

EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF DIGITAL RATINGS ON GEN Z PURCHASE INTENTION IN THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED EASE OF USE

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Abstract

Digital platforms have transformed the way consumers evaluate products and services, making digital ratings a critical source of information that shapes purchasing decisions. Despite the growing importance of online ratings, limited research has examined their effects on Gen Z purchase intention in the airline industry, particularly through the mediating role of perceived ease of use. This study aims to examine the effect of digital ratings on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers and to assess the mediating role of perceived ease of use. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted involving 120 respondents who had previously searched for airline information through digital platforms. Data was analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4. The results indicate that digital ratings significantly and positively influence both perceived ease of use and purchase intention. Perceived ease of use has a significant positive effect on purchase intention and mediates the relationship between digital ratings and purchase intention. These findings suggest that digital ratings facilitate consumers' information processing activities and increase their willingness to purchase airline services. This study extends theory of TAM by highlighting the role of digital ratings in shaping consumer behavior within the airline industry. The findings provide insights for airline companies seeking to enhance customer engagement and purchase intention through effective management of digital rating systems and online platforms.

Keywords: Digital Ratings, Purchase Intention, Perceived Ease of Use, Gen Z, Airline Industry

INTRODUCTION

Development of Digital technology has fundamentally transformed consumer decision-making processes across various industries, including in the airline industry. The existence of online platforms, mobile applications, travel booking websites, and social media channels has enabled consumers to access amounts of information before making purchasing decisions (Selem et al., 2023). Digital ratings have emerged as one of the most influential factors affecting consumer behavior. Digital ratings represented by numerical scores, star ratings, or aggregated customer evaluations that provide consumers with indicators of product or service quality based on the experiences of previous users (Nazifi et al., 2022). Digital ratings are also able to shape consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. Digital ratings in airline industry play a particularly critical role due to the intangible nature of airline services. Unlike physical products, airline services cannot be evaluated before consumption. Evaluation can be done after services gained by customers. Potential customers often rely on information provided by previous passengers to reduce uncertainty and perceived risk. Online travel agencies, airline websites, and review platforms such as TripAdvisor, Google Reviews provide rating systems that allow consumers to assess service quality, comfort, safety, and customer satisfaction.

Digital ratings serve as informational cues that help consumers compare airlines and make purchasing decisions (Wongyai et al., 2024). Gen Z, generally defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, represents the first generation to grow up entirely within a digital environment. They were characterized by levels of digital literacy, extensive internet usage, and strong dependence on online information when making purchasing decisions (Ruangkanjanases et al., 2022). Gen Z consumers literally trust reviews, ratings, and social media recommendations before purchasing products or services and digital ratings are one of the crucial determinants of their decision making. Gen z gains greater purchasing power and becomes a dominant consumer segment in the travel market, understanding the factors influencing their purchase intention become essential for airline companies.

Purchase intention refers to an individual's willingness to purchase a product or service in the future and recognized as a strong predictor of actual purchasing behavior (Palmieri et al., 2023). Identifying the mechanisms through which digital ratings influence purchase intention can therefore provide valuable insights for airline managers seeking to enhance customer acquisition and competitiveness in digital marketplace. The airline industry must be able to attract and retain Gen Z customers. Digital ratings positively influence consumer purchase intention. Previous literature focused on direct relationships between online ratings and consumer behavioral intentions, often overlooking the role of technology related perceptions that may explain how digital ratings affect purchasing decisions (Ahn & Lee, 2024). There is a need to explore mediating variables that can provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in digital environments. Perceived ease of use as mediator in this research. Derived from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), perceived ease of use refers to the degree to which an individual believes that using a particular system, technology, or platform requires minimal effort (Ly & Ly, 2023). Consumers may interact with airline websites, mobile applications, booking platforms, and online review systems. The ease with which consumers can access, interpret, and utilize digital ratings may significantly influence the effectiveness of these ratings in shaping purchase intentions (Ruswanti et al., 2020).

