

Harmonizing User-Generated Content (UGC) and Influencer Marketing Into Purchase Decision in Creative Industry: A Case Study of the Gaming Sector through Mobile Legends Among Gen Z

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the influence of User-Generated Content (UGC) and Influencer Marketing on Purchase Decision of Mobile Legends players from Generation Z in Indonesia, using a quantitative approach. Data were collected from 55 respondents and analyzed using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method with the SmartPLS v.4.0 program. The results show that UGC has a positive and significant influence on Purchase Decision, while Influencer Marketing has no significant influence on Purchase Decision. This study contributes to the literature on digital consumer behavior in the gaming industry, specifically highlighting the dominant role of UGC in shaping Purchase Decision, and providing implications for evaluating the effectiveness of influencer-based marketing strategies in the context of online games.

INTRODUCTION

The creative industry, particularly the mobile-based gaming industry, is showing rapid growth and becoming one of the most promising creative economy subsectors in Indonesia over time (Uddin, 2022). By 2024, the value of the gaming market in Indonesia is recorded to reach US\$2 billion (Rp32 trillion), along with the increasing number of game players which continues to grow significantly every year, from 121.7 million players in 2021, to 174.1 million in 2022, and is projected to reach 182.1 million in 2025 (Rhamadanty & Wahyu, 2024). The smartphone platform is the main choice for the majority of players, making Indonesia a very potential gaming market. Indonesia's position as the leader of the esports market in Southeast Asia and ranked third in Asia, is also strengthened by the high number of active professional players and the user penetration rate which is estimated to increase from 5.2% in 2023 to 6.2% in 2027 (Rhamadanty & Wahyu, 2024). (Lifestyle, 2024) .

One of the most popular mobile games in Indonesia is Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB), MOBA game released in 2016. This game ranked first as the MOBA with the most downloads in 2023, reaching around 27 million times, with monthly active users in Indonesia reaching 51 million players (Risti, 2024). (Lifestyle, 2024). One of its main commercial features is the sale of *skins*, virtual items that change a character's appearance without affecting gameplay. Although cosmetic, *skins* remain in demand due to their engaging visual design, sound effects, and skill animations. Their rarity also varies; the rarer the item, the higher the value and the price players must pay (Wahyudi, 2022). (Alfredo & Henryanto, 2024). According to report from Yonatan (2024), around 43% of the Gen Z population plays games and 25% of them like MOBA games like Mobile Legends.

In the scheme online sales, User-Generated Content (UGC) plays a role as a stimulant that can push behavior consumer because it is considered as source credible and reliable information (Kitsios et al., 2022). In addition, consumer more interested look for information pre-purchase related product or service through UGC compared source other information about product or desired services (Peeroo et al., 2017). This show how UGC can be one of factors that can drive purchasing decisions consumer especially in scheme sale online products.

Previous research conducted by Hayat et al., (2024) shows that UGC has a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions. This means that the better and more reliable the UGC content is, the more it will increase purchasing decisions. However, different findings were shown by Wafiyah and Wusko (2023), who concluded that UGC does not have a significant influence on purchasing decisions.

In addition to UGC, influencer marketing also plays a major role in driving consumer purchasing decisions. Influencer marketing is a promotional strategy that utilises influential individuals on social media to market products or services (Li, 2025). This strategy is effective for Gen Z, who trust the opinions of influencers more than traditional advertising (Flecha-Ortiz et al., 2023).

Previous research conducted by Herman et al. (2023) proved that influencer marketing has a direct positive influence on purchasing decisions.

This means that the better the influencer marketing strategy, the more it will increase purchasing decisions. However, Satiawan et al., (2023) showed different findings, namely that influencer marketing has not played an optimal role in encouraging consumer purchasing decisions.

Based on the background of this phenomenon and the inconsistencies found in previous studies, this research will examine the influence of UGC and Influencer Marketing on purchasing decisions in the Creative Industry: A Case Study of the Mobile Legends Game Sector among Generation Z.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Purchase Decision

Purchase decisions are part of consumer behavior that encompasses the process of how individuals or organizations select, purchase, and use products to meet their needs (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). According to Ragatirta and Tiningrum (2020), this decision begins with awareness of a need and progresses to post-purchase evaluation. The process is not instantaneous, but rather involves complex psychological stages. In the digital age, exposure to UGC and Influencer Marketing on social media can accelerate this stage, especially for Gen Z, by forming more conscious, credible, and informed preferences (Hayat et al., 2024). (Sarhour, 2025) (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

