

Article

# Exploring HR Collaborative Initiatives in Opening Global Market Access for MSMEs

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**Abstract:** The digital era has transformed marketing strategies, particularly for tech startups targeting Generation Z (Gen Z). This study investigates the influence of guerrilla and viral marketing on Gen Z consumer perceptions and behaviors in the context of tech startups, focusing on a risk-based entrepreneurial marketing approach. A quantitative survey with 212 Gen Z respondents was conducted to analyze the effects of these marketing strategies on consumer engagement, brand perception, and purchasing behavior. The results show that guerrilla and viral marketing significantly enhance consumer engagement and brand perception, but they do not directly influence Gen Z behavior or purchasing decisions. The findings highlight the importance of emotional engagement and brand authenticity in shaping consumer perceptions. This research fills a gap in understanding how resource-constrained tech startups can leverage risk-based marketing strategies to engage Gen Z, providing practical insights for designing effective campaigns. Future studies should explore additional factors like brand trust and values to bridge the gap between engagement and behavior.

**Keywords:** Brand perception, Consumer engagement, Gen Z Behavior, Guerrilla marketing, Viral marketing.

## 1. Background

Marketing for technology startups in today's digital era faces significant challenges, especially in marketing products to young consumers who have unique characteristics and are different from other age groups. One of the groups that is a major focus in marketing today is Generation Z (Gen Z), which includes individuals born between 1997 and 2012. Gen Z is known for their highly tech-connected nature and prefers authentic and interactive marketing experiences (P. S. Whalen & Akaka, 2015). Gen Z consumers want marketing that is not only engaging, but also creative and value-based. Marketing that can influence the perception and behavior of Gen Z consumers, especially in the context of tech startups, requires an innovative approach and is able to overcome the resource limitations that startups often experience (Bunea et al., 2024; Thangavel et al., 2022). In this case, risk-based marketing strategies such as guerrilla and viral marketing are emerging as highly relevant alternatives. Guerrilla marketing and viral marketing are two forms of marketing that are highly efficient and can be implemented with limited resources, which is often a major challenge for many tech startups (Hills et al., 2008). Guerrilla marketing, which utilizes surprises and unexpected elements to grab consumers' attention, has proven effective in creating stunning brand experiences at a relatively low cost (Maganti, 2022). On the other hand, viral marketing, which relies on the power of social media and word-of-mouth to spread marketing messages, allows brand messages to spread quickly among a wide audience (Stokes, 2000). Both of these strategies are particularly relevant for Gen Z who are very active on social media platforms and are often involved in sharing content that they find interesting and relevant to. However, while both strategies have great potential, their implementation still requires a cautious risk management approach, given the high level of uncertainty that exists in the tech startup market (Capatina et al., 2024; Usman & Sun, 2023).

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However, while guerrilla and viral marketing are widely known, the main problem faced by tech startups in leveraging both strategies is the limited resources and capacity to mitigate the risks associated with these unconventional marketing strategies (Onyango et al., 2025; Zarco & Herzallah, 2023). Tech startups often operate with limited marketing budgets, so they need to choose strategies that can make a big impact at minimal cost. Therefore, the implementation of risk-based marketing is very important. In this context, guerrilla and viral marketing offer great potential because both not only rely on large financial resources, but also require creativity and acumen in identifying opportunities that can be taken advantage of to the fullest (Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, 2023). By using a risk-based marketing approach, tech startups can take advantage of market uncertainty to create campaigns that steal the show and influence Gen Z's purchasing decisions. However, while many studies have addressed the application of guerrilla and viral marketing in the context of various industry sectors, there is still a gap in research that specifically examines the influence of these two strategies on Gen Z consumer perceptions and behaviors in the context of tech startups. Most of the existing research is still limited to large corporations or traditional marketing contexts (Hills et al., 2008; P. S. Whalen & Akaka, 2015), while tech startups that operate more dynamic business models and are vulnerable to market changes have not been widely researched. In addition, there have not been many studies examining how consumer engagement and brand perception can be a mediating variable in the influence of guerrilla and viral marketing on consumer behavior. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap by examining in depth the influence of guerrilla and viral marketing on Gen Z consumer perceptions and behaviors in tech startups, as well as examining the role of consumer engagement and brand perception as mediators in this relationship (Alsheikh, 2024; Gökerik et al., 2018; SOOMRO et al., 2021).

