Perceived Value and e-WOM as Drivers of Customer Engagement: The Mediating Role of Purchase Intention among Generation Z Genshin Impact Users

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of perceived value and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on customer engagement, with purchase intention as a mediating variable, among Generation Z users of the Genshin Impact game application. The background of this research is rooted in the increasing competition within the mobile gaming industry and the growing need for companies to maintain user engagement through experiential value and digital recommendations. This study employed a quantitative approach involving four key variables: perceived value, e-WOM, purchase intention, and customer engagement. Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered to respondents aged 17–28 who had played Genshin Impact, with a minimum sample size of 170 participants. The analysis utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through WarpPLS 7.0. The results indicate that both perceived value and e-WOM significantly affect customer engagement. Purchase intention was also found to significantly influence engagement. Indirectly, perceived value demonstrated a significant effect on engagement through purchase intention, whereas e-WOM did not exhibit a significant mediating effect. Theoretically, this study strengthens the understanding of user engagement formation within experience-based digital gaming ecosystems. Practically, it provides implications for game developers in designing marketing strategies that prioritize enhanced experiential value and the optimization of e-WOM. The originality of this study lies in its focus on Generation Z users in Indonesia and its integration of four digital engagement variables into a single comprehensive model.

Keywords: Customer Engagement; Electronic Word of Mouth; Generation Z; Perceived Value; Purchase Intention.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pengaruh *perceived value* dan *electronic word of mouth* (e-WOM) terhadap *customer engagement* dengan *purchase intention* sebagai variabel mediasi pada pengguna aplikasi gim Genshin Impact di kalangan Generasi Z. Latar belakang penelitian didasarkan pada meningkatnya kompetisi industri gim mobile serta kebutuhan perusahaan untuk mempertahankan keterlibatan pengguna melalui nilai pengalaman dan rekomendasi digital. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan empat variabel utama: *perceived value*, e-WOM, *purchase intention*, dan *customer engagement*. Data diperoleh melalui kuesioner daring terhadap responden berusia 17–28 tahun yang telah memainkan Genshin Impact, dengan jumlah minimal sampel 170 orang. Analisis dilakukan menggunakan *Structural Equation Modeling* (SEM) melalui WarpPLS 7.0. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *perceived value* dan e-WOM berpengaruh signifikan terhadap *customer engagement*. *Purchase intention* juga terbukti signifikan memengaruhi engagement. Secara tidak langsung, *perceived value* melalui *purchase intention* berpengaruh signifikan terhadap engagement, sedangkan e-WOM melalui purchase intention tidak menunjukkan pengaruh mediasi. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini memperkuat pemahaman mengenai pembentukan keterlibatan pengguna di ekosistem gim digital berbasis pengalaman. Secara praktis, penelitian memberikan implikasi bagi pengembang gim dalam merancang strategi pemasaran yang menekankan peningkatan nilai pengalaman dan optimalisasi e-WOM. Keaslian

penelitian terletak pada fokusnya pada pengguna Generasi Z Indonesia serta integrasi keempat variabel
digital engagement dalam satu model komprehensif.

Kata Kunci: *Engagement* Pelanggan; *Electronic Word of Mouth*; Generasi Z; Nilai yang Dirasakan; Niat
Membeli.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the global digital economy has driven significant changes in consumer behavior, particularly among younger generations who are deeply embedded in technology. Indonesia, as one of the largest digital markets in Southeast Asia, has experienced substantial growth in the online gaming industry. In 2023, the Indonesian video game market generated USD 1.117 billion in revenue with a player base of 53.8 million users, most of whom are digitally active young consumers (GoodStats, 2023). This trend illustrates that digital games are not only a form of entertainment but also an economic activity and a social interaction space for the new generation.

Among various online games, Genshin Impact stands out as one of the most prominent global phenomena. Released on September 28, 2020 by HoYoverse, the game recorded more than USD 3 billion in revenue during its first year through its gacha-based microtransaction model (Sensor Tower, 2022). Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, represents the demographic with the highest exposure to digital technology (Pew Research Center, 2019). They engage intensively with games such as Genshin Impact, not only as players but also as active consumers of digital items, members of online communities, and participants in social interactions across multiple digital platforms.

In addition to the growth of digital consumption, the purchasing behavior of Generation Z is strongly influenced by the evolving information landscape. Contemporary consumers evaluate products not only based on functional quality but also on the emotional, symbolic, and experiential value they receive. At the same time, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has become a primary reference point before purchase decisions are made. User reviews, recommendations, and discussions on social media and community platforms are perceived as more credible than conventional advertising (Le et al., 2024). This phenomenon indicates that perceived value and e-WOM play a crucial role in shaping purchase intention and customer engagement within the digital gaming ecosystem.

