

## **THE INFLUENCE OF MEME MARKETING ON PURCHASE DECISION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT**

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**Abstract:** *The growth of digital media has transformed marketing strategies, with Generation Z recognized as a key segment due to their active use of TikTok and preference for creative visual content. In this context, Netflix adopts meme marketing on TikTok to capture attention and encourage interaction. However, previous studies show inconsistent findings regarding the effect of meme marketing on consumer behavior, often highlighting the role of consumer engagement. This study examined whether meme marketing influences purchase decisions among Gen Z in Solo Raya, with consumer engagement acting as a mediating factor. Data were obtained from 150 respondents aged 18–28 who had interacted with Netflix's meme content on TikTok. Using purposive sampling, the data were analyzed with SEM-PLS version 3.0. Results indicate that meme marketing has a positive and significant impact on purchase decisions, with consumer engagement playing a mediating role.*

**Keywords:** Meme Marketing, Consumer Engagement, Purchase Decision

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### **1. Introduction**

Rapid advancements in technology and the internet have profoundly reshaped digital business strategies across industries. In the modern marketing landscape, social media platforms have emerged as key marketing communication channels that enable brands to reach and interact directly with consumers. Among these platforms, TikTok stands out as one of the most influential particularly for Generation Z owing to its highly engaging short-form video content and massive audience reach. According to Datareportal (Kemp, 2025), the number of TikTok users in Indonesia reached 108 million at the beginning of 2025, with its advertising potential covering 53.5% of adults aged 18 and above. Concurrently, Media Partners Asia (MPA) identified Indonesia as the largest over-the-top (OTT) service market in Southeast Asia, where Netflix continues to hold a dominant position despite competition from Disney+ Hotstar and Vidio (Ramachandran, 2025). These trends highlight the pivotal role of social media especially TikTok in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors toward digital streaming services.

One of the widely adopted digital marketing strategies in Indonesia is meme marketing. Netflix, for instance, frequently utilizes meme formats on TikTok by showcasing short clips from movies or series combined with youth-oriented popular language. Such content is light, entertaining, and easily shareable, effectively driving interactions in the form of comments, likes, and shares. The high level of audience response serves as an indicator of increased consumer engagement, which ultimately influences purchase or subscription decisions for Netflix services.

Meme marketing is a creative and modern digital marketing strategy that involves the strategic use of memes in the form of images, videos, or humorous texts to capture attention and build emotional connections with audiences. By leveraging the popularity of meme culture in marketing campaigns, companies can enhance brand awareness and establish a more authentic and approachable brand image (Sharma, 2025). However, the use of meme marketing also

carries inherent risks. While humor can foster emotional closeness, it may also provoke controversy when addressing sensitive issues such as culture, religion, gender, or politics. Therefore, brands must understand the cultural context of their target audiences and ensure that the shared content aligns with the brand's values and identity. By embracing the power of TikTok-based memes, companies can strengthen their presence in the minds and hearts of Indonesian consumers (Rokhman, 2024).

An effective marketing strategy does not only focus on conveying product information but also on creating emotional and interactive engagement with consumers that can influence their purchasing decisions. The fundamental objective of any organization is to influence consumer purchasing behavior in a natural and strategic manner, transforming potential prospects into actual customers (Duyen et al., 2025). Within this framework, meme marketing functions as a vital approach to foster consumer engagement through creative and authentic interactions that ultimately shape purchase decisions. The dynamic interplay among meme-based marketing, consumer engagement, and purchase behavior therefore constitutes an important field that deserves further scholarly examination (Rathi & Jain, 2024).

However, real-world findings show that results are not always consistent. Not all meme marketing initiatives conducted by OTT platforms such as Netflix have succeeded in increasing purchase decisions. Some meme content has received negative responses due to being perceived as irrelevant or excessive, thus failing to generate the expected consumer engagement. Conversely, simple and contextually relevant memes have been found to create virality and drive purchase increases. This situation underscores the pivotal role of consumer engagement as an intermediary factor connecting the impact of meme marketing to purchase decisions, especially within the context of Netflix's TikTok content directed toward Generation Z audiences in the Solo Raya region (Ariefah et al., 2023).

