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Brand identity, purchasing behavior, and positioning: evidence from Generation Z

Identidad de marca, comportamiento de compra y posicionamiento: evidencias desde la Generación Z

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Abstract

In order to analyze the relationship between purchasing behavior, brand identity, and brand position among Generation Z, this study was developed, which also evaluates the role of the brand as an intermediary in purchasing behavior and brand position. In this sense, a quantitative methodology with a descriptive correlational design was used, along with structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in the data analysis. The sample consisted of 405 respondents between the ages of 18 and 27, most of whom belonged to Generation Z, who completed a structured questionnaire on their demographic pattern of purchasing or brand ownership. The most significant result was to demonstrate that the purchasing behavior whose influence can be observed was 0.843 points ($p < 0.001$) and has a strongly positive correlation with brand identity, which mediates (indirect $\beta = 0.165$, $p = 0.004$) between purchasing behavior and brand positioning in a market. It is concluded that building a strong and consistent brand identity is essential to converting purchasing experiences into differentiated and lasting positions. This is especially important in a connected and demanding segment of the population, such as Generation Z. These results offer relevant implications for the design of marketing strategies that integrate values, experiences, and loyalty.

Keywords: purchasing behavior, brand identity, social media.

Resumen

Con el objetivo de analizar la relación entre el comportamiento de compra, la identidad de marca y el posicionamiento de marca en la Generación Z, se desarrolló el presente estudio, que además evalúa el papel mediador de la identidad de marca en la relación entre el comportamiento del consumidor y el posicionamiento de marca. Se empleó una metodología cuantitativa con un diseño descriptivo-correlacional, aplicando la modelización de ecuaciones estructurales (PLS-SEM) para el análisis de datos. La muestra estuvo conformada por 405 participantes de entre 18 y 27 años, en su mayoría pertenecientes a la Generación Z, quienes completaron un cuestionario estructurado sobre sus patrones demográficos y hábitos de consumo o posesión de marca. Los resultados más relevantes evidenciaron que el comportamiento de compra ejerce una correlación fuertemente positiva sobre la identidad de marca ($\beta = 0.843$; $p < 0.001$), la cual actúa como variable mediadora en la relación entre el comportamiento del consumidor y el posicionamiento de marca (β indirecto $= 0.165$; $p = 0.004$). Se concluye que la construcción de una identidad de marca sólida y coherente resulta esencial para transformar las experiencias de compra en posiciones diferenciadas y sostenibles. Este hallazgo adquiere especial relevancia en un segmento poblacional altamente conectado, informado y exigente, como lo es la Generación Z. Los resultados aportan implicaciones significativas para el diseño de estrategias de marketing orientadas a la integración de valores, experiencias y fidelización.

Palabras clave: comportamiento de compra, identidad de la marca, medios sociales.

Introduction

The interrelated strategic variables that shape contemporary business dynamics are purchasing behavior, brand identity, and brand positioning. In a digitalized environment, conversion and consumer purchasing decisions have become key elements for organizational sustainability and competitiveness. This study analyzes how purchasing behavior influences brand identity and brand positioning, as well as the mediating role of brand identity in the relationship between these two variables.

Purchasing behavior encompasses much more than the mere acquisition of products or services; it represents a complex psychosocial decision-making process, formed by prior experiences, perceptions of value, and social persuasion. According to Petcharat and Leelasantitham (2021), this behavior is increasingly mediated by digital platforms and social networks that serve as high-trust spaces, where purchase intentions are reinforced through direct interaction with brands and other consumers (Ebrahimi et al., 2021). These networks not only facilitate information dissemination but also socially validate it, which is particularly relevant for Generation Z and other demographic groups that place significant importance on recommendations from friends or family.

Purchasing behavior significantly impacts brand identity. Bawazir (2024) defines brand identity as the deep essence, personality, and set of values that enable an emotional and psychological connection with consumers. Through repeated purchases, consumers strengthen this identity, weaving emotional ties that consolidate a coherent and robust image in the market. Brand identity is constructed not only from visual elements but also from communicative coherence and the social values that the brand consistently conveys, reinforcing the consumer experience and loyalty (Nguyen & Dam, 2024; Roy et al., 2022).