This research is based on the Consumer Behavior theory of Kotler & Armstrong (2018), which explains that purchasing decisions are influenced by two main factors: internal (such as motivation, perception, and attitude) and external (such as culture, reference groups, and social status). In this context, User-Generated Content (UGC) and Influencer Marketing are positioned as external factors because they originate from social stimuli that shape consumer perceptions and attitudes through public opinion. UGC has been shown to increase *perceived value* and reduce consumers' psychological distance from products, thereby accelerating the purchasing decision process (Qin et al., 2024), (Sang & Nah, 2022). In addition, interaction emotional with UGC also can trigger decision impulsive buying (Malthouse et al., 2016). On the other hand In other words, Influencer Marketing forms attitude and intention buy consumer through combination credibility, expertise, and power the pull that influencers have. This strengthens trust to products and encourage purchasing decisions, especially among Gen Z (Flecha-Ortiz et al., 2023), (Saputra et al., 2025). Thus, UGC and Influencer Marketing act as external stimuli that influence consumers' psychological stages (from perception to preference) in the decision-making process.

According to Syafrida and Putra, (2022) purchasing decisions can be seen from several indicators. First, *Purchase Confidence*, namely to what extent consumers feel Certain regarding the decisions taken moment buy product certain. Second, *Purchasing Habits*, which reflect trend consumer for regularly buy same product or similar. Third, *Recommendations*, which refers to actions consumer in recommend product to others based on experience personal them. Lastly, *Repurchase*, which shows desire consumer for do Repurchase of the same product in the future.

User-Generated Content (UGC)

User-Generated Content (UGC) is content about something product services created and shared by consumers through social media as form participation they in respond something product (Wafiyah & Wusko , 2023). UGC usually driven by two motivations main : first , for interesting attention public with convey satisfaction or dissatisfaction to something product and second, as form involvement active consumer in perfect or develop product without objective promotion direct (Gautama, 2022).

According to Sarhour (2025), there are four main indicators in UGC: *authenticity, relatability, perceived trust, and transparency*. Content is considered authentic if it appears genuine and does not contain explicit promotional intent, relatable if it aligns with the audience's personal experiences, trustworthy if it comes from fellow users, and transparent if it presents information openly, both positive and negative.

Content such as reviews, comments, and even YouTube or TikTok videos about Mobile Legends playing experiences have been shown to influence Gen Z's perceptions and purchasing intentions. For example, reviews of *legendary skins* or *in-game events* can drive their purchasing decisions (Hayat et al., 2024) . Based on this explanation, the researchers formulated the following hypothesis:

H1: User-Generated Content Has a Positive Influence on Purchasing Decisions in Mobile Legends Games Among Gen Z

Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is a promotional strategy that utilises influential individuals on social media to market products or services (Li, 2025). This strategy is effective for Gen Z, who trust influencers' opinions more than traditional advertisements (Flecha Ortiz et al., 2023). Gen Z is active on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, so exposure to influencer content has a direct impact on brand awareness and purchasing decisions (Saputra et al., 2025).

The effectiveness of influencer marketing is influenced by several indicators according to Nugroho et al., (2022). The first is attractiveness, which is the physical or personality appeal that makes influencer content more attractive to audiences. The second is trustworthiness, which is the level of trust built by influencers through honesty and integrity in conveying information. Third is Expertise, which is the influencer's knowledge and expertise regarding the recommended product, which can increase the credibility of the content and influence consumer perceptions.

Influencer Marketing is not just a promotional medium, but also a strategy for shaping the perceived value of a product. Influencers who are attractive, credible, and engaging can add perceived value, build trust, and strengthen brand image, which ultimately drives Purchase Decisions (Nugroho et al., 2022). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Influencer Marketing Has a Positive Influence on Purchasing Decisions in Mobile Legends Games Among Gen Z

Conceptual Framework

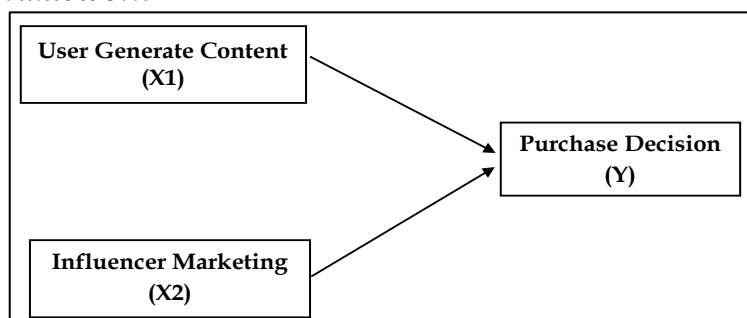


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study uses an *Associative Quantitative approach* with *Descriptive* and *Explanatory methods*. The population of this study is Gen-Z with an age range of 17-27 years who actively play *Mobile Legends* with a sample of 55 respondents. Data were collected using a questionnaire developed based on research variable indicators which were then distributed *online* using *Google Forms*. The analysis method used is *Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)* using *SmartPLS* software version 4.0.