Perceived ease of use has been identified as determinant of technology adoption and online consumer behavior (Mousa et al., 2020). Consumers perceived digital platforms as easy to use, they absolutely engage with available information, process online reviews efficiently, and develop positive attitudes toward purchasing. Perceived ease of use may function as an important mechanism through which digital ratings translate into stronger purchase intentions. Digital consumers can quickly assess service quality without analyzing lengthy reviews or searching for additional information (Ngo et al., 2023). Digital ratings may enhance consumers' perceptions of platform usability and convenience and finally increase confidence in the purchasing process and strengthen purchase intentions. Despite the growing significance of digital ratings in online consumer behavior, empirical studies examining the mediating role of perceived ease of use remain relatively limited (Habib et al., 2024), particularly within the airline industry. Most previous research has focused on e-commerce, hospitality, and retail sectors, while the airline context has received comparatively less attention. This study specifically examines that Gen Z consumers are still scarce, despite their increasing importance in the global travel market. This gap in the literature highlights the need for further investigation into the factors influencing airline purchase intention among digitally native consumers.

This research seeks to address these research gaps by examining the effect of digital ratings on Gen Z purchase intention in the airline industry while investigating the mediating role of perceived ease of use. By exploring the Technology Acceptance Model, this research offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding consumer decision making in digital airline services. This study contributes to literature in digital marketing and offers practical implications for airline managers and digital platform developers seeking to optimize online customer experiences and enhance conversion rates.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

Digital Ratings

Digital ratings refer to numerical scores or star ratings provided by consumers on digital platforms based on their experiences with a product or service. Digital ratings have become a crucial form of electronic word-of-mouth that helps potential customers assess the quality and reliability of products and services before making purchasing decisions (Gómez-Déniz et al., 2024). Digital ratings provide valuable information regarding service quality, punctuality, safety, customer service, and all consumers travel experience in airline industry. Ruangkanjanases et al., (2022) explain consumers are highly dependent on digital information sources, frequently use digital ratings to reduce uncertainty and evaluate available alternatives, Gen Z focus on this type of consumers. The research done by Agus et al., (2020) found that positive digital ratings can enhance consumer trust and confidence, making them more likely to consider and purchase airline services. Digital ratings serve as an important informational cue that influences consumers' perceptions and behavioral intentions.

Perceived Ease of Use

Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) is a core construct of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Fred Davis (Zaineldeen et al., 2020). It refers to the degree to which an individual believes that using a particular system or obtaining information requires minimal effort. Perceived ease of use reflects consumers' perceptions regarding how easily they can access, understand, and utilize information during the decision-making process. Digital ratings can improve perceived ease of use by evaluations in a simple and accessible format, allowing consumers to quickly compare alternatives without searching for information. According to Ngo et al., (2023) that Gen Z consumers value convenience and efficiency in online environments, higher perceived ease of use can facilitate information processing and improve their overall experience when searching for airline services.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's willingness to purchase a particular product or service in the future (Sobiech-Grabka et al., 2022). Purchasing behavior influenced by various cognitive, emotional, and informational factors. According to Tarkang et al., (2022) that purchase intention in airline industry reflects to consumers' readiness to select and buy airline tickets based on their evaluation of available information and perceived value. Previous studies done by Yang et al., (2020) have demonstrated that consumers are more likely to develop purchase intentions when they perceive information as trustworthy, useful, and easy to understand. Digital ratings play a significant role in shaping purchase intentions because they provide social proof and reduce perceived risk associated with service purchases (Jadil et al., 2022). Consumers will perceive the process of obtaining and evaluating information as easy, they are more likely to develop favorable attitudes and stronger intentions to purchase airline services. Thus, purchase intention serves as the key outcome variable in this study, reflecting the effectiveness of digital ratings and perceived ease of use in influencing consumer decision-making.

HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

Digital ratings have become a critical source of information for digital consumers. Digital ratings represent consumers' evaluations of products or services and are expressed through numerical scores or star-based systems on digital platforms. Consumers tend to rely on online evaluations when making purchase decisions, particularly when direct experience with a product or service is limited. Digital ratings in airline industry provide potential customers with valuable

insights regarding service quality, reliability, safety, and customer satisfaction. Gen Z consumers are familiar with digital technologies and online information sources, frequently consult digital ratings before making purchasing decisions. The research done by Doğan et al., (2022) found positive digital ratings can reduce uncertainty, enhance trust, and increase consumers' confidence in selecting airline services. Digital ratings positively influence consumers' intentions to purchase airline tickets (Ahn & Lee, 2024).