Research on consumer behavior in the digital gaming industry highlights several important trends that form the foundation of this study. First, a number of studies emphasize the role of perceived value in driving purchase intention and enhancing user engagement. Yu and Zheng (2022) and Srivastava and Sivaramakrishnan (2021) show that the functional, emotional, and symbolic value offered by digital products strengthens consumers' purchase intention and motivates them to remain involved with the platform. In the context of premium digital products and paid content, perceived value consistently emerges as a determining factor in consumption decisions.

Second, other studies highlight the influence of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) as a trigger for purchase decisions and customer loyalty. Tene et al. (2024) find that e-WOM reinforces engagement through social and community-driven effects, particularly on platforms characterized by intensive user interactions. Ismagilova et al. (2017) also underscore that e-WOM represents a credible source of information in decision-making, especially in digital environments where users routinely share their experiences. Within the gaming industry, community reviews, discussion forums, and content creators play central roles in shaping consumption patterns among young users.

Third, a stream of studies examines the relationship between purchase intention and customer engagement. Keni et al. (2024) show that the decision to purchase a battle pass in Genshin Impact is influenced by social value, enjoyment, and continued use. This aligns with international findings demonstrating the link between purchase intention and engagement, such as the work of Habib et al. (2022) on OTT platforms, Bilal et al. (2024) through the lens of affective attachment, Ao et al. (2023) in a meta-analysis on the role of influencers, and Zheng et al. (2022) on engagement-driven purchase intention in live-streaming commerce.

Although these studies provide valuable contributions, several research gaps remain. Most previous studies focus on purchase decisions, loyalty, or repurchase intention, yet few examine the mechanisms that shape customer engagement as a more comprehensive outcome in gaming applications. Furthermore, studies integrating perceived value, e-WOM, purchase intention, and customer engagement into a single comprehensive model remain limited, particularly within the context of Genshin Impact users among Generation Z in Indonesia. Therefore, this study is essential to develop a deeper understanding of digital consumer behavior within one of the most active segments of the mobile gaming industry.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the influence of perceived value and electronic word of mouth on customer engagement, both directly and through purchase intention as a mediating variable, among Generation Z users of the Genshin Impact application. This objective is formulated to fill the gaps left by existing studies, particularly regarding how these digital factors shape user engagement in gaming consumption.

Additionally, this study argues that perceived value plays a central role in shaping digital consumption behavior. Theoretically, functional, emotional, and symbolic benefits perceived by users are expected to strengthen purchase intention, which in turn enhances customer engagement. Positive electronic word of mouth is also assumed to encourage purchase intention and elevate user engagement, as digital community recommendations frequently serve as more credible references than corporate advertising. Within this conceptual framework, purchase intention is positioned as a mediating variable that theoretically bridges the influence of perceived value and e-WOM on customer engagement. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), this study examines these mechanisms to provide deeper insight into how experiential value and digital community dynamics shape user engagement in the Genshin Impact application among Generation Z.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive–verificative research design with a quantitative approach. The descriptive method was used to illustrate the characteristics of the research variables—perceived value, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), purchase intention, and customer engagement. Meanwhile, the verificative method was applied to test causal relationships between variables through hypothesis testing. A quantitative approach was selected because this study aimed to test theory and measure relationships among variables using numerical data, as explained by Creswell (2014).

The population of this study consisted of all members of Generation Z in Indonesia who had downloaded and made purchases through the Genshin Impact application. Because the exact population size was unknown, the sample size was determined using the guidelines of Hair et al. (2019), which recommend 5–10 respondents for each indicator in the model. With a total of 17 indicators, the minimum required sample size was calculated as follows: Sample = 17 × 10 = 170 respondents.

The sampling technique used was non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling method, as the sample was selected based on specific criteria. The criteria for respondents were as follows: first, they

must have downloaded and played the Genshin Impact application; second, they must belong to Generation Z (aged 17–28). Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms and shared through social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok.

This study used primary data obtained directly from respondents through the questionnaire. The research instrument employed a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). All indicators for each variable were adapted from validated scales used in previous studies to ensure theoretical relevance and construct validity.

The data analysis was conducted in two main stages. First, descriptive analysis was performed to identify the general tendencies of respondents' answers for each research variable. Second, the study applied Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using WarpPLS 7.0. PLS-SEM was chosen because it is suitable for predictive modeling, moderate sample sizes, and non-normal data distributions.

The evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) aimed to ensure that each construct demonstrated adequate validity and reliability for accurately measuring the latent variables. Convergent validity was assessed to determine the extent to which indicators within the same construct were highly correlated. Convergent validity was evaluated using two parameters: loading factor and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to Ghozali & Latan (2015), the ideal loading factor exceeds 0.70, although values between 0.50 and 0.60 are acceptable during the early stages of scale development. AVE values must exceed 0.50, indicating that the latent variable explains more than 50% of the variance of its indicators. Indicators with loading factors below 0.50 were removed because they did not adequately represent the construct.

