a crucial role in influencing students' decisions when selecting an academic programme. For many Generation Z school leavers, enrolling in a particular field of study depends heavily on their expectations of future employment opportunities. Job market perception describes the way in which the students assess the existence of the career opportunities, the long-term career stability, and the professional development related to a specific field. Students have a greater motivation to study the subject when they believe that an employment opportunity is high in the program under study [5]. Over the past few years, the digital revolution in businesses has brought about new demand of professionals possessing digital marketing skills. Companies in all industries are currently seeking new paths of marketing and reaching customers over the Internet through digital platform use, social media campaigns, and marketing campaigns that are driven by data. Consequently, the marketing graduates are becoming more and more demanded to have abilities in the fields of digital advertising, content strategy, and customer analytics, among others, which they are imperative to the business activity nowadays [1][6]. These trends demonstrate the fact that marketing education is highly congruent with the changes in the nature of the modern labor market. In spite of such increasing opportunities, some potential students are still not sure of a career prospect with marketing program. Students may find other areas to be having more secure job opportunities due to lack of information in relation to the demand of the marketing professionals. These images might push the students to explore other fields socially when marketing careers present competitive prospects in the digital economy [2].

Helping students better understand the trends in the labor market, career opportunities, and market demands can consequently contribute to the development of more realistic impressions of the marketing profession. Students will be more certain in the choice of the program when they realize that marketing diplomas can offer them the necessary digital skills and the open doors to the long-term perspective of sustainable careers. In turn, the perception of the job market is also a significant determinant of the intention of Generation Z school leavers to join marketing diploma program.

F. Parental Influence (IV IV)

Parental influence remains an important factor in shaping students' educational decisions, particularly in societies where family values strongly guide career choices. In many cases, parents act as key advisors when students decide which academic programme to pursue after completing secondary education. Their opinions often reflect concerns about job stability, financial security, and the long-term reputation of a particular profession. Consequently, students might take into account the parental expectations when making decisions about the possible study program and career politics [5]. Family influence in the Malaysian context could also have a significant impact on the perception of students in relation to some academic subjects. Parents can also urge their children to study disciplines that are conventionally seen as safe or prestigious like accounting, engineering and medicine. Conversely, marketing program can be considered less safe or less purposefully associated with future career security. Such perceptions may influence the readiness of the students to use marketing diplomas as an academic option. However, the influence of parents is gradually evolving alongside the changing aspirations of Generation Z learners. As digital natives, Gen Z students have greater access to information about career opportunities through online platforms, professional networks, and digital media. Through exposure to industry insights, alumni experiences, and emerging digital marketing careers, students are increasingly able to form their own perspectives about future employment opportunities [7][4]. Such exposure may encourage students to consider career paths that differ from traditional expectations. Nevertheless, parental perspectives continue to play a meaningful role in the final decision-making process. When parents gain a clearer understanding of the career opportunities available in modern

marketing fields particularly those related to digital marketing and business innovation, they may become more supportive of their children's choices. Consequently, parental influence remains an important factor that can shape Generation Z school leavers' intention to enrol in marketing diploma programmes [2].

Figure 1.0 presents the conceptual framework of this study. The framework illustrates the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable examined in this research. The dependent variable of this study is students' intention to enrol in marketing programmes. Meanwhile, the independent variables include career perception toward marketing, programme awareness and exposure, job market perception, and parental influence. These variables are proposed to influence students' intention to pursue marketing education in the context of the digital marketing era.