H1: Digital Rating effect Purchase Intention

Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) is a key construct in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and refers to the extent to which individuals believe that using a particular system or information source requires minimal effort. Digital ratings simplify the information search process by providing evaluations from previous customers. Gen Z consumers prefer quick and convenient access to information. Digital ratings can significantly improve the ease of obtaining and processing information related to airline services (Ahn & Lee, 2024). Digital ratings become more transparent and user-friendly, and consumers are likely to perceive the decision-making process as easier and more convenient (Zaineldeen et al., 2020).

H2: Digital Rating effect Perceived Ease of Use

The Technology Acceptance Model suggests that individuals are more likely to adopt and utilize information systems when they perceive them as easy to use. Consumers who experience convenience and simplicity during the information-search and evaluation process are more likely to develop favorable attitudes and purchase intentions. When consumers perceive airline-related information as easy to access, understand, and evaluate, they become more confident in making purchase decisions. Previous studies done by Krishnan & Koshy, (2021); Habib et al., (2024) demonstrated that perceived ease of use positively affects behavioral intentions across various digital environments, including e-commerce, online booking platforms, and travel-related services. Consumers who perceive digital platforms as easy to use are expected to exhibit stronger purchase intentions toward airline services (Galindo-Domínguez & Bezanilla, 2021).

H3: Perceived Ease of Use effect Purchase Intention

Digital ratings can directly influence consumers' purchase intentions, their impact may also occur indirectly through perceived ease of use (Jain, 2020; Winanti & Fernando, 2024). Digital ratings provide organized and readily available information that helps consumers evaluate alternatives more efficiently. The Technology Acceptance Model perceived ease of use serves as an important mechanism that explains how external information such as digital ratings influence behavioral intentions. Perceived ease of use mediates the relationship between digital ratings and purchase intention (Jaiswal et al., 2021) among Gen Z consumers in the airline industry.

H4: Perceived Ease of Use mediates the effect between Digital Rating and Purchase Intention

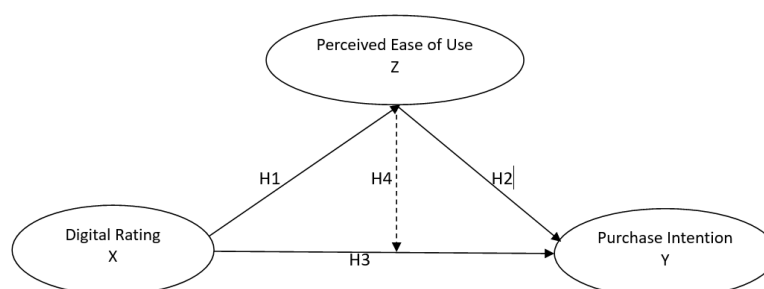


Figure 1. Research Hypothesis.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among Digital Ratings, Perceived Ease of Use, and Purchase Intention

in the airline industry. This study focused on Gen Z consumers who had previously searched for airline-related information through digital platforms such as airline websites, online travel agencies, social media, and review platforms. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who met the criteria of being between 18 to 30 years and having experience using digital platforms to obtain airline information. Data was collected through an online questionnaire distributed via digital channels, resulting in 120 valid responses. All constructs were measured using multiple items adapted from previous studies and assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). Data was analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4. The analysis consisted of two stages that are evaluation of the measurement model and assessment of the structural model. The measurement model was examined through indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity using factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. The structural model was evaluated by assessing path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and mediation effects. The mediating role of Perceived Ease of Use was examined through the significance of the indirect effect between Digital Ratings and Purchase Intention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data for this study were collected through questionnaires distributed to 120 Generation Z respondents who had experience using airline services. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were classified based on gender, age, domicile, education level, occupation, and monthly budget allocated for purchasing airline tickets. The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Respondent Demographic Profile (N = 120)

Criteria	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	56	46.7
Female	64	53.3
Total	120	100
Age		
18–21 years	28	23.3
22–25 years	52	43.3
26–30 years	40	33.4
Total	120	100
Domicile		
Java	72	60
Sumatra	20	16.7
Kalimantan	10	8.3
Sulawesi	12	10
Others	6	5
Total	120	100
Education Level		
High School	38	31.7
Diploma	18	15
Bachelor's Degree	58	48.3
Postgraduate Degree	6	5
Total	120	100
Occupation		
Student	54	45
Private Employee	36	30