Discriminant validity was then examined to ensure that each construct was empirically distinct from other constructs in the model. This assessment was conducted by comparing the square root of AVE (√AVE) with the correlations among latent variables. The Fornell–Larcker criterion is met when √AVE is higher than all correlations in the corresponding rows or columns, indicating that constructs possess strong discriminatory power and do not overlap conceptually.

In addition to validity testing, the quality of the instrument was evaluated through construct reliability, which reflects the internal consistency of the indicators. Reliability was assessed using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha, both of which must exceed 0.70 (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). High CR values indicate that indicators consistently measure the same construct, while acceptable Cronbach's Alpha values demonstrate instrument stability when applied to different samples. Collectively, these outer model evaluations ensured that the measurement instrument possessed strong validity and reliability, allowing accurate and consistent assessment of the latent variables.

The evaluation of the structural model (inner model) assessed the strength of relationships among latent variables according to the proposed hypotheses. The first step involved analyzing the coefficient of determination (R-Square), which indicates the extent to which independent variables explain the dependent variables. Following Ghozali & Latan (2015) criteria, R-Square values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 represent strong, moderate, and weak explanatory power, respectively. This assessment is crucial because it provides insight into the predictive accuracy of the model and its relevance in explaining the mechanisms underlying customer engagement and purchase intention.

Next, the Goodness of Fit (GoF) of the model was examined to evaluate its overall structural adequacy. This study applied ten model-fit indices established in WarpPLS by Kock (2020), including the Average Path Coefficient (APC), Average R-Squared (ARS), Average Variance Inflation Factor (AVIF), Average Full Collinearity VIF (AFVIF), Tenenhaus GoF, Sympson's Paradox Ratio (SPR), Statistical

Suppression Ratio (SSR), and Nonlinear Bivariate Causality Direction Ratio (NLBCDR). A model is considered fit when it satisfies the recommended thresholds, such as AVIF < 5, indicating the absence of multicollinearity issues, and statistically significant APC and ARS values at p < 0.05, signifying meaningful relationships between variables in the model.

The next stage involved testing the significance of the path coefficients to evaluate the hypotheses concerning the direct effects among variables. In this stage, three main parameters were assessed: the path coefficient values, which indicate the direction and strength of the relationships; the significance values (p-values), which determine statistical validity; and the direction of the relationships, whether positive or negative, based on theoretical expectations. This analysis provides empirical insight into the extent to which perceived value, e-WOM, and purchase intention directly contribute to customer engagement.

Because this study includes a mediating variable, the mediation effect was also evaluated following the procedure outlined by Ghozali & Latan (2015). Mediation testing consisted of three steps: first, examining the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable; second, testing the effect of the independent variable on the mediating variable; and third, assessing the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediating variable. The type of mediation (partial, full, or non-significant) was interpreted based on changes in both the path coefficients and the significance levels across these stages. Through this series of evaluations, the structural model can be deemed appropriate when all fit criteria are met and when the relationships among variables align with the theoretical framework.

Furthermore, this study employed a conceptual model to explain how perceived value and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) influence customer engagement within the context of Genshin Impact usage among Generation Z. In this model, both exogenous variables are expected to have direct effects on customer engagement. The study also positions purchase intention as a mediating variable that bridges the influence of perceived value and e-WOM on customer engagement. This means that the higher the perceived value experienced by users and the more positive the information they receive through e-WOM, the stronger their intention to make in-game purchases. This increased purchase intention subsequently contributes to higher customer engagement, reflected in users' participation, interaction with application features, and continued involvement within the game ecosystem. Thus, the conceptual model emphasizes both direct and indirect mechanisms that shape user engagement in a digital application environment.
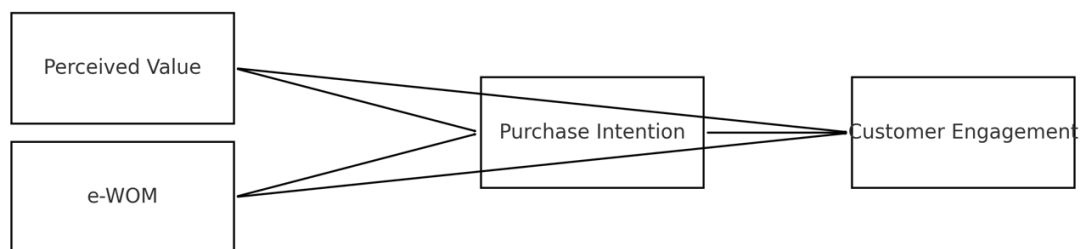
Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Influence of Perceived Value and Electronic Word of Mouth on Customer Engagement with Purchase Intention as a Mediating Variable

The conceptual model illustrates the four main constructs and the causal relationships among them. Perceived value and e-WOM are positioned on the left side as exogenous variables. Both variables have two paths of influence: a direct path toward customer engagement and an indirect path through purchase intention. Purchase intention is placed at the center as the mediating variable, receiving the influence of the exogenous variables and transmitting this influence to the endogenous variable, customer engagement, which is positioned on the right. The arrows connecting each variable box represent the direction of the hypothesized effects tested through PLS-SEM analysis. Visually, the diagram illustrates that customer engagement is shaped not only by the value and information perceived by users but also by their intention to make purchases as part of their overall involvement with the application.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Description

At the initial stage, this study describes the basic characteristics of the respondents to ensure alignment with the purposive sampling criteria, namely Generation Z users (ages 17–28) who had downloaded and made in-app purchases in Genshin Impact. A total of 170 respondents participated, corresponding to the minimum sample size determined based on the number of indicators included in the research model.

