

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEDONIC AND SYMBOLIC VALUE ON CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AND ONLINE IMPULSIVE BUYING TENDENCY: THE CASE OF GENERATION Z

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Abstract: The phenomenon of impulsive online buying in Indonesia has become an important concern with the increasing use of the internet and e-commerce platforms, especially among Generation Z. Online impulsive buying is an unplanned purchasing action triggered by external stimuli, often driven by the hedonic and symbolic value of the product or service. This research aims to examine the influence of hedonic and symbolic values on customer engagement and the tendency for impulsive online buying, particularly among Generation Z. There were 216 respondents who filled out the online questionnaire. The respondents are individuals who have experience with online impulsive buying activity. The analysis used structural equation modeling partial least squares. The research findings indicate that hedonic and symbolic values have a positive and significant impact on customer engagement. Furthermore, customer engagement was found to have a positive and significant influence on online impulsive buying. The theoretical implications of this research emphasize the importance of a deep understanding of hedonic and symbolic motivations in the context of online consumer behavior. Managerially, these findings can be used by marketers to design more effective marketing strategies emphasizing the hedonic and symbolic values of their products, in order to enhance customer engagement and stimulate impulsive buying.

Keywords: hedonic value, symbolic value, customer engagement, online impulsive buying tendency

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving digital era, consumer behavior has become a primary subject in marketing research. The phenomenon of online shopping has become one of the most prominent aspects in the transformation of consumer behavior. Specifically, Generation Z, which is the demographic group born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, has become a primary focus of research regarding online consumer behavior. This generation has grown up in a highly digitally connected environment, which has had a significant impact on their shopping preferences. (Amos *et al.*, 2014). Generation Z is a cohort that has been immersed in ubiquitous Wifi, cell phones, and mobile internet gaming since their early years (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014).

Understanding the online shopping behavior of Generation Z is important due to the complexity of factors that influence their engagement in online transactions. In this context, hedonic and symbolic values play a crucial role. Hedonic value refers to the sensory and emotional satisfaction derived from purchasing a product or service. (Hussain *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, symbolic value relates to the symbolic meaning or social status associated with a particular product (Cheung *et al.*, 2008). Both play a crucial role in influencing customer engagement in online shopping, especially among Generation Z, who tend to seek experiences and express their identity through online impulsive buying (Rauschnabel & Krey, 2016).

A deeper understanding of the role of hedonic and symbolic values in Generation Z's online shopping behavior is important because of its implications for marketing practices. By understanding the factors influencing customer engagement and the tendency for online impulsive buying among Generation Z, companies can develop more effective marketing strategies to attract and retain customers in an increasingly competitive e-commerce environment (Hajli *et al.*, 2017). Marketing strategies based on a deep understanding of the values desired and pursued by Generation Z in the context of online shopping are more likely to successfully capture their attention and influence their purchasing decisions (Kim & Forsythe, 2007).

However, despite existing research involving hedonic and symbolic values in the context of online shopping, studies focusing on the relationship between these values and customer engagement and online impulsive buying tendencies, particularly among Generation Z, remain limited. Therefore, this research aims to fill this knowledge gap by investigating how hedonic and symbolic values contribute to customer engagement and online impulsive buying tendencies, particularly among Generation Z. Thus, this research is expected to provide a better understanding of Generation Z's online consumer behavior and its implications for online marketing practitioners (Hajli *et al.*, 2017). The objective of this research is to examine how hedonic and symbolic values influence customer engagement and online impulsive buying tendencies, particularly among Generation Z.

LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESES TESTING

Flow Theory

Flow theory was developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and explains the optimal state in which a person is fully immersed in an activity that provides intrinsic satisfaction. Customers will experience an optimal experience where they encounter various events that are enjoyable. Several researchers have described the online flow experience (Do *et al.*, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2022; Obada, 2014) to explain flow theory in the context of digital marketing. Ye and Ching (2023) Using flow theory to explain consumer behavior in live-streaming. Other researchers use the flow theory approach to study customer engagement in live-streaming environments (Kim *et al.*, 2019). Flow theory is characterized by intense enjoyment and deep engagement, which can fluctuate over time, often alternating between feelings of anxiety and boredom, indicating that the flow experience is dynamic. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2022).

Hedonic Value

Hedonic value in the context of consumer behavior refers to the sensory and emotional satisfaction derived from the experience of purchasing or consuming a product or service. (Hussain *et al.*, 2019). This concept highlights the importance of aspects such as pleasure, enjoyment, and personal satisfaction that consumers derive from their interaction with specific

products or services (Babin *et al.*, 1994). In the context of online shopping, hedonic value has proven to be a significant factor influencing consumer behavior, especially among Generation Z, who tend to seek personal experiences and satisfaction in their online purchases (Rauschnabel & Krey, 2016).