RESULTS

Respondent Characteristics

Majority respondents study This is men (65.5%) with age dominant 21-24 years (41.48), reflecting characteristics main player *Mobile Legends* in Indonesia. As big background background of high school/vocational school/ equivalent education (56.4%), which shows respondents Lots originate from group age productive beginning. In terms of domiciles, majority live on the island Java (67.3%), while the remainder (32.7%) is spread across other regions (Sumatra , Kalimantan, NTB and Sulawesi) in Indonesia, providing variation geographical findings This in line with report Rachmanta, (2021) which shows that majority *Mobile Legends* players in Indonesia are indeed originate from the islands of Java and Sumatra. Based on experience playing , the majority respondents has playing *Mobile Legends* for > 1-2 years (70.9%), while the remainder < 1 year (29.1%). Characteristics This confirm that respondents own interest strong towards *Mobile Legends*, so that relevant analyzed in Purchase Decision context influenced by User-Generated Content (UGC) and Influencer Marketing.

Validity And Reliability Testing

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity Test Result

	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance

				Extracted (AVE)
X1	0,890	0,892	0,912	0,564
X2	0,914	0,939	0,933	0,702
Y	0,883	0,895	0,906	0,548

The results of the outer model evaluation show that most indicators have loading factor values above 0.7, indicating that convergent validity has been met. As shown in the table, indicators X2.2 (0.940), X2.4 (0.836), and X1.1 (0.802), for example, show a strong contribution to the construct. However, there are two indicators in the Y variable whose values are slightly below the ideal limit of 0.7. Nevertheless, both indicators can still be maintained because their values are close to the threshold, and are supported by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value and construct reliability that are above the cut-off (AVE > 0.5 and CR > 0.7). These results are reinforced by the Cronbach's Alpha value for each construct that is above 0.7, namely X1 = 0.890, X2 = 0.914, and Y = 0.883. The Composite Reliability (CR) value also consistently shows good reliability, which is more than 0.9 for all constructs. Thus, all indicators are declared reliable and suitable for further analysis.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity using Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	X1	X2	Y
X1	0.751		
X2	0.719	0.838	
Y	0.684	0.637	0.740

Based on the results of the discriminant validity test using the Fornell-Larcker criteria (Table 1), it can be seen that the square root of the AVE of each construct (X1 = 0.751; X2 = 0.838; Y = 0.740) is greater than the correlation between constructs. These results indicate that each research variable has good discriminant validity, as it can be distinguished from other variables. Thus, the research constructs can be declared to meet the discriminant validity criteria.

R-Square

The results of this study indicate that the R² value for the Purchase Decision variable is 0.511, which can be categorized as high. This means that the User-Generated Content (UGC) and Influencer Marketing variables are able to explain 51.1% of the variability in the Purchase Decision construct, while the remaining 48.9% is explained by other factors outside the research model.

Hypothesis Testing

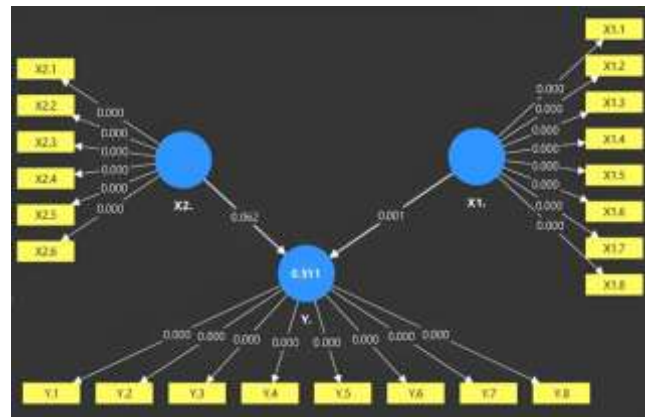


Figure 2. Structural Inner-Model

Table 3. Hypothesis Test's Results

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistics	P-Value	Conclusion
H1	0.469	0.499	0.143	3,278	0.001	Significant
H2	0.299	0.289	0.160	1,867	0.062	Not Significant

Based on results statistical analysis shown in Table 1, the t- statistic value for H1, namely The influence of UGC on Purchase Decision is of 3.278 with a p-value of 0.001 (< 0.005). This show that H1 is accepted , so UGC has an effect positive and significant regarding Mobile Legends players' Purchase Decisions . Meanwhile, that , the result H2 testing regarding The influence of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Decisions shows t- statistic value of 1.867 with a p-value of 0.062 (> 0.05). With Thus, H2 is rejected.