## 2. Theoretical Review

### Entrepreneurial Marketing Theory

Entrepreneurial marketing theory has evolved as an approach that combines aspects of marketing with entrepreneurship, with a focus on the courage to innovate, take risks, and take advantage of opportunities that exist in an uncertain market. Entrepreneurial marketing emphasizes the importance of flexibility, speed, and creativity in the face of market uncertainty, which is especially relevant for tech startups that often operate in an environment full of challenges and resource constraints (Miles et al., 2015). Entrepreneurial marketing, also known as risk-based marketing, focuses not only on achieving short-term goals but also on creating long-term relationships with consumers through innovative and unconventional marketing (Hills et al., 2008).

Guerrilla and viral marketing are two strategies that best reflect the basic principles of entrepreneurial marketing. Guerrilla marketing, first introduced by Levinson (1984), focuses on unusual and surprising marketing tactics to grab the attention of audiences without the need for a large budget. Viral marketing, on the other hand, relies on the power of social media and word-of-mouth to accelerate the spread of marketing messages (P. S. Whalen & Akaka, 2015). Both reflect an approach that fits perfectly with the entrepreneurial marketing philosophy, which emphasizes the use of innovation to create value and address market uncertainty. In the context of tech startups, both of these strategies allow companies to introduce their products to consumers in a more authentic and memorable way, without having to rely on traditional marketing methods that often require large investments.

### Previous Research

Several studies have examined the impact of guerrilla and viral marketing on consumer behavior, both in general contexts and in specific sectors such as small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). Whalen & Akaka, (2016) in their research showed that guerrilla marketing can increase consumer engagement and strengthen brand perception, especially when the campaign involves elements of surprise and direct interaction with the audience. Viral marketing, on the other hand, can accelerate the spread of information and increase brand awareness, especially among young consumers who are active on social media. This research shows that both marketing strategies are effective in attracting attention and influencing the behavior of tech-connected consumers, such as Gen Z.

However, while there are a number of studies that address guerrilla and viral marketing, there are still gaps in the literature that examine the influence of these two strategies in the context of tech startups and Gen Z consumer behavior. Most of the existing research focuses more on large companies or conventional businesses, with little attention paid to the dynamics faced by tech startups that often operate on a limited budget and focus on innovation to

create a competitive advantage (Miles et al., 2015). Additionally, while guerrilla and viral marketing has been shown to be effective in a variety of contexts, there is still little research linking these two strategies to consumer engagement and brand perception as mediating variables, especially in relation to the behavior of Gen Z consumers who tend to be more selective in interacting with brands.

### **3. Research Methods**

#### **Hypothesis**

##### **Guerrilla Marketing on Consumer Engagement**

Guerrilla marketing, with its creative and unconventional approach, has proven to be effective in increasing consumer engagement. Research by (Stokes, 2000) shows that guerrilla marketing allows brands to interact directly with consumers, creating unforgettable experiences and encouraging consumers to engage emotionally. Through elements of surprise and direct interaction, guerrilla campaigns not only attract attention but also motivate consumers to share their experiences, strengthening the relationship with the brand. This is in line with the findings of (P. Whalen et al., 2015), who emphasized that marketing campaigns that are surprising and unexpected can significantly increase consumer engagement. In addition, research by (Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, 2023) supports these claims by showing that guerrilla marketing, which is based on an unusual and experience-based approach, can increase consumer engagement in the long run, especially when consumers feel more connected to the brand. Thus, guerrilla marketing can create a stronger relationship between brands and consumers, leading to increased engagement.

H1: Guerrilla Marketing has a positive impact on Consumer Engagement.

##### **Viral Marketing on Consumer Engagement.**

Viral marketing has been widely recognized as an effective strategy in harnessing the power of social media to increase consumer engagement. Research by (Morris et al., 2002) revealed that viral marketing allows brand messages to spread quickly through social interactions, thereby increasing consumer visibility and engagement. In the context of Gen Z, who are very active on social media platforms, viral marketing is very effective in creating buzz and attracting the attention of a wide audience (P. Whalen et al., 2015). Findings by (Eggers et al., 2018) further suggest that consumers who engage in viral campaigns feel more motivated to share content with their networks, strengthening their social relationships with brands. The study also shows that the engagement gained from viral marketing is more natural and not forced, creating a stronger emotional closeness between consumers and brands. Therefore, viral marketing plays an important role in increasing consumer engagement, especially among the younger generation who are active on social media.

H2: Viral Marketing has a positive impact on Consumer Engagement.