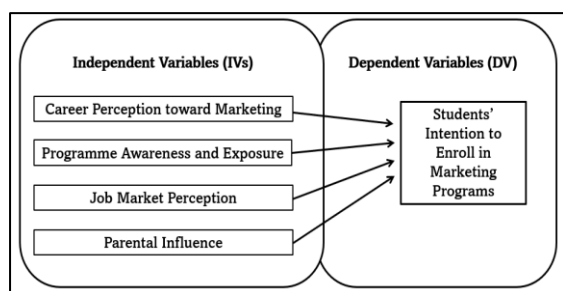


Figure 1.0 Conceptual Framework for Rethinking Marketing Education for Gen Z: New Learning Approaches to Developing Future Digital Marketers

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the factors influencing Generation Z students' intention to enrol in marketing programmes. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to SPM students from the Pengajian Perniagaan stream, who represent potential candidates for business-related tertiary education, particularly in marketing. A random sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents were selected fairly and without bias. A total of 301 valid responses were obtained and included in the analysis. The questionnaire measured the key constructs of the study, namely career perception toward marketing, programme awareness and exposure, job market perception,

parental influence, and students' intention to enrol in marketing programmes. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The analysis of the data collected was performed by the use of Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis involved descriptive analysis to explain the perceptions of the respondents on the variables of the study. Moreover, correlation analysis was done to test the relations between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Lastly, the multiple regression analysis was conducted to ascertain the level to which career perception in relation to marketing, program awareness and exposure, job market perception and parental influence determines intention among the students to enroll in marketing program. These are the analytical processes that present empirical data to determine the main determinants that influence the interest of students in learning marketing. The tools in this research were modified according to the existing literature to provide the validity of the measurements and reliability. Table 1.0 summarises the constructs and their respective sources used in this research.

Construct	Key Sources
Career Perception (IV1)	[12], [13], [14]
Programme Awareness (IV2)	[12], [13], [14]
Job Market Perception (IV3)	[15], [12], [13]
Parental Influence (IV4)	[12], [16], [17]
Enrollment Intention (DV)	[12], [13], [17]

Table 1.0 Measurement Instruments adapted from scholar

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the overall perceptions of respondents toward the variables investigated in this study. The results indicate that students generally demonstrate positive perceptions toward marketing careers and the opportunities available within the marketing industry. Among the variables measured, **career perception toward marketing recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.98)**, suggesting that respondents generally view marketing as an attractive and promising career field. This finding indicates that students recognise the relevance of marketing in today's digital business environment and perceive the profession as offering meaningful career prospects. The second highest mean score was reported for job market perception (M = 3.92). This result suggests that respondents believe that marketing-related careers offer considerable

employment opportunities and remain relevant in the evolving digital economy. In addition, program awareness and exposure recorded a mean score of 3.87, indicating that respondents have relatively good awareness of marketing programs and are somewhat exposed to marketing-related career information. However, parental influence recorded a comparatively lower mean score ($M = 3.54$), indicating that parental guidance plays a more moderate role in shaping students' interest in marketing education. Table 1.0 shows the descriptive analysis of the study variables, presenting the mean values of career perception toward marketing, job market perception, programme awareness and exposure, and parental influence.

Variable	Mean	Interpretation
Career Perception toward Marketing	3.98	High
Job Market Perception	3.92	High
Program Awareness and Exposure	3.87	High
Parental Influence	3.54	Moderate

Table 1.0: Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

These results are indicative of the fact that the perception of students with marketing careers and opportunities in the labour market is an important factor in determining the interest in marketing education. The mean scores of career perception and job market perception are relatively high which means that the respondents acknowledge the importance of marketing in the digital economy. The result is similar to other past studies that have established a strong correlation between the students enrolling on marketing-related programmes and their perception of good career opportunities and market demand [5][2]. On the other hand, the mean score on parental influence is lower which implies that students are relying more on their personal judgment of career opportunities, as opposed to merely relying on the family suggestion when deciding on education. These descriptive results, in general, indicate that perceptions of career opportunities and prospects on the labour market have a significant effect on the interest of students in marketing education as opposed to the expectations of their parents. Such a trend could indicate the specifics of the Generation Z students, who are more likely to choose a career following their interests, industry trends, and digital exposure.

B. Regression Result

Multiple regression analysis will provide us with a clear image as to what actually causes a student to join a marketing program. Table 2 shows that the data offers a strong story: three factors how people see the job market, how they see their career, and how much they know about the program are the most important determinants.