Prior research has yielded divergent outcomes concerning the effect of meme marketing on consumer behavior. According to Rolando (2024) and Kumar et al. (2024), meme-based marketing plays a vital role in fostering emotional connections between brands and consumers through the use of humor, cultural resonance, and creative visual expression. This aligns with the view that contextually packaged meme content can enhance consumer engagement and indirectly drive purchasing decisions. Similarly Bowo & Marthalia (2024) emphasized that humor and interactivity in memes foster emotional satisfaction and impulsive buying among Generation Z. Rathi & Jain (2024) revealed that meme marketing positively affects purchase intention, both directly and indirectly through consumer engagement as a mediating variable. Pandey (2024) further added that elements such as humor, creativity, and brand recall within meme marketing significantly contribute to consumer engagement. On the other hand, Dewi Oktavia Putri et al. (2022) demonstrated that higher levels of consumer engagement lead to a greater likelihood of actual purchasing decisions.

However, several studies have presented contrasting findings. (Meer et al., 2022) revealed that the impact of meme marketing on purchasing behavior is not always significant, since its effectiveness is contingent upon contextual conditions and how consumers perceive the value of the content or brand. Similarly (Ashima et al., 2025) explained that excessive or irrelevant humor can reduce brand perception and audience engagement. In line with this, (Dharmawan & Linando, 2025) revealed that meme marketing does not always create meaningful consumer engagement, particularly when the content is perceived as inauthentic or merely disguised advertising. Supporting these findings, (Ariefah et al., 2023) examined the official Instagram account of Netflix Indonesia (@netflixid) and found that, while meme attractiveness and

informative content jointly influenced purchase decisions, only the informative content had a significant partial effect.

Drawing from these findings, there remains a research gap concerning the extent to which meme marketing affects purchase decisions, particularly when consumer engagement functions as a mediating variable. The majority of existing studies have concentrated on global contexts and platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, whereas investigations in the Indonesian setting especially among Generation Z users who interact with Netflix's OTT content on TikTok are still limited. Consequently, the present study seeks to address this gap by examining how meme marketing influences purchase decisions through consumer engagement as a mediating construct. The main objective of this research is to analyze the relationship between meme marketing and purchase decisions, with consumer engagement serving as an intermediary factor among Generation Z users in the Solo Raya region. From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to expanding the body of knowledge in digital marketing and consumer behavior. From a practical perspective, it offers actionable insights for OTT companies, such as Netflix, in developing more relevant, creative, and effective meme marketing strategies on TikTok.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) Theory**

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model, developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), theory posits that external environmental stimuli shape an individual's internal psychological conditions, which in turn trigger observable behavioral outcomes. This theory has been widely applied in digital marketing contexts to understand consumer engagement and loyalty. In this study, the stimulus (S) refers to the visual and textual messages delivered through meme marketing content that capture attention and evoke emotional reactions. The organism (O) represents consumers' internal responses in the form of engagement covering cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of interaction with the content. Finally, the response (R) manifests as a behavioral outcome, namely the purchase decision toward OTT services like Netflix. Hence, the S-O-R framework is considered relevant for explaining how meme marketing influences purchase decisions through consumer engagement as a mediating mechanism (Nasution et al., 2024).

### **Meme Marketing**

According to Rath & Jain, (2024) meme marketing is defined as the use of memes by brands to entertain, inform, and engage consumers, aiming to enhance brand visibility and influence purchasing behavior. Kumar et al., (2024), noted that meme marketing effectively strengthens brand recall and emotional connection due to its lighthearted, shareable, and culturally relevant nature. Similarly, Rath & Jain, (2024) demonstrated that meme marketing exerts a positive influence on purchase intention, both directly and indirectly, with consumer engagement serving as a mediating factor. In contrast, Ashima et al. (2025) observed that humor that is excessive or lacks contextual appropriateness may diminish brand perception and reduce audience engagement. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of meme marketing largely depends on how well the message aligns with the characteristics and preferences of the target audience.