Entrepreneur	14	11.7
Civil Servant	6	5
Others	10	8.3
Total	120	100
Monthly Budget for Airline Tickets		
Less than IDR 500,000	20	16.7
IDR 500,000 – 1,000,000	38	31.7
IDR 1,000,001 – 2,000,000	42	35
More than IDR 2,000,000	20	16.6
Total	120	100

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Outer Loading Validity Test

Table 2. Outer Loading Validity Test

	Digital Rating	PEOU	Purchase Intention	PEOU x Digital Rating
DR1	0.782			
DR2	0.881			
DR3	0.859			
DR4	0.843			
PEOU1		0.893		
PEOU2		0.893		
PEOU3		0.897		
PEOU4		0.848		
PI1			0.788	
PI2			0.859	
PI3			0.887	
PI4			0.829	
PEOU x Digital Rating				1

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Based on Table 1, all Digital Rating indicators have loading values above 0.70, indicating that each item adequately represents the Digital Rating construct. DR2 is the most dominant indicator with a loading value of 0.881, suggesting that consumers' perceptions of digital ratings strongly contribute to the formation of this construct. All Purchase Intention indicators also satisfy the convergent validity requirement. The highest loading value is found in PI3 (0.887), indicating that this indicator is the strongest representation of consumers' purchase intention. The loading values of all Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) indicators range from 0.848 to 0.897, demonstrating that the construct is measured very well by all indicators employed in this study. PEOU3 is the most representative indicator with the highest loading value of 0.897.

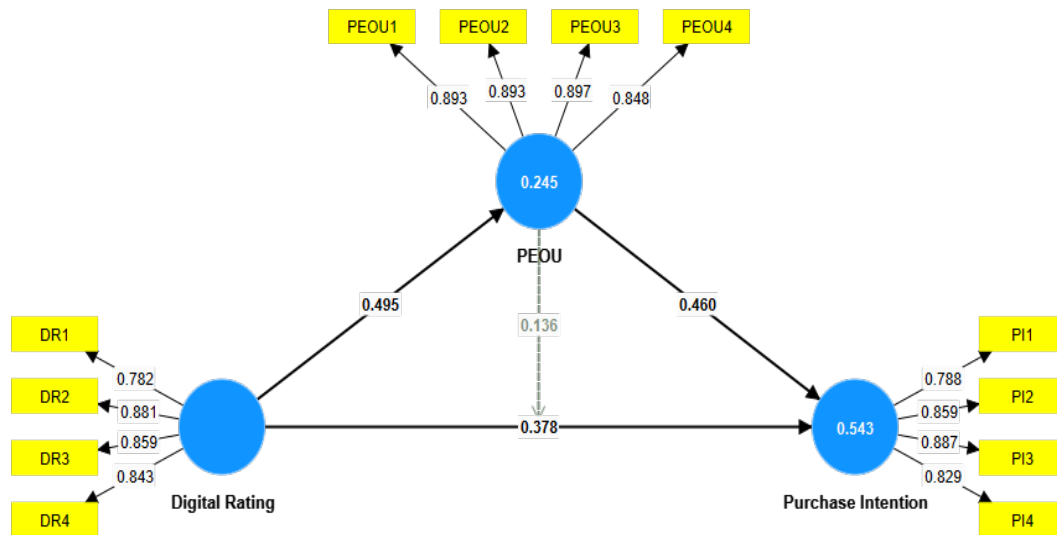


Figure 2. Outer Loading Validity Test

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Reliability Test and AVE

Table 3. Reliability and AVE

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Digital Rating	0.862	0.863	0.907	0.709
PEOU	0.907	0.921	0.934	0.78
Purchase Intention	0.862	0.868	0.906	0.708

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The recommended thresholds are Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70, Composite Reliability > 0.70, and AVE > 0.50. The results indicate that all constructs meet the required criteria for reliability and convergent validity. The Digital Rating construct achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.862 and a Composite Reliability of 0.907, indicating excellent internal consistency. The AVE value of 0.709 suggests that more than 70% of the variance in the indicators is explained by the Digital Rating construct. PEOU demonstrates the highest reliability in the model, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.907 and a Composite Reliability of 0.934. Its AVE value of 0.780 indicates that the construct explains 78% of the variance in its indicators. These findings suggest that Perceived Ease of Use is a highly stable and consistent construct. Purchase Intention recorded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.862 and a Composite Reliability of 0.906, indicating high reliability. Its AVE value of 0.708 confirms excellent measurement quality.