Hedonic value refers to the emotional benefits or pleasure that customers derive from using a product or service (Babin *et al.*, 1994). Hedonic value is typically associated with the level of enjoyment obtained by the buyer (Jarvenpaa & Todd, 1997). Sometimes, audiences watching live streaming seek entertainment, emotional connection, and enjoyment from the content being presented. Most online shoppers think that online shopping offers an opportunity to distract themselves from the routines of daily life (Parsons, 2002). When live streaming content offers enjoyable experiences such as humor, excitement, or admiration, it enhances hedonic value. The influence of emotional and non-rational factors is stronger when customers make purchases compared to other methods of acquiring something (Wong *et al.*, 2012). Customers are more likely to actively participate and sustain their interest in live streaming to gain greater enjoyment. Customer engagement involves interaction, participation, and involvement with content or a brand. Hedonic value will certainly impact customer engagement (Żymkowska, 2018).

H1: Hedonic value has a positive and significant impact on customer engagement.

Symbolic Value

Symbolic value emphasizes the symbolic meaning or social status associated with a particular product or brand in the eyes of consumers (Cheung *et al.*, 2008). Consumers often use products or brands as a way to express their personal identity, lifestyle, or affiliation with specific groups (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). In the context of online shopping, symbolic value can play a crucial role in influencing consumer preferences and purchasing decisions, especially among Generation Z, who tend to seek social recognition and identity through online purchases. (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014)

Firat and Venkatesh (1993) Shopping is a communal activity that allows individuals to build symbolic meaning, adhere to social norms, build relationships, and shape their identity and self-esteem. Social considerations have a significant influence on the phenomenon of shopping through social media (De Vries & Carlson, 2014). Many customers make online purchases with the goal of enhancing their self-identity. Consumers want to demonstrate that live streaming offers social and symbolic value by allowing buyers to attach symbolic meanings to themselves, sellers, vendor products, and other customers (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). The products sold are often branded items offered at relatively low prices. Consumers tend to make purchases to obtain these well-known brands. If there is a famous artist who becomes a brand ambassador, it further demonstrates their desire to make a purchase. Consumers will strive to engage with the live streaming platform by providing reviews, feedback, number of likes, and ultimately making purchases (Kim & Park, 2013). In the livestreaming environment, symbolic value can enhance customer engagement (Arisman & Salehudin, 2022).

H2: Symbolic value has a positive and significant influence on customer engagement.

Customer Engagement

Customer engagement is a concept that encompasses interactions, participation, and emotional involvement of consumers with a brand or company (Hollebeek, 2011). This includes various activities such as interacting with the brand on social media, participating in loyalty programs, and providing feedback or product reviews (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). In the context of online shopping, customer engagement has been proven to be a crucial factor influencing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention (Verhagen & Van Dolen, 2011). Generation Z, with their high level of engagement on digital platforms, can be a key target for customer engagement strategies in the context of online shopping (Chan *et al.*, 2014).

Impulsive Buying tendencies

The tendency for impulse buying refers to consumers' inclination to make spontaneous purchase decisions without careful consideration or prior planning (Rook, 1987). Factors such as emotional instability, instant gratification desires, and external stimuli can influence impulsive buying behavior (Verplanken & Sato, 2011). In the context of online shopping, the tendency for

impulse buying can be influenced by factors such as product availability, promotions, and attractive visual displays (Dittmar *et al.*, 2007). Generation Z, who have grown up in an environment filled with digital stimuli, may be vulnerable to impulsive buying behavior online (Rauschnabel & Krey, 2016).

Customer engagement refers to the level of interaction and emotional connection between consumers and a brand (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). This significantly impacts patterns of impulsive buying (Luo *et al.*, 2024). Consumers who have a strong emotional connection with a brand or product are more likely to be influenced by emotional cues included in marketing messages, promotions, or social interactions. This emotional influence can lead to unplanned buying reactions (Zuo & Xiao, 2021) thus causing consumers to make spontaneous purchases driven by temporary desires or urges. Furthermore, consumers who are actively engaged and have a strong emotional attachment to a brand may feel a greater sense of urgency when presented with time-sensitive offers or limited-time promotions, which can lead to a tendency for impulse buying online.