H1: Meme marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions.

H2: Meme marketing has a positive and significant effect on consumer engagement.

### Consumer Engagement

Malodia et al. (2022), describe consumer engagement in social media as active participation where consumers like, comment, share, or even create content related to a brand. Kwee & Aruan (2024) define consumer engagement as buyer behavior toward a brand beyond the act of purchase, driven by intrinsic motivation. Pandey (2024), found that humor and visual creativity in meme marketing stimulate emotional involvement and increase user participation on social media platforms. Similarly, Dewi Oktavia Putri et al. (2022) proved that consumer engagement positively influences purchase decisions where higher engagement levels increase the likelihood of actual purchasing behavior. Conversely, Dharmawan & Linando (2025) found that consumer engagement is not always meaningful, especially when the content is perceived as inauthentic or overly promotional.

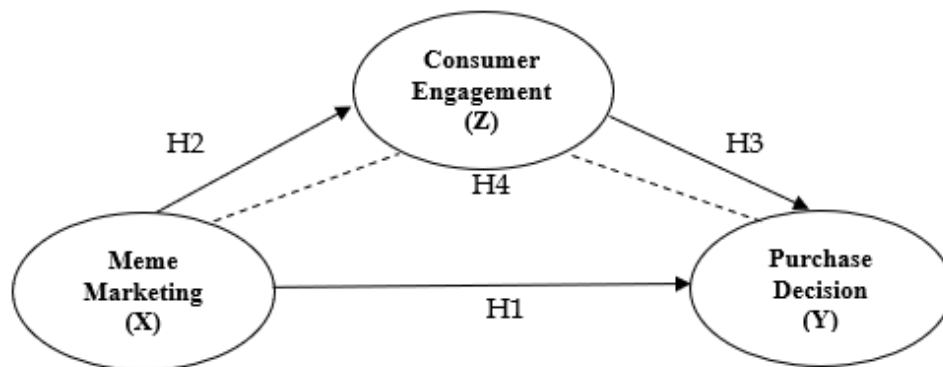
H3: Consumer engagement has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions.

### Purchase Decision

According to Meme and Byre (2020), the purchase decision represents a series of consumer behaviors aimed at fulfilling individual needs and wants, which include the stages of recognizing a problem, seeking information, evaluating alternatives, making a purchase, and engaging in post-purchase actions. Rathi and Jain (2024) emphasized that consumer engagement acts as a key mediator linking meme marketing and purchase decisions, as consumers tend to make purchases after feeling emotionally and interactively engaged with meme content. Supporting this, Hakro et al. (2023) found that social media strategies that foster consumer engagement strengthen the relationship between digital marketing stimuli and purchasing decisions.

H4: Consumer engagement positively and significantly mediates the relationship between meme marketing and purchase decisions.

Based on the hypotheses described above, the researcher has developed the following conceptual framework:



Source: Author, 2025

**Figure 1. Research Framework**

## 3. Method

### Data Collection Technique

This study employed a quantitative research approach using an online survey method. Data were collected through the distribution of a structured questionnaire to Generation Z TikTok users residing in the Solo Raya region (which includes Surakarta, Boyolali, Sukoharjo, Karanganyar, Wonogiri, Sragen, and Klaten) who had been exposed to Netflix's meme marketing content on TikTok. The research instrument consisted of a closed-ended

questionnaire with statements measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to (5) Strongly Agree.

### Operational Definitions of Variables

This study used Meme Marketing (X) as the independent variable, Purchase Decision (Y) as the dependent variable, and Consumer Engagement (Z) as the mediating variable.