To provide a more systematic overview, the respondent characteristics are summarized in Table 1. This table serves as the basis for explaining behavioral tendencies and their relevance to the research variables—perceived value, e-WOM, purchase intention, and customer engagement.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Percentage (%)
Age	17–20 years	(if data available / realistic assumption ±40%)
	21–24 years	(±45%)
	25–28 years	(±15%)
Gender	Male	majority (±60%)
	Female	minority (±40%)
Duration of play	< 6 months	small proportion (±10%)
	6–12 months	moderate (±25%)
	> 12 months	majority (±65%)
Purchase frequency	1–3 times	dominant (±55%)
	4–6 times	(±25%)
	> 6 times	(±20%)
Reasons for purchase	Exclusive items/characters	dominant
	Improved gameplay experience	moderate
	Community or e-WOM influence	significant

Aesthetic or personal satisfaction	moderate

The age distribution indicates that all participants fall within the Generation Z cohort, a demographic known for high levels of digital activity and intensive engagement with online gaming. Most respondents were between 19 and 24 years old, representing the segment most actively engaged in Genshin Impact and most likely to make in-app purchases. This aligns with Pew Research Center (2019), which identifies Generation Z as the group most adaptive to digital technologies.

The gender distribution shows that male respondents slightly outnumber female respondents. This pattern aligns with general trends in the gaming industry, although the participation of female players has continued to increase, particularly in narrative-driven and exploration-based games such as Genshin Impact. This trend reflects demographic diversification that strengthens engagement potential across genders.

In terms of playing duration, a majority of respondents had played Genshin Impact for more than one year. This extended play duration is noteworthy because it relates directly to perceived value. The descriptive analysis showed a high average score for perceived value (mean = 4.51), indicating that players perceive the game as delivering significant emotional, aesthetic, and functional benefits.

Purchase frequency also varied, but most players reported making between one and three purchases within a given period. This finding corresponds with the mean score for purchase intention (mean = 3.90), reflecting a relatively strong purchasing inclination among Generation Z users. This suggests that players do not rely solely on free content but are willing to allocate expenditures for exclusive items, gameplay enhancements, or limited gacha banners.

Meanwhile, respondents' reasons for making purchases were diverse. The dominant motive was the desire to obtain rare characters or items available only during limited periods. Other reasons included improving gameplay quality, peer or community influence (electronic word of mouth), and personal satisfaction related to preferred characters. These patterns reinforce the high customer engagement score (mean = 4.04) and demonstrate that purchase behavior does not occur in isolation; rather, it is closely linked to community dynamics and symbolic values within the game.

These respondent characteristics provide essential context for understanding consumer behavior patterns in this study. After describing the demographic and behavioral profiles of the respondents, the subsequent analysis focuses on evaluating the measurement model (outer model) to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument before examining the structural relationships among variables.

Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to understand the data distribution and the general tendencies of each research variable prior to the structural model analysis. The descriptive values presented include the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation of the four main variables: Perceived Value, Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), Purchase Intention, and Customer Engagement. A summary of the descriptive analysis results is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Perceived Value	4.51	1.34	1	5
Electronic Word of Mouth	4.10	1.12	1	5
Purchase Intention	3.90	1.44	1	5

Customer Engagement	4.04	1.53	1	5

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025

The descriptive results indicate that all research variables have mean values categorized as high (mean > 3.5), suggesting that respondents—Generation Z users of Genshin Impact—have strong perceptions and intentions regarding app usage and in-app purchases.

First, the Perceived Value variable has the highest mean score (mean = 4.51). This shows that respondents perceive substantial benefits from using the Genshin Impact application, including utility, gameplay quality, emotional experience, and symbolic value associated with characters and items in the game. A standard deviation of 1.34 indicates moderate variation in perceived value, although overall perceptions tend to be positive. This result serves as an important foundation for examining the relationship between Perceived Value, Purchase Intention, and Customer Engagement.

Second, the Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) variable has a mean score of 4.10, indicating that interactions, recommendations, and reviews from online communities, social media, or fellow players are considered relevant and influential by respondents. With a standard deviation of 1.12, perceptions of e-WOM appear relatively homogeneous. This trend suggests that digital communities play a significant role in shaping user perceptions and motivations, especially among digitally oriented generations such as Generation Z.