H3: Customer engagement has a positive and significant influence on online compulsive buying tendency

Here is the proposed research model within this study:

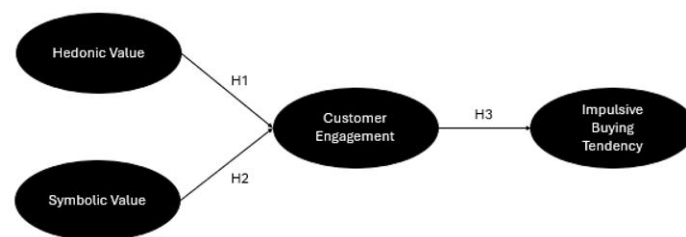


Figure 1. Research Model

METHOD

Sample

This study involves data collection through online questionnaire distribution, conducted between April 20 and April 27, 2024, specifically targeting Generation Z, which comprises individuals born between 1997 and 2012. In the process, a total of 216 respondents voluntarily filled out the online survey and provided responses to all the questions presented. It is emphasized that the data collection process was carried out without any data deletion due to errors or incomplete forms from the respondents.

Through the analysis of the respondents, various demographic and behavioral characteristics were identified, providing a more comprehensive picture related to the subject of this study. Specifically, from the total respondents, it is evident that the percentage of males (51.4%) and females (48.6%) shows a fairly balanced distribution. However, the distribution of respondents' ages indicates that the majority of them (57.9%) fall within the age range of less than 20 years old, with a small percentage spread across the age ranges of 15-17 years old (6%), 21-23 years old (17.1%), and 24-25 years old (8.8%). Meanwhile, regarding income, the majority of respondents (43.1%) have a monthly income between 0 to 1 million, followed by 1-3 million (30.6%), and above 3 million (26.4%).

Interestingly, geographically, the majority of respondents come from Makassar with a significant percentage (81.48%), indicating a strong research coverage in that area. However, the presence of respondents from various other regions cannot be overlooked, such as Palu (1.39%), Surabaya (2.78%), Toraja (1.39%), Bali (0.46%), Bone (0.46%), Jakarta (2.78%), Jember (0.93%), and other locations (8.33%).

Based on the platform used, the majority of respondents tend to use Tiktok Shop (68.52%), indicating the dominance of this platform in reaching Generation Z. Meanwhile, Shopee Live also garnered a significant number of users with a percentage of 26.85%. The use of other platforms such as Youtube (1.39%) and other platforms (3.24%) contributes to a smaller yet significant part of the digital ecosystem among the respondents. From these results, it can be concluded that there is a trend of dominance among certain platforms in creating online interactions and transactions

among Generation Z, which has significant implications for the development of marketing and sales strategies in the current digital era.

Measurement

This study employs 4 variables: hedonic value, symbolic value, customer engagement, and online impulsive buying. Indicators used to measure each variable were adopted from previous research. Hedonic value has 4 indicators adapted from Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020). Symbolic value has 4 indicators adapted from Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020). Customer engagement has 3 indicators adapted from Luo *et al.* (2024). Online impulsive buying tendency has 3 indicators adapted from Zhao *et al.* (2022); Do *et al.* (2020). Each item is measured using a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 1. Variables and Indicators

Variables	Question Items	
Hedonic Value (HV)	1. Shopping through live-streaming is indeed entertaining (HV1) 2. I enjoy shopping through live-streaming (HV2) 3. When shopping through live-streaming, I can forget my problems (HV3) 4. I enjoy getting attractive deals when shopping through live-streaming (HV4)	Adapted from Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020)
symbolic Value (SV)	1. Shopping through live-streaming makes me feel trendy (SV1) 2. I feel like the sellers recognize me and remember my preferences (SV2) 3. I feel like a smart shopper when shopping through live-streaming (SV3)	Adapted from Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020)
Customer Engagement (CE)	1. In my opinion, shopping via live-streaming is interesting (CE1) 2. I spend more time on live-streaming platforms (CE2) 3. I tend to recommend sellers who use live-streaming to my friends (CE3)	Adapted from Luo <i>et al.</i> (2024)
Impulsive Buying Tendency (IBT)	1. When I watch live-streaming, I buy things that I don't really want to buy (IBT1) 2. I am someone who makes impulse purchases (IBT2) 3. It's very enjoyable to make spontaneous purchases (IBT3)	Adapted from Zhao <i>et al.</i> (2022); Do <i>et al.</i> (2020)

Analysis

Because of the advantages associated with the quantitative approach, we use Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Some advantages of using SEM-PLS are the ability to use small samples and not requiring the assumption of normality (Hair *et al.*, 2017). To process the data, we use WarpPLS (versi 8).

RESULT

After designing the instrument and distributing the questionnaire to collect data, the next step is to analyze the data. In Partial Least Squares (PLS), there are two stages of analysis: the measurement model and the structural model.