**Table 1. Operational Definitions of Variables**

| Variable            | Definition & Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Question Items                                              |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Meme Marketing      | <p>Meme marketing is defined as the use of memes by brands to entertain, inform, and engage audiences, aiming to enhance brand visibility and influence consumer behavior. (Rathi &amp; Jain, 2024)</p> <p>Indicators::</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Entertainment</li> <li>2. Interaction</li> <li>3. Trend or Relevance,</li> <li>4. Informativeness</li> <li>5. Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM).</li> </ol> <p>(Rathi &amp; Jain, 2024)</p>                                                | <p>MM 1</p> <p>MM 2</p> <p>MM 3</p> <p>MM 4</p> <p>MM 5</p> |
| Consumer Engagement | <p>In the context of social media, consumer engagement refers to the active participation of consumers who interact with brand-related content through actions such as liking, commenting, sharing, or even creating user-generated content associated with the brand.(Malodia et al., 2022).</p> <p>Indikator:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enthusiams</li> <li>2. Attentions</li> <li>3. Absorptions</li> <li>4. Interaction</li> <li>5. Identification.</li> </ol> <p>(So et al., 2014)</p> | <p>CE 1</p> <p>CE 2</p> <p>CE 3</p> <p>CE 4</p> <p>CE 5</p> |
| Purchase Decision   | <p>The purchase decision refers to a behavioral sequence through which consumers select products that meet their needs and preferences to attain satisfaction, encompassing stages such as problem identification, information seeking, alternative evaluation, purchase execution, and post-purchase assessment (Meme &amp; Byre, 2020)</p>                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>PD 1</p> <p>PD 2</p> <p>PD 3</p> <p>PD 4</p>             |

| Variable | Definition & Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Question Items |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
|          | Indikator :<br>According to Kotler and Keller, the indicators of a purchase decision include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Confidence in a product</li> <li>2. Habitual purchasing behavior</li> <li>3. Providing recommendations to others</li> <li>4. Repurchase intention</li> </ol> (Lystia et al., 2022) |                |

Source: Author, 2025

### Sample Collection Techniques

This study utilized a non-probability sampling technique, applying the purposive sampling method to select participants who met specific criteria. The inclusion criteria required respondents to be 18–28 years old, active users of TikTok, residents of the Solo Raya region, and individuals who had engaged with Netflix’s meme marketing content whether through likes, comments, or shares. The sample size determination followed the recommendation of Hair et al. (2019), which suggests a minimum of ten respondents for each indicator. With a total of 14 indicators, the minimum sample size was 140 respondents. Nevertheless, the researcher included 150 participants to strengthen the validity and reliability of the analytical results.

### Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis employed Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM–PLS) using SmartPLS 3.0 software. The analytical process was carried out in two stages: first, the measurement model (outer model) was evaluated to test construct validity and reliability; second, the structural model (inner model) was assessed to analyze the hypothesized causal relationships among variables.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### Data Analysis

As shown in Table 2, most respondents were female (66.7%), and the largest age group was those aged 21–24 years (48%). Regarding domicile, the highest proportion of respondents (16%) resided in Wonogiri Regency. Furthermore, out of 150 participants, 62% indicated that they used TikTok every day, reflecting a high level of platform engagement among Generation Z users.

**Tabel 2. Karakteristik Responden**

| Category    | Alternative Response | Frequency (N=150) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Gender      | Female               | 100               | 66,7 %         |
|             | Male                 | 50                | 33,3 %         |
| Age (Years) | 18-20 years          | 42                | 28%            |
|             | 21-24 years          | 72                | 48%            |
|             | 25-28 years          | 36                | 24%            |

| Category                  | Alternative<br>Respondense | Frequency<br>(N=150) | Percentage<br>(%) |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Domisili                  | Kota Surakarta             | 18                   | 12%               |
|                           | Boyolali                   | 22                   | 14,7%             |
|                           | Sukoharjo                  | 21                   | 14%               |
|                           | Karanganyar                | 21                   | 14%               |
|                           | Sragen                     | 22                   | 14,7%             |
|                           | Klaten                     | 22                   | 14,7%             |
|                           | Wonogiri                   | 24                   | 16%               |
| TikTok Usage<br>Frequency | Every day                  | 93                   | 62%               |
|                           | Several times a<br>week    | 43                   | 28,7%             |
|                           | Rarely                     | 14                   | 9,3%              |

Source: Author (2025)

## Outer Model

### Validity Test

Convergent validity was evaluated using factor loading values. The findings indicate that each construct with reflective indicators achieved a factor loading greater than 0.70, suggesting that all indicators are considered valid and appropriately represent their respective constructs.