Conversely, purchasing behavior directly affects brand positioning. Pratisthita et al. (2022) define positioning as the unique and differentiated position that a brand occupies in the minds of consumers relative to its competitors. Through frequent and positive purchasing decisions based on functional attributes, emotional benefits, or previously assimilated values, consumers consolidate this positioning (Indiani & Purnami, 2021; Illa-Sihuincha et al., 2025). Thus, the brand enhances its reputation and perception, increasing preference and competitiveness in highly saturated and diverse markets (Pratisthita et al., 2022).

The relationship between brand identity and positioning is intrinsic and dynamic. While identity represents the internal, authentic, and strategic construction of the brand, positioning reflects how this construction is perceived externally. A well-defined and managed identity provides coherence and differentiation, facilitating a solid positioning that maximizes perceived value (Behnke, 2025). This relationship is bidirectional, as effective positioning can also feedback and strengthen brand identity by harmonizing market expectations with organizational values and principles (Sihvonen, 2019).

In this context, the components of purchasing behavior, brand identity, and brand positioning constitute crucial elements that interconnect and interact in contemporary strategic management. Purchasing behavior is defined as the process through which consumers select, acquire, and use goods or services, influenced by psychological, social, and cultural factors that determine tastes, preferences, and loyalty (Sharma & Gupta, 2005). This behavior directly impacts the perception and construction of brand identity, understood as the set of communicated values, personality, and essence that generate a lasting emotional bond with the consumer (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018; Arikan, 2021). In turn, brand identity affects positioning, which corresponds to how a brand is perceived in the consumer's mind compared to its rivals (Nugraha et al., 2025).

Positioning not only reflects functional attributes but also the emotional and symbolic resonance that a credible identity projects. In other words, it combines the "color photograph and words" of a brand with the human relationships that sustain it: each interaction with the consumer is a form of mutual recognition that reinforces the brand's values and authenticity (Kächele et al., 2016). Consequently, the synergy among these three constructs is essential for brands not only to capture consumer attention but also to consolidate their loyalty, especially in a saturated digital environment where authenticity and values are determinants (Tőkés, 2023; Shahid & Zafar, 2021).

Finally, brand identity plays a crucial mediating role between purchasing behavior and brand positioning. Shams et al. (2024) assert that the effect of purchasing behavior on positioning is reinforced or modulated by the strength, cohesion, and consistency of brand identity. When this identity is robust, it acts as an emotional and psychological key that translates purchasing decisions into enduring and favorable perceptions of positioning. This mediation contributes to customer retention and loyalty in the face of market competitive dynamics (Bawazir et al., 2024).

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In this framework, the present study seeks to address existing gaps in the literature related to purchasing behavior, brand identity, and brand positioning in Generation Z. Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed:

- H1: Purchasing behavior (PB) is positively related to brand identity (BI).
- H2: Purchasing behavior (PB) is positively related to brand positioning (BP).
- H3: Brand identity (BI) is positively related to brand positioning (BP).
- H4: Brand identity (BI) has a mediating effect on the relationship between purchasing behavior (PB) and brand positioning (BP).

Methodology

The deductive method serves as a fundamental pillar within the epistemological framework of the research process. It is characterized by starting from a general theory that serves as a conceptual foundation for formulating specific hypotheses, which are subsequently tested through the systematic collection and analysis of empirical data. This process allows for the validation of initial theories and, if necessary, their refinement (Creswell, 2009). This method is particularly suitable for research aimed at verifying or improving existing theories, ensuring a rigorous and cumulative scientific advancement.

In the realm of contemporary marketing, especially when analyzing Generation Z, the deductive method becomes a powerful tool for studying the relationship between brand positioning and purchasing behavior. It also facilitates the exploration of how various dimensions—such as attributes, benefits, beliefs, and values—can influence this behavior. This approach not only serves to confirm previous theoretical models but also to adjust market strategies based on empirical evidence that reflects the particularities and demands of a highly connected and informed generation.

Regarding the type of research, Creswell (2009) defines applied research as that which is oriented towards solving specific problems and improving practices in particular contexts, such as business or education. Complementarily, Saunders et al. (2019) argue that applied research aims to generate results that can be implemented in real life, addressing specific challenges faced by certain sectors or populations. In this study, the focus is on determining the nature and strength of the relationship between brand positioning and purchasing behavior in Generation Z. Based on empirical analysis, the goal is to provide recommendations and strategies that companies can use to strengthen their connection with this cohort of consumers.