In the measurement model stage, we need to test the validity and reliability of the proposed instruments. Table 2 shows the results of validity and reliability testing. The factor loadings for each research item range from 0.671 to 0.866, and all these factor loading values are above 0.5. The AVE (Average Variance Extracted) values are also above 0.5, indicating that the instruments can be considered valid (Hair *et al.*, 2017). The composite reliability (CR) values range from 0.832 to 0.908, while the Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.695 to 0.848. Because the CR values are above 0.7, the proposed instruments are considered reliable.

Table 2. Measurement Model Result

Variabel & Indikator	Loading Factor	AVE	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability
Hedonic Value (HV)		0.616	0.790	0.864
HV1	0.841			
HV2	0.836			
HV3	0.705			
HV4	0.749			
symbolic Value (SV)		0.706	0.791	0.878
SV1	0.854			
SV2	0.801			
SV3	0.863			
Customer Engagement (CE)		0.626	0.695	0.832
CE1	0.671			
CE2	0.823			
CE3	0.866			
Impulsive Buying Tendency (IBT)		0.767	0.848	0.908
IBT1	0.865			
IBT2	0.878			
IBT3	0.885			

The structural model is an activity of testing previously proposed hypotheses. This stage is used to test the relationships between variables. The results of this study indicate that all proposed hypotheses are accepted (see Table 3).

Table 3. Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hipotesis	Result	
H1: Hedonic Value → Customer Engagement	0.323*	H1 diterima
H2: symbolic Value → Customer Engagement	0.469*	H2 diterima
H3: Customer Engagement → Impulsive Buying Tendency	0.453*	H3 diterima

*p<0.001

DISCUSSION

The hedonic value plays a crucial role in enhancing customer engagement. This value refers to the emotional benefits or pleasure that customers derive from the experience of using a product or service (Babin *et al.*, 1994). In the context of live streaming, hedonic value often arises from entertainment, emotional connection, and the enjoyment experienced by the audience from the content being presented (Jarvenpaa & Todd, 1997).

The experience of online shopping has proven to provide consumers with an opportunity to divert their attention from the routines of their daily lives (Parsons, 2002). When consumers engage in enjoyable activities such as watching live streaming that offers humor, excitement, or even admiration, they tend to experience higher hedonic value. This hedonic value not only enhances enjoyment but also provides feelings of relaxation and a diversion from monotonous routines. Study from Wong *et al.* (2012) This shows that emotional and non-rational factors have a stronger influence when customers make purchases compared to other methods of acquiring something. It means that when customers feel entertained or emotionally connected to live streaming content, they are more likely to make impulse purchases. Moreover, they tend to be more actively engaged and maintain their interest in the live streaming to further enjoy themselves.

Customer engagement involves interaction, participation, and involvement with content or a brand. Żymkowska (2018) It states that hedonic value significantly impacts customer engagement. When live streaming provides a pleasurable experience, customers are more likely to interact with the content, leave comments, and even participate in activities offered by the

streamer. These interactions enhance customer engagement, which ultimately can increase customer loyalty and retention. The positive impression created by hedonic value can enhance customer loyalty towards the brand or content they enjoy. Customers who feel entertained and satisfied with their experience are more likely to return and remain loyal to the streamer or brand. This also opens up opportunities for brands to build long-term relationships with their customers.

By understanding how hedonic value influences customer engagement, companies can design more effective strategies to attract and retain customers through entertaining content that provides emotional satisfaction. This enables companies not only to enhance engagement but also to build stronger customer loyalty and retention.

This research also indicates that symbolic value plays a crucial role in enhancing customer engagement in the context of online shopping, especially through live streaming platforms. Firat and Venkatesh (1993) It explains that shopping is a communal activity that allows individuals to build symbolic meanings, adhere to social norms, cultivate relationships, and shape their identities and self-esteem. In the digital era, social considerations have a significant influence on shopping phenomena through social media (De Vries & Carlson, 2014). Many customers make online purchases with the intention of enhancing their self-identity. Consumers want to showcase their status or identify themselves with specific communities through the products they purchase.

Live streaming offers social and symbolic value by allowing buyers to associate symbolic meaning with themselves, the seller, the vendor's products, and other customers (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). The products sold often include well-known branded items priced relatively affordably. Consumers tend to make purchases to obtain these well-known brands and showcase their social status. If there is a famous artist serving as a brand ambassador, it further indicates consumers' desire to purchase that product. The presence of public figures or celebrities in product promotions can enhance the product's appeal because consumers want to feel connected to the icons they admire.