##### **Guerrilla Marketing on Gen Z Behavior**

Guerrilla marketing can influence the behavior of Gen Z consumers through a more personalized and creative approach. Gen Z tends to be more responsive to marketing that offers unique and authentic experiences (P. Whalen et al., 2015). Research by (Miles et al., 2015) shows that Gen Z highly values marketing campaigns that are not only innovative, but also focus on values they find relevant, such as sustainability and authenticity. Guerrilla marketing, which often uses surprise tactics and direct interactions, can create memorable experiences for Gen Z, encouraging them to engage more and share those experiences. In addition, (Stokes, 2000) notes that guerrilla marketing that uses community-based and interaction-based approaches can increase brand loyalty, which is crucial in influencing Gen Z's behavior to stick with the brand in the long run. By harnessing creativity and surprises, guerrilla marketing can directly influence Gen Z's behavior, encouraging them to more actively participate in marketing campaigns and become more loyal to brands.

H3: Guerrilla Marketing has a positive impact on Gen Z Behavior.

##### **Viral Marketing on Gen Z Behavior**

Viral marketing has been shown to have a significant impact on Gen Z's behavior, particularly when it comes to brand perception formation and purchase decisions. Research by (Eggers et al., 2018) shows that viral marketing can influence consumer behavior by strengthening their emotional connection with brands, especially through shareable and easily accessible content on social media. Gen Z, who are very active on digital platforms, are more likely to interact with content that goes viral and is shared by their friends, which creates a

stronger sense of connection with the brand. According to (P. Whalen et al., 2015), Gen Z's behavior is often influenced by social interactions and friend recommendations, so viral marketing can accelerate the process of brand adoption in this group. In addition, research by (Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, 2023) reveals that viral marketing leverages the power of social media to spread messages that influence consumer buying behavior, especially in the context of Gen Z, who have a high tendency to make impulse purchases based on what they see on social media platforms. Thus, viral marketing plays an important role in influencing Gen Z consumer behavior, both in terms of brand engagement and purchase decisions.

H4: Viral Marketing has a positive impact on Gen Z Behavior

#### **Guerrilla Marketing on Brand Perception**

Guerrilla marketing focuses on innovations and surprises that create unforgettable experiences for consumers, which in turn influences their perception of the brand. According to (Stokes, 2000), guerrilla marketing strategies that utilize creativity and unconventional approaches can improve brand image by creating a strong positive impression on consumers. This approach fosters emotional connections and unique consumer experiences, which has the potential to enhance brand perception in their minds. Research by (Miles et al., 2015) shows that consumers who engage in guerrilla marketing campaigns often have better brand perceptions because the brand is perceived as innovative, bold, and different from competitors. In addition, (Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, 2023) add that guerrilla marketing not only attracts consumers' attention, but also builds long-term relationships with brands through touching and engaging experiences. Therefore, guerrilla marketing can directly influence brand perception by creating a more positive image, increasing consumer recognition of the brand, and building stronger loyalty.

H5: Guerrilla Marketing has a positive impact on Brand Perception.

#### **Viral Marketing on Brand Perception**

Viral marketing has the ability to influence brand perception in a very effective way, especially through social media that makes it easier to spread messages from word of mouth. Research by Whalen et al. (2015) shows that when consumers see a brand talked about or shared by a friend or influencer they trust, it can improve their perception of the brand. Viral marketing builds brand credibility because consumers tend to trust recommendations from people they know more than traditional advertising. According to (Eggers et al., 2018; P. Whalen et al., 2015), viral marketing allows brand messages to spread organically through engaging, relevant, and easy-to-share content, which in turn improves the brand's image in the eyes of consumers. In addition, (Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, 2023) highlight that successful viral campaigns can create a deep positive impression, which increases brand perception, particularly among younger generations who are more connected to the digital world. By harnessing the power of social media and shareable content, viral marketing not only increases brand awareness, but also forms positive perceptions that can last in the long run, ultimately increasing consumer loyalty and engagement.

H6: Viral Marketing has a positive impact on Brand Perception.

#### **Consumer Engagement on Gen Z Behavior**

Consumer engagement plays an important role in shaping consumer behavior, especially among Gen Z. According to (P. S. Whalen & Akaka, 2015), high consumer engagement can strengthen an emotional connection with a brand, which in turn influences purchasing decisions and further interaction with the brand. Gen Z, known for its reliance on technology and social media, tends to be more engaged with brands that offer engaging and authentic experiences. Research by (Eggers et al., 2018) reveals that when consumers feel engaged in a marketing campaign, they not only interact with the brand more often, but are also more likely to take action, such as buying a product or recommending it to their friends. Additionally, (Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, 2023) note that consumer engagement serves as a stronger indicator of loyalty, where consumers who feel connected to brands tend to exhibit more sustainable purchasing behaviors. Thus, high consumer engagement is directly related to the behavior of Gen Z consumers, who prefer brands that are able to create interactive and life-relevant marketing experiences.