Moreover, a correlational descriptive scope was employed, aimed at providing a detailed description of the variables under study and analyzing how they interact with each other (Creswell, 2014). This approach allows for the identification of the direction and intensity of reciprocal relationships, facilitating an understanding of how Generation Z's purchasing patterns are associated with brands. Shaughnessy et al. (2000) note that correlational studies are essential for predicting future behaviors based on present patterns, offering advantages in addressing complex and multidimensional phenomena. Thus, the correlational descriptive approach represents a valuable tool for detecting trends and designing strategies tailored to the characteristics of the current market.

The study was conducted in the Peruvian context. Data were collected from individuals aged between 18 and 27 who make purchases at least once a month in electronic environments. A structured questionnaire comprising six items on purchasing behavior, four on brand identity, and four on brand positioning was administered. Data collection was carried out through an online form, reaching a total of 445 respondents, of whom 423 completed the instrument. From this group, 405 valid responses were selected for analysis, resulting in a response rate of 93%.

For data analysis, second-generation Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed, utilizing the Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) approach, recognized for its ability to assess complex models that include both latent and observed variables (Hair et al., 2021). This analytical approach allowed for the validation of the proposed theoretical relationships and the estimation of direct and indirect effects among the study variables.

Results and discussion

Table 1 presents the reliability and validity indicators of the scales used to measure each construct. The results demonstrate that the applied instruments meet the required standards for structural analysis. The reliability of the indicators shows high values (> 0.80), indicating individual consistency in the items. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE > 0.50) demonstrates adequate convergent validity. Both composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha (both above 0.80) confirm a high internal consistency for each construct. Collectively, these results support that the measurements are well-defined and meet the methodological criteria required for structural equation modeling.

Table 1
Validity and reliability of the measurement model

Variable	Code	Indicator Reliability	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Purchasing Behavior	PB	0,882	0,627	0,910	0,881
Brand Identity	BI	0,832	0,661	0,886	0,829
Brand Positioning	BP	0,875	0,721	0,912	0,871

Source. Smart PLS SEM

Table 2 shows the discriminant validity among the constructs: purchasing behavior (PB), brand identity (BI), and brand positioning (BP). The criterion of the square root of the AVE (≤ 0.90) was used to ensure that each construct measures distinct concepts. The diagonal values are higher than the cross-correlations between the constructs, validating that the latent variables are statistically distinguishable from one another and do not present conceptual overlaps.

Table 2
Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	PB	BI	BP
PB			
BI	0,884		
BP	0,847	0,887	

Fuente. Smart PLS SEM

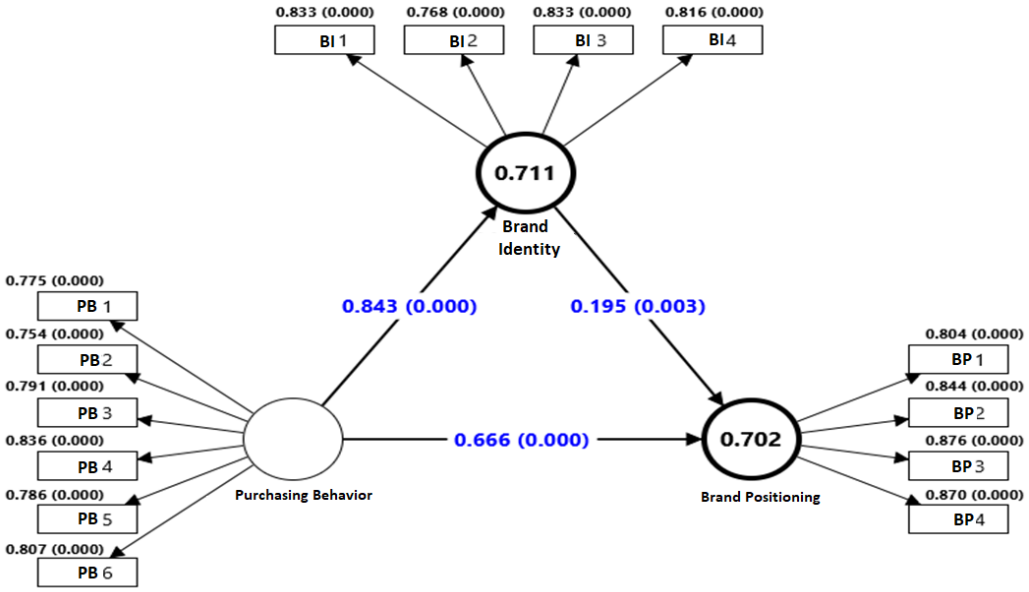
Figure 1 presents the analysis of the structural model, highlighting the coefficients of determination (R^2) and the path coefficients (β). Brand identity ($R^2 = 0.711$) indicates that 71.1% of its variance is explained by purchasing behavior, demonstrating considerable explanatory capacity of the model. Meanwhile, brand positioning ($R^2 = 0.702$) reveals that 70.2% of its variance is jointly explained by purchasing behavior and brand identity.