Kim and Park (2013) It emphasizes that consumers will strive to engage with live streaming platforms by providing reviews, feedback, likes, and ultimately making purchases. This engagement reflects the symbolic value gained by consumers, where they feel part of a larger community and have a relationship with the brand or product they purchase. This symbolic value is capable of enhancing customer engagement by giving them a sense of ownership and identity recognized by the community.

Symbolic value also has the ability to enhance customer loyalty towards a brand or product. Customers who feel that the products they purchase hold symbolic meaning tend to be more loyal and committed to supporting the brand. Arisman and Salehudin (2022) It states that symbolic value can enhance customer engagement in the live streaming environment. When consumers feel that the products they buy have strong symbolic value, they are more likely to interact with the content, provide feedback, and even recommend the product to others.

Customer engagement in impulse buying tendencies indicates that a strong emotional connection between consumers and a brand or product can have a significant impact. According to Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020), customer engagement refers to the level of interaction and emotional connection between consumers and a brand, which can influence consumer responses to marketing messages, promotions, or social interactions. Consumers who have a deep emotional attachment tend to be more influenced by emotional cues in these messages, which can trigger unplanned or impulse purchases (Luo et al., 2024). Zuo & Xiao (2021) additionally, consumers who are actively engaged and have a strong emotional attachment to a brand or product may be more susceptible to impulse purchases, especially when faced with time-sensitive offers or limited-time promotions. They tend to feel a greater sense of urgency to make spontaneous purchases in such situations. This is consistent with findings that consumers who have a strong emotional attachment to a brand tend to be more responsive to marketing stimuli containing emotional cues (Zuo & Xiao, 2021).

This research makes a significant contribution to online consumer behavior theory by asserting that hedonic and symbolic motivations play a crucial role in driving customer engagement and impulse purchases. Hedonic motivation refers to consumers' drive to seek pleasure and emotional satisfaction from shopping experiences or product usage. Meanwhile, symbolic motivation is related to the use of products as a means to express self-identity and social status. The results of this research indicate that a deep understanding of these motivations is

crucial for explaining consumer behavior, which is often irrational and driven by emotional and symbolic factors.

Theoretically, this research enriches the literature on consumer behavior by emphasizing that theories focusing solely on rational aspects are inadequate for understanding the dynamics of impulse buying in the digital era. Online consumers, especially Generation Z, are highly influenced by emotional and symbolic values, which ultimately affect their engagement with brands and purchasing decisions. Therefore, theories examining consumer behavior should incorporate these hedonic and symbolic dimensions to provide a more comprehensive and accurate depiction of the factors motivating impulse purchases. These findings also pave the way for further research to explore how these elements can be leveraged in more effective marketing strategies.

This research also provides insights into flow theory. In the context of e-commerce, high customer engagement can be understood as a state of flow. The hedonic and symbolic values of products can increase the likelihood of customers experiencing flow, which in turn promotes impulse buying. This reflects the dynamics of experiencing flow, where the optimal state of happiness and deep engagement can fluctuate over time, often marked by anxiety and boredom. Therefore, hedonic and symbolic values play a crucial role in sustaining customer engagement, ensuring they remain in a dynamic and satisfying flow state.

The implications of these findings for marketing practices underscore the importance of leveraging emotional cues and time-limited offers to enhance consumer emotional engagement. By building a strong emotional connection with customers, companies can increase the likelihood of impulse purchases occurring. Strategies such as using emotionally-focused marketing messages, time-limited special offers, or more personalized social interactions can help increase customer engagement and elicit positive responses from consumers (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that hedonic and symbolic values have a positive and significant influence on customer engagement and impulse buying tendencies among Generation Z online. These findings support previous literature indicating that hedonic value, associated with emotional and sensory satisfaction from online shopping experiences, and symbolic value, related to symbolic meaning and social status gained from specific products or brands, play a crucial role in influencing online consumer behavior.

However, this research has several limitations that need to be noted. Firstly, the study sample primarily came from one city (Makassar), which may limit the generalization of these findings to the entire Generation Z population. Secondly, the use of online survey methods may introduce bias in respondent selection, especially if respondents tend to be more digitally active. Thirdly, data collection was conducted only during a specific time period, which may not capture seasonal variations or changes in online consumer behavior.

For future research, it is recommended to broaden the geographic scope of respondents, utilize more diverse data collection methods such as in-depth interviews or direct observations, and extend the data collection period to comprehensively understand changes in consumer behavior over time. Research can also delve into other factors that may influence customer engagement and impulse buying tendencies, such as the effects of promotions or social interactions on live-streaming platforms. Therefore, future research can provide deeper and more applicable insights for marketing practitioners in developing more effective strategies to attract and retain Generation Z consumers in an increasingly competitive online shopping environment.

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