Fornell - Larcker Criterion

Table 4. Fornell - Larcker Criterion

	Digital Rating	PEOU	Purchase Intention
Digital Rating	0.842		
PEOU	0.495	0.883	
Purchase Intention	0.599	0.645	0.841

Source: Data Processed (2026)

The diagonal values (0.842, 0.883, and 0.841) are higher than the correlations among the constructs. This finding indicates that each construct possesses distinct characteristics and captures different aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, it can be concluded that the research model satisfies the requirements of discriminant validity, indicating that there is no overlap among the constructs.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P valu es	Hipot esis
Digital Rating -> Purchase Intention	0.378	0.381	0.069	5.476	0	1
Digital Rating -> PEOU	0.495	0.501	0.085	5.798	0	2
PEOU -> Purchase Intention	0.46	0.458	0.063	7.323	0	3
PEOU x Digital Rating -> Purchase Intention	0.136	0.136	0.046	2.967	0.003	4

Source: Data Processed (2026)

The results reveal that Digital Rating has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention, supporting Hypothesis 1. The path coefficient of 0.378 indicates that higher digital ratings lead to greater consumer purchase intention. The t-statistic value of 5.476 (> 1.96) and p-value < 0.05 confirm the statistical significance of this relationship. Hypothesis 2 is also supported, showing that Digital Rating positively and significantly affects Perceived Ease of Use. The coefficient value of 0.495 indicates a relatively strong influence. This suggests that better digital ratings enhance consumers' perceptions regarding the ease of using a product or digital platform. The t-statistic value of 5.798 (> 1.96) and p-value < 0.05 confirm this significant relationship. Hypothesis 3 demonstrates that Perceived Ease of Use positively and significantly influences Purchase Intention. The coefficient value of 0.460 indicates that ease of use exerts a relatively stronger influence on purchase intention than Digital Rating. The t-statistic value of 7.323 (> 1.96) and p-value < 0.05 further support this finding. For Hypothesis 4, the moderating effect of Perceived Ease of Use on the relationship between Digital Rating and Purchase Intention is positive and significant. The moderation coefficient of 0.136 indicates that PEOU strengthens the influence of Digital Rating on Purchase Intention. The t-statistic value of 2.967 (> 1.96) and p-value < 0.05 confirm the significance of the moderating effect.

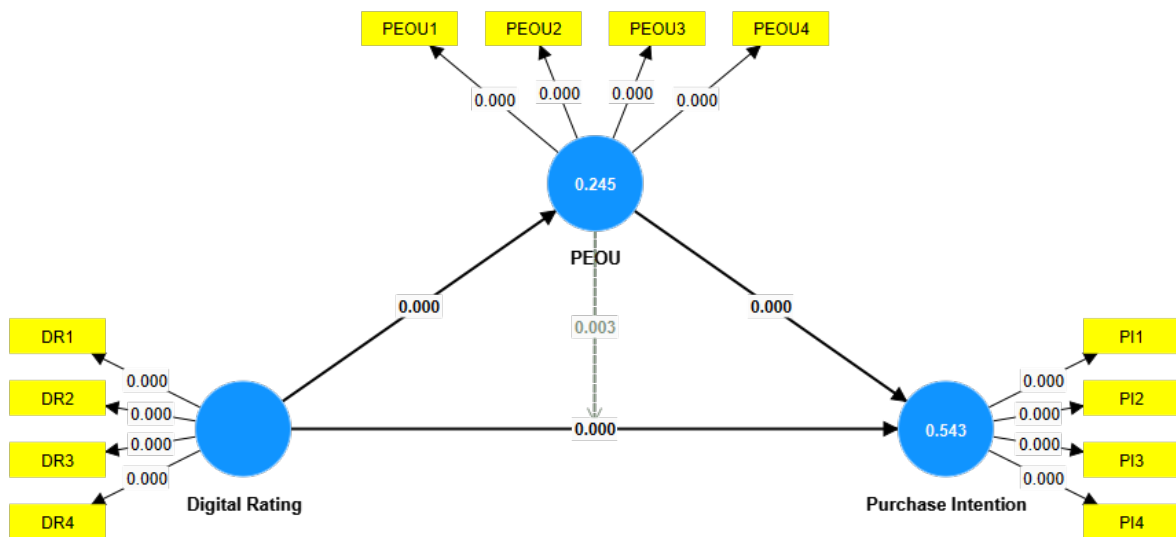


Figure 3. Hypothesis Testing

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Q Square

Table 6. Q Square

	SSO	SSE	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSO)
Digital Rating	480	480	0
PEOU	480	392.791	0.182
Purchase Intention	480	301.939	0.371