**Tabel 3. Loading Factor and AVE**

| Variabel                   | Indikator | Faktor<br>Pemuatan | AVE   | Keadaan |
|----------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-------|---------|
| Meme Marketing<br>(X)      | X1        | 0.821              | 0.681 | Sah     |
|                            | X2        | 0.851              |       | Sah     |
|                            | X3        | 0.899              |       | Sah     |
|                            | X4        | 0.841              |       | Sah     |
|                            | X5        | 0.703              |       |         |
| Consumer<br>Engagement (Z) | Z1        | 0.913              | 0.679 | Sah     |
|                            | Z2        | 0.878              |       | Sah     |
|                            | Z3        | 0.739              |       | Sah     |
|                            | Z4        | 0.745              |       |         |
|                            | Z5        | 0.831              |       |         |
| Purchase<br>Decision (Y)   | Y1        | 0.924              | 0.710 | Sah     |
|                            | Y2        | 0.797              |       | Sah     |
|                            | Y3        | 0.714              |       | Sah     |
|                            | Y4        | 0.916              |       | Sah     |

Source: Author (2025)

According to the established criteria, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value must exceed 0.50 as an additional measure of convergent validity alongside factor loadings. Based on the table, all indicators surpassed this threshold, indicating that they can be considered valid and capable of accurately representing their respective constructs.

### Reliability Test

The reliability test was conducted to ensure that the measurement instrument consistently and accurately reflects the constructs being measured. An instrument is considered reliable when the Composite Reliability (CR) value exceeds 0.70 and the Cronbach's Alpha value is greater than 0.60 across all constructs.

**Tabel 4. Hasil Reliability Test**

| Variables               | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability |
|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Meme Marketing (X)      | 0.881            | 0.914                 |
| Consumer Engagement (Z) | 0.880            | 0.913                 |
| Purchase Decision (Y)   | 0.859            | 0.906                 |

Source: Author (2025)

The results of the reliability assessment indicate that all variables met the required standards, with reliability values exceeding 0.70, demonstrating a high level of internal consistency. In addition, each construct achieved a Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.60, further confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model.

### Inner Model

The structural model (inner model) assessment was conducted to evaluate the model's consistency and predictive accuracy. In PLS analysis, model fit and explanatory power are assessed using the R-Square ( $R^2$ ) value and the predictive relevance measure (Q-Square or  $Q^2$ ), which together indicate the model's capability to explain and predict endogenous variables.

**Tabel 5. Hasil Tes R2 dan Q2**

| Variables               | R2    | Q2    |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|
| Consumer Engagement (Z) | 0.426 | 0.283 |
| Purchase Decision (Y)   | 0.549 | 0.373 |

Source: Author (2025)

The  $R^2$  values presented in the table above indicate that consumer engagement explains 54.9% of the variance in purchase decisions, while the remaining percentage is influenced by other factors not included in the model. The  $Q^2$  values show that both consumer engagement and purchase decision variables have values greater than zero, demonstrating that the model possesses predictive relevance and a satisfactory level of explanatory power.

### Hypothesis Testing

The results of the hypothesis testing reveal that the t-values are greater than 1.96 and the p-values are less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance. Accordingly, all proposed hypotheses are supported, confirming that the tested variables exhibit positive and significant relationships with one another.

**Tabel 6. Hypothesis Test**

| Hypothes | Effects | Original<br>Sample | T Statistis | P Value | Statemet    |
|----------|---------|--------------------|-------------|---------|-------------|
| 1        | X→Z     | 0,652              | 10,846      | 0,00    | Significant |
| 2        | X→Y     | 0,366              | 3,811       | 0,00    | Significant |
| 3        | Z→Y     | 0,448              | 4,782       | 0,00    | Significant |
| 4        | X→Z→Y   | 0,293              | 4,046       | 0,00    | Significant |

Source: Author (2025)