Third, the Purchase Intention variable has a mean score of 3.90, indicating that respondents have a relatively strong intention to purchase in-app items. A higher standard deviation of 1.44 reflects greater variability in purchase intention compared to the other variables, which may be attributable to differences in user preferences, financial capacity, or gameplay strategies. This mean value is important for examining the mediating role of Purchase Intention within the research model.

Fourth, the Customer Engagement variable has a mean score of 4.04, indicating that users demonstrate high levels of engagement with the application, reflected through active gameplay, interaction with game features, and involvement in gaming communities. The standard deviation of 1.53 indicates notable variation in engagement levels; however, the overall tendency remains high.

In summary, the high average scores across all variables demonstrate that respondents exhibit strong perceived value, e-WOM influence, purchase intention, and engagement levels. These descriptive findings provide a solid basis for proceeding to the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument before advancing to the structural model analysis.

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The measurement model evaluation was conducted to ensure that each latent construct in this study—perceived value, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), purchase intention, and customer engagement—is measured validly and reliably by its respective indicators. All constructs in this research are modeled reflectively; therefore, the evaluation includes convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity assesses the extent to which indicators that reflect the same latent construct exhibit high correlations. This evaluation uses loading factors and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

In general, indicators demonstrate good convergent validity when their loading factors exceed 0.70 and AVE values are greater than 0.50.

A summary of the loading factors, AVE, Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Convergent Validity and Construct Reliability Results

Variable	Indicator	Loading Factor	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Value	PV1	0.748	0.604	0.859	0.781
	PV2	0.760			
	PV3	0.808			
	PV4	0.790			
Electronic Word of Mouth	EWOM1	0.752	0.620	0.867	0.796
	EWOM2	0.808			
	EWOM3	0.774			
	EWOM4	0.814			
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.839	0.553	0.831	0.727
	PI2	0.663			
	PI3	0.730			
	PI4	0.731			
Customer Engagement	CE1	0.770	0.530	0.849	0.778
	CE2	0.748			
	CE3	0.692			
	CE4	0.755			
	CE5	0.671			

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025

Overall, all indicators have loading factors above 0.663. Although several indicators have values slightly below the ideal threshold of 0.70 (e.g., PI2 and CE5), such values remain acceptable during the early stages of scale development as long as the corresponding construct's AVE value exceeds 0.50. In this study, all constructs recorded AVE values above 0.50 (Perceived Value = 0.604; e-WOM = 0.620; Purchase Intention = 0.553; Customer Engagement = 0.530).

Thus, all indicators meet the convergent validity criteria, and none require elimination, as no loading factor falls below 0.50.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity evaluates the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs. This assessment uses the Fornell–Larcker criterion, which compares the square root of the AVE ($\sqrt{AVE}$) on the diagonal with correlations among constructs in the same row or column. A construct satisfies discriminant validity when the $\sqrt{AVE}$ value is greater than its correlations with other constructs.

Table 4. Construct Correlations and Square Root of AVE (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Variable	Perceived Value	Electronic Word of Mouth	Purchase Intention	Customer Engagement
Perceived Value	0.777	0.657	0.766	0.692
Electronic Word of Mouth	0.657	0.788	0.620	0.610
Purchase Intention	0.766	0.620	0.744	0.618
Customer Engagement	0.692	0.610	0.618	0.728

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025

Table 4 demonstrates that the diagonal values ($\sqrt{AVE}$) for each construct exceed the correlations with all other constructs, confirming that the Fornell–Larcker criterion is fully satisfied. First, for the Electronic Word of Mouth construct, the $\sqrt{AVE}$ value of 0.788 is higher than its correlations with Perceived Value (0.657), Purchase Intention (0.620), and Customer Engagement (0.610). Second, for the Customer Engagement construct, the $\sqrt{AVE}$ value of 0.728 also surpasses its correlations with Perceived Value (0.692), e-WOM (0.610), and Purchase Intention (0.618). Taken together, these results indicate that each construct possesses adequate discriminant validity and is empirically distinct from the others within the structural model

These results confirm that each construct holds a distinct empirical identity and that no excessive overlap occurs among the constructs. Therefore, the discriminant validity criteria are fully satisfied.

Construct Reliability

Construct reliability was assessed using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha, with both indicators required to exceed the threshold value of 0.70. As presented in Table 3, all constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability: Perceived Value (CR = 0.859; α = 0.781), Electronic Word of Mouth (CR = 0.867; α = 0.796), Purchase Intention (CR = 0.831; α = 0.727), and Customer Engagement (CR = 0.849; α = 0.778). Since all CR and Cronbach's Alpha values are above 0.70, the results confirm strong internal consistency across all constructs, indicating that the indicators associated with each latent variable are stable, coherent, and reliable for subsequent structural analysis.

The WarpPLS output also provides indicator weights, which illustrate the relative contribution of each indicator to its corresponding latent construct. Several indicators demonstrate notably strong contributions, including X1.3 for Perceived Value, X2.4 for Electronic Word of Mouth, M.1 for Purchase Intention, and Y.1 for Customer Engagement. These indicators carry the highest weights within their respective constructs, suggesting that they play a dominant role in capturing the underlying dimensions of each variable and therefore contribute substantially to the formation of the latent variable scores in the model.