Independent Variables	Beta (β)	p-value	Significance
Career Perception toward Marketing	0.298	< 0.001	Significant
Program Awareness and Exposure	0.214	0.002	Significant
Job Market Perception	0.421	< 0.001	Significant
Parental Influence	0.087	0.091	Not Significant

Table 2.0: Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Parental influence did not achieve statistical significance, indicating a significant transformation in the academic decision-making of the present generation. In our model, the most important factor is how people see the employment market ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$). It is by far the best predictor. This shows that students are quite practical. They aren't simply seeking for a degree; they want a guarantee of stability and demand. Students perceive marketing as a sector with a lot of room for growth since data analytics and social media skills are in great demand in today's digital economy. This is in line with the studies of [12] and [15], which shows that for Gen Z, getting a job isn't simply a bonus; it's the main aim. It's also **important how people see marketing as a career, not just "getting a job"** ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.001$). We discovered that students are far more inclined to sign up for marketing courses when they see it as a creative, inventive, and tech-driven field. It's about their professional identity; they want to work in an industry that is "future-proof" and always changing. This supports the fact that marketing must be regarded as a technological-minded profession so as to attract the finest employees [13]. Moreover, it was rather significant to know about and to see the software ($\beta = 0.214$, $p = 0.002$). It is a call to action by institutions. According to the research, when we bridge the gap through workshops, industry lectures and online communication, students get it. They

transition into being interested to being dedicated. The first thing to do in unravelling the mystery that exists between a subject taught in a classroom and a good job is awareness, which according to [14], is the first. Among the most prominent inferences, however, was that parental influence did not make a difference at all ($\beta = 0.087$, $p = 0.091$). Parents can also offer general tips, but they ceased to be the determinants of Generation Z. The generation has the reputation of being independent. They receive their information online and tend to have more faith in social networks and market trends than traditional people of authority [17]. These figures indicate that Gen Z is making market-based decisions. Most importantly, they are concerned about the relevancy of their job to their career and the industry fame. In the case of colleges and universities, the lesson is simple, in case we want to attract more students to enroll, we must cease selling college degrees but sell futures. We must transform the way we conduct marketing thinking in order that it becomes a prospective, opportunity-based discipline that speaks to a tech-savvy, independent generation.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the variables that affect the intention of Generation Z students to pursue marketing programs in the light of the changing digital marketing environment. The results show that job market perception, career perception towards marketing, program awareness and exposure are significant in the intention of the students to pursue marketing education. Among these factors, job market perception emerged as the strongest predictor, indicating that students are more likely to consider marketing programs when they perceive strong employment prospects and career opportunities in the field. In addition, positive perceptions toward marketing careers and increased exposure to program information also contribute to stronger enrolment intentions among students. Interestingly, the results show that parental influence does not significantly affect students' intention to enroll in marketing programs. This finding suggests that Generation Z students tend to make educational and career decisions based more on their own interests, industry trends, and perceived career opportunities rather than relying heavily on parental guidance. These findings highlight the importance of aligning marketing education with the realities of the digital economy and communicating the relevance of marketing careers more effectively

to prospective students. From a practical perspective, this study suggests that higher education institutions should strengthen program visibility, industry exposure, and career-related communication to enhance students' understanding of marketing education. Integrating digital marketing practices, industry collaborations, and real-world marketing applications into learning approaches may further increase students' engagement and interest in marketing programs. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research focuses on SPM students in the business stream, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to students from other academic backgrounds or educational contexts. Second, the study applies a quantitative approach, which may not fully capture deeper insights into students' motivations and perceptions regarding marketing education.

Future research could extend this study by including students from different academic streams, institutions, or geographical regions to provide a broader understanding of students' interest in marketing programs. In addition, future studies may consider employing mixed-method or qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus group discussions, to gain deeper insights into students' perspectives on marketing education and digital marketing careers. Overall, this study hopes to contribute to ongoing efforts to rethink marketing education in the digital era by highlighting the key factors that influence Generation Z students' interest in marketing programs. Understanding these factors is essential for educators and institutions seeking to design more relevant and engaging learning approaches that can prepare the next generation of digital marketing professionals.

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