The analysis of direct relationships shows that:

- Purchasing behavior is significantly related to brand identity ($\beta = 0.843$; $p < 0.001$).
- Purchasing behavior also influences brand positioning ($\beta = 0.666$; $p < 0.001$).
- Brand identity maintains a positive and significant relationship with brand positioning ($\beta = 0.195$; $p < 0.05$).

Consequently, the model exhibits a high overall explanatory capacity, with R^2 values > 0.70 for the endogenous variables and statistically significant relationships ($p < 0.05$), demonstrating its empirical robustness.

Figure 1
Evaluation of the structural model



Source. Smart PLS SEM

Table 4 presents the tested hypotheses, all accepted with very high significance levels ($p < 0.01$). The relationship between purchasing behavior and brand identity (H1) is the strongest, with a correlation of 0.843 and a very large effect size ($f^2 = 2.464$). The direct relationship between purchasing behavior and brand positioning (H2) is also significant, with a moderate effect ($f^2 = 0.430$). Furthermore, brand identity significantly influences brand positioning (H3), while the indirect effect of purchasing behavior on positioning, mediated by brand identity (H4), is also significant. These results confirm that brand identity acts as a key mediator between purchasing behavior and brand positioning, enhancing consumer perception of the brand.

Table 4
Analysis of the structural model (Hypothesis testing)

No.	Hypothesis	Correlation	*t*	*p*	IC	Result	f^2
H1	PB -> BI	0.843	42.856	0.000	[0.803, 0.879]	Accepted	2.464
H2	PB -> BP	0.666	10.726	0.000	[0.546, 0.791]	Accepted	0.430
H3	BI -> BP	0.195	2.933	0.003	[0.060, 0.321]	Accepted	0.037
H4	PB -> BI -> BP	0.165	2.920	0.004	[0.051, 0.273]	Accepted	0.179

Source. Smart PLS SEM

Finally, Table 5 presents the evaluation of the predictive model, interpreted through the SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual), whose value (0.066 < 0.08) indicates a good overall fit of the model. The d_ULS and d_G indicators also support the structural adequacy of the model. Similarly, the comparative fit index NFI (0.842) confirms a satisfactory level of fit. Positive predictive Q^2 values (0.7) suggest a strong predictive capacity for the external latent variables, with moderate errors (RMSE and MAE). In summary, the model demonstrates statistical and predictive robustness, validating its usefulness for understanding the influence of brand identity on market positioning, especially within the Generation Z segment.

Table 5
Model fit indices
Source. Smart PLS SEM

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model	PLSpredict	Q^2 predict	RMSE	MAE
SRMR	0,066	0,066	Brand identity	0,710	0,543	0,390
d_ULS	0,453	0,453	Brand positioning	0,689	0,562	0,414
d_G	0,268	0,268				
NFI	0,842	0,842				

Discussion

Regarding Hypothesis 1, which posits that purchasing behavior (PB) positively relates to brand identity (BI), the results reveal a strong and statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($\beta = 0.843$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that greater engagement in purchasing decisions strengthens the perception of brand identity. In line with these findings, Bawazir (2024) argues that emotions and cognition are reinforced through continuous and committed contact with the brand, leading to the consolidation of a strong and coherent identity in the market. This result underscores the strategic importance of maintaining a close and authentic relationship with customers, particularly with Generation Z, whose consumption behavior is influenced by genuine experiences and shared values (Nguyen & Dam, 2024; Roy et al., 2022). In this regard, brands must create spaces that promote recurrence and, consequently, loyalty, strengthening the identity that distinguishes them from competitors.