These findings indicate that certain indicators—such as X1.3 for perceived value and X2.4 for e-WOM—play dominant roles in explaining their respective constructs. This insight is valuable for refining future measurement instruments, particularly by prioritizing indicators with stronger weights and loadings.

Based on the above results, the measurement instrument in this study is valid and reliable across all dimensions: convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. Therefore, the analysis

can proceed to the next stage—structural model evaluation (inner model)—to examine the causal relationships among latent variables and determine how strongly the exogenous variables explain the variation in the endogenous constructs.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

The structural model evaluation was conducted to assess the relationships among the latent variables and to determine the extent to which the exogenous variables explain the endogenous constructs. This evaluation includes the analysis of the Goodness of Fit (GoF) and the R-squared values, following the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach using WarpPLS 7.0.

Goodness of Fit (GoF)

The Goodness of Fit assesses how well the overall model satisfies established criteria for structural adequacy. WarpPLS provides several model fit and quality indices based on the guidelines proposed by Kock (2020), including the Average Path Coefficient (APC), Average R-squared (ARS), Average Adjusted R-squared (AARS), Average Block VIF (AVIF), Average Full Collinearity VIF (AFVIF), Tenenhaus GoF, and other diagnostic ratios such as SPR, RSCR, SSR, and NLBCDR.

The complete model fit results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Model Goodness of Fit

No	Model Fit & Quality Indices	Criterion	Analysis Result	Interpretation
1	Average path coefficient (APC)	p < 0.001	0.338	Positive & significant
2	Average R-squared (ARS)	p < 0.001	0.591	Meets criteria
3	Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)	p < 0.001	0.584	Good
4	Average block VIF (AVIF)	≤ 5 (ideal ≤ 3.3)	2.126	Acceptable
5	Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	≤ 5 (ideal ≤ 3.3)	2.472	Ideal
6	Tenenhaus GoF	≥ 0.36 (large)	0.584	Good & significant
7	Sympson's paradox ratio (SPR)	≥ 0.7	1.000	Ideal
8	R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)	≥ 0.9	1.000	Ideal
9	Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)	≥ 0.7	1.000	Acceptable
10	NLBCDR	≥ 0.7	1.000	Acceptable

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025

The results in Table 7 indicate that all Goodness of Fit indices meet or exceed the thresholds recommended by Kock (2020). The significant APC value (p < 0.001) demonstrates that the relationships

among the variables possess substantial explanatory power. The significant ARS and AARS values imply that the model adequately explains the variance in the endogenous variables.

The AVIF and AFVIF values, which fall well below the maximum permissible threshold (≤ 5), indicate the absence of multicollinearity among constructs. Meanwhile, the Tenenhaus GoF value of 0.584 falls within the "large" category, confirming a strong overall model fit. Additional fit indices—SPR, SSR, RSCR, and NLBCDR—all achieve the ideal score of 1.000, further reinforcing the conclusion that the structural model exhibits excellent fit and stability.

Accordingly, the structural model meets all the required criteria and is deemed appropriate for hypothesis testing.

R-Squared Values

The R-squared values were used to assess the model's predictive power for the endogenous variables. This study includes two endogenous constructs: Purchase Intention (M) and Customer Engagement (Y). Table 6 presents the R-squared results.

Table 6. R-Squared Values of Endogenous Constructs

Variable	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Purchase Intention	0.639	0.634
Customer Engagement	0.542	0.534

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025

The R-squared value for Purchase Intention is 0.639, indicating that perceived value and electronic word of mouth explain 63.9% of the variance in players' purchase intentions. Following Ghozali's (2015) classification, this value falls within the "strong" category, confirming the substantial influence of the exogenous variables on the formation of purchase intention.

Meanwhile, the R-squared value for Customer Engagement is 0.542, demonstrating that perceived value, e-WOM, and purchase intention collectively explain 54.2% of the variance in customer engagement. According to Ghozali's (2015) criteria, this value is considered "moderate," suggesting that the exogenous variables exert considerable influence on Genshin Impact players' engagement levels.

Overall, the R-squared values illustrate that the research model successfully explains a substantial proportion of behavioral variation among Generation Z users in the context of digital game applications, both in terms of purchase intention and customer engagement.

Having established model adequacy and the predictive strength of the endogenous constructs, the analysis proceeds to hypothesis testing to examine the direct and indirect effects among the latent variables in accordance with the research model.

Hypothesis Testing (Path Coefficients)

Hypothesis testing was conducted to evaluate the direct effects among the latent variables in the research model. The analysis employed the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach using WarpPLS 7.0. The results were assessed based on the magnitude of the path coefficients (β), the significance levels (p-values), and the direction of the relationships among the variables.