H7: Consumer Engagement has a positive impact on Gen Z Behavior

### **Brand Perception on Gen Z Behavior**

Brand perception influences consumer behavior, especially in Gen Z, who tend to be more selective in choosing the brands they support. Research by (Miles et al., 2015) shows that when consumers have a positive perception of a brand, they are more likely to make repeat purchases and share their experiences with others. Gen Z, who have extensive access to information and are heavily influenced by social media, are more easily influenced by brand image and reputation (P. S. Whalen & Akaka, 2015). If brands can build a positive and authentic image, then consumer behavior, including purchasing decisions and brand loyalty, will be stronger. Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, (2023) also emphasize that positive brand perceptions can strengthen consumer engagement and increase loyalty, leading to more favorable behaviors for the brand. Therefore, good brand perception plays an important role in influencing the behavior of Gen Z, who prefer to interact with brands that they consider credible, innovative, and relevant to their values.

H8: Brand Perception has a positive impact on Gen Z Behavior.

### **Guerrilla Marketing on Gen Z Behavior through Consumer Engagement**

Guerrilla marketing, which prioritizes creativity and unexpected tactics, can influence Gen Z behavior through consumer engagement. Research by (Stokes, 2000) shows that guerrilla marketing campaigns that directly engage consumers can create an engaging experience and encourage consumers to interact more with brands. In the context of Gen Z, which prioritizes authentic and interactive experiences, guerrilla marketing allows brands to introduce their products or services in an unforgettable way, which increases consumer engagement rates (P. Whalen et al., 2015). This high engagement, according to (Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, 2023), will in turn influence consumer behavior, including purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. Thus, guerrilla marketing can influence Gen Z behavior through increased consumer engagement, allowing brands to get closer to consumers and create profitable long-term relationships.

H9: Guerrilla Marketing positively influences Gen Z Behavior through Consumer Engagement.

### **Viral Marketing on Gen Z Behavior through Consumer Engagement.**

Viral marketing, which relies on the rapid spread of messages through social media, can influence Gen Z behavior through increased consumer engagement. Research by (Eggers et al., 2018) shows that viral content has the power to increase consumer engagement, especially when consumers feel that they are part of a larger social conversation. Gen Z, who are very active on social media platforms, are often engaged in sharing content that they find relevant or interesting, and this can accelerate brand or product adoption (P. Whalen et al., 2015). Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, (2023) also revealed that successful viral marketing can create social experiences that strengthen consumer engagement, which ultimately influences their behavior, both in terms of purchase and loyalty. Therefore, viral marketing can influence Gen Z behavior by increasing consumer engagement through social media platforms, creating an ongoing positive effect on purchasing decisions and brand loyalty.

H10: Viral Marketing positively influences Gen Z Behavior through Consumer Engagement.

### **Guerrilla Marketing on Gen Z Behavior through Brand Perception**

Guerrilla marketing can influence Gen Z behavior through positive brand perception. Research by (Miles et al., 2015) shows that marketing campaigns based on surprise and innovation, such as those done in guerrilla marketing, can build a more positive brand image in the eyes of consumers. Gen Z is very sensitive to how they perceive a brand, especially when it comes to authenticity and innovation. Stokes, (2000) notes that guerrilla marketing that utilizes unexpected elements and creates unique experiences can reinforce positive perceptions of brands, which in turn influences consumer behavior. Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, (2023) also show that positive brand perception, resulting from creative and unconventional marketing, can strengthen consumer loyalty and improve purchasing behavior. Thus, guerrilla marketing can influence Gen Z behavior through improved brand perception, which encourages consumers to engage more with brands and make more profitable purchasing decisions.

H11: Guerrilla Marketing positively influences Gen Z Behavior through Brand Perception.

### Viral Marketing on Gen Z Behavior through Brand Perception

Viral marketing has the potential to influence Gen Z behavior through positive brand perception. Research by (P. S. Whalen & Akaka, 2015) shows that viral campaigns can create a stronger brand image among consumers, especially when the content shared has social or emotional value. Gen Z, who are heavily influenced by the recommendations of friends and influencers on social media, tend to build a positive perception of brands that appear virally on their platforms (Eggers et al., 2018). Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, (2023) reveal that brand perception built through viral marketing can strengthen consumers' relationship with brands, which ultimately influences their behavior. Thus, viral marketing can influence Gen Z behavior by creating better brand perception, which increases consumer loyalty and strengthens their purchasing decisions.