In relation to Hypothesis 2, which proposes that purchasing behavior (PB) positively relates to brand positioning (BP), the significant correlation found ($\beta = 0.666$, $p < 0.001$) supports the idea that informed and consistent purchasing decisions contribute to consolidating a more defined and valued brand image (Saxena, 2025). Repeated purchases based on functional and emotional attributes position the brand as a reference in a saturated market, increasing consumer perception of value and preference. This effect is particularly relevant for brands seeking to connect with Generation Z, a group characterized by its demands and loyalty towards brands that reflect their own values (Petcharat & Leelasantitham, 2021). Therefore, it is fundamental that marketing strategies prioritize post-purchase satisfaction and the creation of memorable experiences to maintain a competitive and sustainable positioning.

Regarding Hypothesis 3, which states that brand identity (BI) positively relates to brand positioning (BP), a positive, albeit moderate, effect is observed ($\beta = 0.195$; $p = 0.003$). This finding aligns with the assertions of Ward et al. (2020), who emphasize the importance of building a clear and coherent identity that facilitates authentic and differentiated positioning. A well-defined brand identity ensures that consumer perception is solid and consistent, allowing positioning to transcend superficial aspects and rest on values, purpose, and personality that resonate with the audience (Roy et al., 2022). However, the lesser strength of this relationship compared to the other hypotheses indicates the need for integrated strategies that simultaneously strengthen identity, consumer experience, and brand communication, especially in complex segments such as Generation Z.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 posits that brand identity (BI) acts as a mediating variable between purchasing behavior (PB) and brand positioning (BP). The results confirm this mediation (β indirect $= 0.165$, $p = 0.004$), indicating that brand identity transforms perceptions derived from the purchasing experience into a solid and differentiated representation (Fernández-Cavia, 2019). This highlights the necessity for brands not only to promote purchases but also to maintain a coherent and resonant identity that enhances perceived value and long-term loyalty. Mediation through brand identity is crucial for building deep positioning, especially among young consumers who value authenticity and coherence with their own principles (Nguyen & Dam, 2024).

Overall, this study delves into the complex interaction between purchasing behavior, identity, and brand positioning, with particular attention to Generation Z, a segment characterized by its high demands, digital competence, and differentiated values. From a theoretical perspective, the results reaffirm the centrality of purchasing behavior as a fundamental driver that not only propels transactions but also reinforces brand identification. This connection underscores the multidimensional nature of brand identity as an emotional and symbolic construct, shaped by the ongoing consumer experience, as highlighted by Bawazir (2024) and Nguyen and Dam (2024).

Conclusions

Brand identity is not a static element but a dynamic process that emerges and is sustained through the everyday re-experience of the user. In this regard, the relationship between purchasing behavior and brand

positioning demonstrates that the repetition of successful consumption decisions generates both social and functional validation, consolidating the strategic position of the brand in today's saturated markets. Thus, it is concluded that transcending mere customer acquisition is essential for ensuring the brand's survival and relevance. This finding emphasizes the need to delight and retain consumers rather than merely attract them, an aspect that is especially relevant for Generation Z, who value authenticity and coherence above all other attributes. Therefore, positioning should not be understood solely as the external perception of an attribute but as the result of a complex process of interaction among personal, collective, and situational perceptions.

Moreover, although more moderate, the positive relationship between brand identity and brand positioning underscores the importance of having a clear, coherent identity that is communicated effectively. Otherwise, the prevailing image may be perceived as superficial and disconnected from the consumer. For brands aspiring to endure, this bidirectional interaction is crucial in an environment where traditional strategies have lost effectiveness against an informed, critical, and participative audience. Herein lies one of the most significant contributions of this study: it has evidenced the mediating role of brand identity in the relationship between purchasing behavior and positioning. This mediation implies that marketing efforts should not be solely directed at promoting purchases but at building a solid, coherent, and resonant identity, so that each consumption experience reinforces the emotional and symbolic connection between the consumer and the brand.

In terms of recommendations, it is suggested that future research adopt longitudinal approaches that capture the evolution and causality of these constructs in contexts of rapid technological and social transformation. Additionally, incorporating additional moderating or mediating variables—such as the role of micro-influencers, perceptions of corporate social responsibility, or the digital identity of consumers—would enrich the understanding of the mechanisms underlying loyalty and preference towards brands among emerging generations.

Finally, this research not only reaffirms the strategic role of the analyzed variables in brand success management but also invites professionals and academics to consider these relationships as an interconnected system, whose synergies enhance competitiveness and relevance in a marketing environment that demands authenticity, coherence, and sustained commitment.

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