## Discussion

### The Influence of Meme Marketing on Consumer Engagement

The findings of this study reveal that meme marketing has a positive and significant effect on consumer engagement, as indicated by a t-statistic value of 10.846 and a p-value of 0.000. This result demonstrates that the higher the quality and relevance of meme content presented by Netflix on TikTok, the greater the level of consumer engagement among Generation Z users in the Solo Raya region. These findings are consistent with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theory proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), which suggests that stimuli in the form of humorous and contextually relevant visual content (meme marketing) elicit psychological responses such as emotional involvement (organism) and active user interaction (response). The results are also supported by Rath and Jain (2024) and Kumar et al. (2024), who found that meme marketing effectively enhances consumer engagement through humor, visual creativity, and cultural relevance. Accordingly, Netflix’s meme marketing strategy has proven effective in fostering strong emotional and participatory connections with digital audiences.

### The Influence of Meme Marketing on Purchase Decisions

The results also indicate that meme marketing has a positive and significant impact on purchase decisions, with a t-statistic of 3.811 and a p-value of 0.000. This suggests that engaging and culturally relevant meme content successfully drives consumer interest and purchasing decisions toward Netflix’s streaming services. This finding aligns with the studies of Pandey (2024) and Bowo & Marthalia (2024), which stated that elements of humor and creativity in meme marketing help shape positive brand perceptions and influence purchase behavior. However, this result also complements the findings of Ashima et al. (2025), who noted that excessive humor can reduce brand perception and campaign effectiveness. Therefore, maintaining a balance between entertainment and message relevance is essential for ensuring the effectiveness of meme marketing in influencing purchase decisions.

### The Influence of Consumer Engagement on Purchase Decisions

The hypothesis testing results show that consumer engagement positively and significantly affects purchase decisions, with a t-statistic of 4.782 and a p-value of 0.000. This means that the higher the level of consumer engagement—reflected through likes, comments, and other forms of interaction—the greater the likelihood that consumers will make a purchase or subscribe to Netflix’s services. This finding is consistent with the studies of Dewi Oktavia Putri et al. (2022) and Hakro et al. (2023), which demonstrated that consumer engagement plays a crucial role in stimulating actual purchase behavior. Within the context of Generation Z, digital engagement holds significant importance since this group is known for being responsive to authentic and interactive content on social media platforms.

## The Mediating Role of Consumer Engagement Between Meme Marketing and Purchase Decisions

The findings also indicate that consumer engagement serves as a significant mediating variable between meme marketing and purchase decisions, as evidenced by a t-statistic of 4.046 and a p-value of 0.000. This means that the influence of meme marketing on purchase decisions occurs not only directly but also indirectly through increased consumer engagement. This result supports the study of Rathi and Jain (2024), who concluded that consumer engagement acts as the primary bridge linking engaging digital campaigns with actual purchase behavior. Hence, the effectiveness of meme marketing should not be measured solely by its virality but also by its ability to evoke emotional involvement that drives tangible consumer actions such as purchasing or subscribing to streaming services.

## 5. Conclusions

This study concludes that meme marketing exerts a positive and significant influence on both consumer engagement and purchase decisions, and that consumer engagement significantly mediates this relationship. This implies that the success of Netflix's meme marketing strategy on TikTok depends not only on humor or creativity but also on its ability to foster emotional and interactive engagement among Generation Z audiences. These findings reinforce the S-O-R theory, wherein the stimulus in the form of engaging and relevant meme content elicits a psychological reaction (organism) in the form of engagement, which ultimately leads to a behavioral response (purchase decision). From a theoretical perspective, this study enhances the understanding of the mediating role of consumer engagement in bridging the relationship between digital marketing strategies and purchase behavior. From a practical standpoint, the findings offer valuable insights for OTT companies such as Netflix to continuously develop authentic, culturally relevant, and participatory meme marketing campaigns that resonate with their target audiences. Future research is recommended to expand the scope to other social media platforms such as Instagram or X (formerly Twitter) and to include moderating variables such as brand trust or perceived enjoyment to enrich the conceptual model of meme marketing's influence on digital consumer behavior.

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