Source: Data Processed (2026)

The Q² test was conducted to evaluate the predictive relevance of the model. A Q² value greater than zero indicates that the model possesses predictive capability. The Q² value for PEOU is 0.182, indicating that the model explains approximately 18.2% of the predictive capability for the PEOU construct. This value falls within the moderate predictive relevance category. Purchase Intention demonstrates a Q² value of 0.371, indicating strong predictive relevance. This finding suggests that the combination of Digital Rating, Perceived Ease of Use, and their interaction effectively predicts consumers' Purchase Intention. Overall, the model exhibits satisfactory predictive performance and confirms the importance of Digital Rating and Perceived Ease of Use affecting purchase intention among consumers.

Mediation Test

Table 7. Mediation Test

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Digital Rating -> PEOU -> Purchase Intention	0.228	0.228	0.047	4.805	0

Source: Data Processed (2026)

The mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) acts as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between Digital Ratings and Purchase Intention. The results presented in Table 6 indicate that the indirect effect of Digital Ratings on Purchase Intention through PEOU is positive and statistically significant, with a path coefficient of 0.228, a t-statistic of 4.805, and a p-value of 0.000. Since the t-statistics exceed the threshold value of 1.96

and the p-value is below 0.05, the mediation effect is supported. These findings suggest that favorable digital ratings enhance consumers' perceptions of the ease of accessing and utilizing airline related information, which subsequently increases their intention to purchase airline services. Therefore, Perceived Ease of Use serves as an important mechanism through which Digital Ratings influence Purchase Intention among Generation Z consumers in the airline industry.

The findings reveal that Digital Rating has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention among Generation Z consumers in the airline industry. This result indicates that consumers increasingly rely on online ratings and evaluations when making purchasing decisions. Positive digital ratings serve as a signal of service quality, reliability, and customer satisfaction, thereby reducing uncertainty and increasing consumers' confidence in purchasing airline services. This finding is consistent with signaling theory, which suggests that consumers use external information cues to evaluate products and services before making purchase decisions. The result also supports previous studies that identified digital ratings as an important determinant of online consumer behavior, particularly among digitally native generations who actively seek information through online platforms before making purchases.

The results show that Digital Rating significantly influences Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), while PEOU positively affects Purchase Intention. These findings suggest that PEOU plays an important mediating role in explaining how Digital Ratings influence consumers' purchasing decisions. When airline services receive favorable ratings, consumers tend to perceive the booking platform and service process as easier to understand and use. This positive perception of ease of use enhances their intention to purchase. This result is consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which emphasizes that perceived ease of use is a critical factor influencing users' behavioral intentions. Therefore, the influence of Digital Ratings on Purchase Intention occurs not only directly but also indirectly through consumers' perceptions of ease of use, highlighting the importance of user-friendly digital platforms in strengthening the effectiveness of online ratings in attracting Generation Z consumers.

CONCLUSION

Digital Ratings have a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention among Gen Z consumers in the airline industry. Consumers tend to have a stronger intention to purchase airline services when they perceive digital ratings as favorable and reliable. Digital Ratings significantly influence Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and suggest that positive ratings help consumers perceive airline booking platforms as easier to use. PEOU was found to have a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention and plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between Digital Ratings and Purchase Intention. This finding demonstrates that Digital Ratings not only directly increase consumers' purchase intentions but also indirectly enhances purchase intentions by improving perceptions of ease of use. PEOU serves as an important mechanism through which Digital Ratings influence consumer decision-making. Airline companies should focus on maintaining positive digital ratings by encouraging customer reviews and improving service quality. Airline industry should continuously enhance the usability, simplicity, and convenience of their digital platforms to strengthen consumers' perceptions of ease of use. Future research is encouraged to examine other mediating variables, such as trust, perceived value, or customer satisfaction, and to expand the study to different industries and consumer segments to improve the generalizability of this finding.

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