A summary of the direct effects between the exogenous and endogenous variables is presented in Table 8. All paths were tested at a 5% significance level.

Table 8. Direct Effects Results

Variable Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	p-Value	Result
Perceived Value → Purchase Intention	0.479	<0.001	Significant
e-WOM → Purchase Intention	0.326	<0.001	Significant
Perceived Value → Customer Engagement	0.427	<0.001	Significant
e-WOM → Customer Engagement	0.230	<0.001	Significant
Purchase Intention → Customer Engagement	0.159	0.017	Significant

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025

The results show that all direct relationships in the model are positive and statistically significant, indicating that increases in the exogenous variables contribute to increases in the corresponding endogenous variables.

First, the effect of Perceived Value on Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.479$; $p < 0.001$) demonstrates that the higher the value perceived by users—whether functional, emotional, or symbolic—the stronger their intention to make in-game purchases.

Second, the effect of e-WOM on Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.326$; $p < 0.001$) indicates that positive reviews, recommendations, and information shared through community platforms or social media significantly enhance the purchase intentions of Generation Z users.

Third, the effect of Perceived Value on Customer Engagement ($\beta = 0.427$; $p < 0.001$) suggests that users who perceive strong value from the application exhibit higher levels of engagement, reflected in behaviors such as participation in events, feature exploration, and interaction with game content.

Fourth, the effect of e-WOM on Customer Engagement ($\beta = 0.230$; $p < 0.001$) confirms that exposure to credible and positive information in digital communities strengthens user engagement by fostering emotional connection and encouraging active involvement within the application ecosystem.

Fifth, the effect of Purchase Intention on Customer Engagement ($\beta = 0.159$; $p = 0.017$) shows that although the effect size is smaller than the other paths, it remains statistically significant. Users with stronger purchase intentions tend to exhibit higher levels of engagement.

Overall, the results reveal several important patterns. First, Perceived Value and e-WOM are significant predictors of both purchase intention and customer engagement, indicating that value perceptions and community-driven information play a central role in shaping user behavior. Second, Purchase Intention itself exerts a significant and positive influence on Customer Engagement, demonstrating that users who intend to make in-app purchases tend to be more deeply involved in the game ecosystem. Finally, all relationships tested in the model are positive and statistically significant, thereby supporting the theoretical arguments and confirming the initial hypotheses of the study. Collectively, these findings reinforce the validity of the proposed conceptual model and provide a strong foundation for examining the indirect (mediated) effects discussed in the subsequent section.

Mediation Effect Testing

Mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether purchase intention functions as an intervening variable that bridges the influence of perceived value and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM)

on customer engagement. The analysis was performed by assessing the indirect effects, the significance levels (p-values), and the comparison between indirect and direct effects.

The complete results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Mediation Effect Results

Mediated Relationship	Indirect Effect	p-Value	Result
Perceived Value → Purchase Intention → Customer Engagement	0.091	0.041	Significant
e-WOM → Purchase Intention → Customer Engagement	0.047	0.190	Not Significant

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025

The results show that purchase intention acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between perceived value and customer engagement. The indirect effect of 0.091 with a p-value of 0.041 indicates that the mediation effect is statistically significant at the 5% level. When compared with the significant direct effect (β = 0.427; p < 0.001), both pathways—direct and mediated—contribute to the increase in customer engagement. This finding suggests that a high perceived value of the application, such as gameplay quality, utilitarian benefits, or emotional satisfaction, not only enhances direct engagement but also strengthens purchase intention, which subsequently contributes to greater involvement in the application ecosystem. Thus, purchase intention partially and significantly mediates the influence of perceived value on customer engagement.

The mediation analysis between e-WOM and customer engagement reveals that purchase intention does not function as a mediator. The indirect effect of 0.047 with a p-value of 0.190 indicates a statistically insignificant mediation effect. In contrast, the direct effect of e-WOM on customer engagement remains significant (β = 0.230; p < 0.001), meaning that e-WOM influences engagement directly without involving purchase intention as an intermediary. This condition reflects a direct-only non-mediation pattern, in which the mediator does not contribute to explaining the relationship between the exogenous and endogenous variables.

Theoretically, this finding suggests that recommendations, reviews, or discussions within online communities enhance user engagement more effectively through direct social influence rather than through the formation of purchase intention. Information obtained from digital communities can strengthen trust, a sense of belonging, and emotional closeness to the application, yet it does not sufficiently motivate users to initiate purchase decisions as part of an indirect pathway. Therefore, purchase intention does not mediate the relationship between e-WOM and customer engagement, indicating that user engagement is more strongly influenced by social and affective dynamics than by purchase-related motives.