DISCUSSION

Based on results statistical analysis shown in Table 1, the t- statistic value for H1, namely The influence of UGC on Purchase Decision is of 3.278 with a p-value of 0.001 (< 0.005). This show that H1 is accepted , so UGC has an effect positive and significant towards the Purchase Decision of Mobile Legends players . This means that the higher quality content generated users, such as reviews, comments, and recommendations on social media, increasingly big opportunity consumer for decide purchasing in-game items. This finding aligns with consumer behavior theory, which explains that consumers often rely on information from other users experiences because they are considered more credible (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). The results of this study also support the findings of Hayat et al., (2024) which stated that UGC has a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions.

These findings also reinforce what Kitsios et al., (2022) stated about the superiority of UGC as a valuable and highly credible source of information about a product and a strong factor in purchasing decisions, especially in the Mobile Legends game sector. Furthermore, the findings also support what was conveyed

by Peeroo et al. (2017) regarding consumer behaviour, which tends to favour UGC as the main source of pre-purchase information when they are interested in a particular product.

Meanwhile, the results of the H2 test regarding the influence of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Decisions showed a t-statistic value of 1.867 with a p-value of 0.062 (> 0.05). Thus, H2 was rejected, meaning that Influencer Marketing did not have a significant influence in driving Purchase Decisions in this study. These results indicate that promotions through influencers are not yet effective enough in driving item purchases in Mobile Legends. One reason is that players tend to trust reviews from fellow gamers or internal communities more than influencer recommendations. Furthermore, the critical nature of Gen Z towards promotional content also makes them assess the relevance and authenticity of messages before deciding to purchase. The results of this study are consistent with (Satiawan et al., 2023) who stated that Influencer Marketing has not played an optimal role in driving purchase decisions.

This finding also indirectly refutes what was stated by Flecha-Ortiz et al. (2023) regarding the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies for Gen Z. This may be due to errors, particularly in determining the right influencer for the product being marketed. Considering that influencers play a vital role in this marketing model (Li, 2025). This finding also refutes what was stated by Herman et al. (2023), proving that influencer marketing has a direct positive influence on purchasing decisions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study show that User-Generated Content (UGC) has a positive and significant effect on the Purchase Decision of Mobile Legends players among Gen Z. This means that the higher the quality of user-generated content, such as reviews, comments, and recommendations, the greater the tendency of consumers to purchase in-game items. Conversely, Influencer Marketing does not have a significant effect on Purchase Decision, which means that promotions through influencers have not been able to directly drive purchase decisions in the context of this study.

This research contributes to the development of digital consumer behavior literature, particularly in the context of online gaming. The finding that UGC is more influential than Influencer Marketing reinforces Kotler & Armstrong's (2018) consumer behavior theory which emphasizes the importance of trust in non-commercial information sources. On the other hand, the insignificant results of Influencer Marketing confirm inconsistencies in previous literature and open up discussion about the potential for influencer effectiveness to vary depending on the product context and consumer characteristics.

For gaming industry practitioners, this study confirms that UGC-based marketing strategies are more effective in driving purchasing decisions than mere influencer promotions. Therefore, Mobile Legends developers and publishers need to provide more space for players to share their experiences, for example through community features, sharing events, or a reward system for positive reviews. On the other hand, even if influencer marketing doesn't have a significant

impact, this strategy can still be used, but it must be combined with other approaches such as increasing gamer community engagement to be more relevant to the audience.

FURTHER STUDY

Study This own a number of limitations . First , the number of respondents in this research was 55 people, who were determined based on rule Hair et al., (2022) related the minimum number of samples in PLS-SEM analysis. Although amount This Already fulfil condition methodological , size relative sample small still limit generalization findings to all over population Mobile Legends players in Indonesia. Second, respondents dominated by players who live on the island of Java, so that distribution geographical Not yet fully evenly. In addition, research This only using two independent variables, namely UGC and Influencer Marketing, so that other factors such as price, quality experience play, and loyalty brand No analyzed more carry on.

Based on limitations said, research furthermore recommended for expand amount respondents with distribution more geographical evenly distributed throughout Indonesia. In addition, researchers upcoming can add other variables such as price, quality experience playing, online communities, and factor psychological like FoMO or brand trust for give a clearer picture comprehensive about dynamics purchase decision. Research continuation can also be done on other games to compare whether same result occurs in various genres of online games.

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