H12: Viral Marketing positively influences Gen Z Behavior through Brand Perception

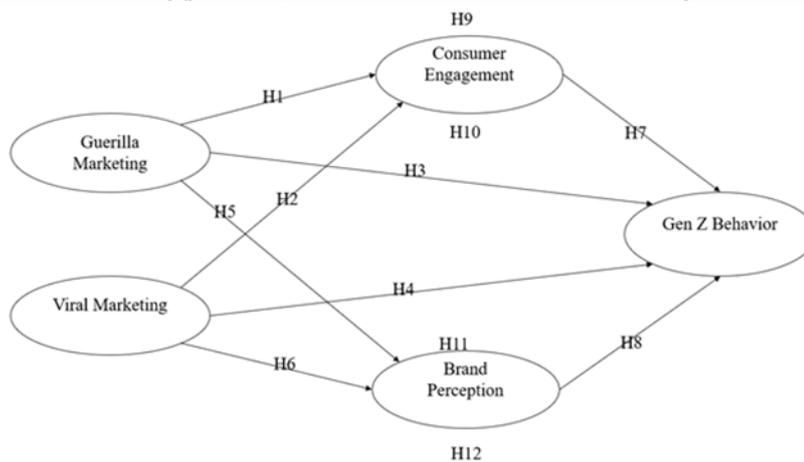


figure 1

### 4. Results and Discussion

The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire designed to measure consumer perception, consumer engagement, and Gen Z consumer behavior towards guerrilla and viral marketing implemented by tech startups. The questionnaire consists of several sections, each of which measures variables related to the research hypothesis. The variables measured included brand perception, consumer engagement, and consumer behavior. The questionnaire will use a 5-point Likert scale to measure the extent to which respondents agree or disagree with existing statements, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". The Likert scale was chosen for its proven ability to measure consumer attitudes, perceptions, and engagement in various marketing contexts (P. S. Whalen & Akaka, 2015). Here is an example of an indicator used to measure these variables:

Table 1. Variable Measurement Instruments

No	Variabel	Indikator	Item	Kode
1	Guerrilla Marketing (Stokes, 2000)	Innovation	The brand offers exciting and unique innovations.	GMX1.1
			I was impressed by the brand's new way of offering products	GMX1.2
		Surprise	I was surprised and intrigued by the experience this brand provided.	GMX1.3
			Their marketing campaigns often surprise me.	GMX1.4
			The experience that this brand provides is very different from the others.	GMX1.5

No	Variabel	Indikator	Item	Kode
2	Viral Marketing (P. Whalen et al., 2015; P. S. Whalen & Akaka, 2015)	Message Dissemination	I often see messages from this brand shared on social media.	VMX2.1
			This brand content often appears on my social media feeds.	VMX2.2
		Social Interaction	I trust this brand message because my friend shared it.	VMX2.3
			I trust messages shared by people I know.	VMX2.4
		Credibility	I feel that this brand really knows what I want.	VMX2.5
			The brand provides relevant and engaging information.	VMX2.6
3	Consumer Engagement (Eggers et al., 2018)	Emotional Engagement	I feel emotionally connected to this brand.	KCZ1.1
			This brand makes me feel valued as a consumer.	KCZ1.2
		Social Engagement	I often talk about this brand with my friends.	KCZ1.3
			I feel like this brand speaks to a language I understand.	KCZ1.4
4	Brand Perception (P. S. Whalen & Akaka, 2015)	Brand Image	The brand has a positive image in my eyes.	PMZ2.1
			This brand is seen as a trusted brand in the industry.	PMZ2.2
		Brand Authenticity	This brand feels authentic and relevant to my needs.	PMZ2.3
			This brand puts forward the values I believe in.	PMZ2.4
5	Gen Z Behavior (Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, 2023)	Purchase Decision	I tend to buy products from this brand.	PKY1.1
			This brand makes it easier for me to make purchasing decisions	PKY1.2
		Brand Loyalty	I will continue to support this brand in the future.	PKY1.3
			This brand has always met my expectations as a consumer.	PKY1.4

### 5. Conclusions and Suggestions

Based on the results of the discussion in the study entitled Exploring HR Collaborative Initiatives in Opening Global Market Access for MSMEs, it can be concluded that collaborative efforts carried out by the Human Resources (HR) division have an important role in opening global market access for MSMEs, especially through understanding consumer behavior, brand perception, and consumer engagement. Through the use of an instrument in the form of a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, this study succeeded in measuring the perception, engagement, and behavior of Gen Z consumers towards guerrilla and viral marketing strategies implemented by technology startups. These findings indicate that innovative and measurable marketing strategies, if supported by a collaborative HR

approach, can increase the competitiveness of MSMEs in the international market through an in-depth understanding of global consumer behavior, especially the younger generation.

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