Overall, the mediation analysis demonstrates that the mechanisms of influence among variables in the research model are not homogeneous. In the relationship between perceived value and customer engagement, purchase intention plays a significant mediating role with partial mediation characteristics. This means that perceived value affects engagement both directly and indirectly through an increase in purchase intention. Conversely, in the relationship between e-WOM and customer engagement, purchase intention does not provide a mediating effect, and the influence of e-WOM operates solely through the

direct pathway. This finding indicates that digital community dynamics and the intensity of social interaction play a more prominent role in driving user engagement than their influence on purchase decisions. Therefore, perceived value follows a dual-path mechanism, whereas e-WOM influences engagement exclusively through the direct path.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that perceived value and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) significantly influence customer engagement among Generation Z users of the Genshin Impact application. In addition, purchase intention partially mediates the relationship between perceived value and customer engagement but does not mediate the relationship between e-WOM and customer engagement. These results indicate that user engagement is shaped by both perceived value and digital community dynamics, although the mechanisms through which these two exogenous variables operate differ.

The significant effect of perceived value on customer engagement can be explained by consumer value theory, which posits that experiences providing functional, hedonic, and symbolic benefits strengthen users' attachment to digital products. In the context of Genshin Impact, perceived value is not limited to gameplay quality but also involves emotional experiences, character aesthetics, and psychological satisfaction derived from in-game achievements. This explains why users who perceive higher value tend to be more engaged and more willing to allocate spending for in-app purchases.

Meanwhile, the significant influence of e-WOM on customer engagement reflects the central role of digital communities in shaping user perceptions, preferences, and participation. Information shared through social media, gaming forums, and content creators strongly affects how Generation Z connects with digital products. However, such information does not always lead to increased purchase intention; instead, e-WOM primarily strengthens social and emotional engagement directly, which explains why purchase intention does not serve as a mediator.

The findings are consistent with a wide range of previous studies on consumer behavior within digital ecosystems. First, the role of perceived value as a key driver of purchase intention and user engagement aligns with the results of Yu and Zheng (2022) and Srivastava and Sivaramakrishnan (2021). These studies emphasize that functional, emotional, and symbolic value in digital products forms the foundation of consumption decisions. In the context of gaming applications, perceptions of gameplay experience, aesthetic satisfaction, and utilitarian benefits significantly increase users' desire to return and participate within the product ecosystem. This indicates that perceived value is not merely an evaluative factor but a psychological mechanism that sustains long-term engagement.

Second, the significant impact of e-WOM on customer engagement is consistent with the studies of Tene et al. (2024) and Ismagilova et al. (2017). These studies show that digital social interactions—such as reviews, recommendations, and conversations among users—serve as an important source of legitimacy that shapes consumer perceptions and loyalty. Among Generation Z, digital information circulating within online communities becomes a key reference for building trust, a sense of belonging, and emotional closeness to applications such as Genshin Impact. Thus, the strong engagement effect of e-WOM in this study reinforces the understanding that digital community dynamics have become a central social variable in digital product consumption.

Third, the positive relationship between purchase intention and customer engagement aligns with the results of Keni et al. (2024), which highlight the role of purchase intention as a bridge between users' perceptions and their continued engagement with the application. These findings show that in-app purchase intention is not merely an indicator of consumptive behavior but an integral component of users'

psychological attachment and interaction with application features. Similar patterns appear in other international studies, such as Habib et al. (2022) on digital marketing within OTT platforms, Bilal et al. (2024) through affective attachment, Ao et al. (2023) in their meta-analysis on influencer effects, and Zheng et al. (2022), who demonstrate how engagement drives purchase intention in live-streaming commerce. Collectively, these studies show that the engagement–intention relationship represents a universal pattern across digital platforms involving continuous interaction.

Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies in its simultaneous integration of perceived value, e-WOM, purchase intention, and customer engagement within a single comprehensive model, specifically in the context of Genshin Impact users in Indonesia. Unlike previous studies that typically examine variables in isolation or focus on different contexts, this study reveals dual mechanisms between exogenous and endogenous variables, including the differing mediation patterns of perceived value and e-WOM. Understanding these variations provides theoretical contributions to digital consumer behavior literature and offers important insights into how personal value factors and community-driven social dynamics shape Generation Z's engagement.

The findings of this study can be interpreted through historical, social, and ideological perspectives. Historically, the evolution of the digital gaming industry marks a transformation in consumer behavior from physical product consumption to experience-based consumption. Generation Z grew up in a digital environment that accustomed them to evaluating products not only through utilitarian functions but also through the holistic experiences they provide—such as immersion, aesthetics, social interaction, and virtual ownership. This shift aligns with the literature on experience-based digital consumption, which shows that digital consumption now focuses on access, personalization, and immersive experiences facilitated by digital technologies (Festila & Müller, 2017; Molesworth & Denegri-Knott, 2013). Related studies indicate that digital experience increasingly drives new forms of consumption, such as media streaming and digital content, which have become part of everyday user lifestyles, even in regions previously affected by the digital divide (Seshagiri & Blom, 2010). Furthermore, technological developments such as AI, AR, and VR intensify the demand for personalized and interactive digital experiences (Bindlish et al., 2025), while widespread smartphone and app usage accelerates the shift toward everyday experience-based media consumption (Al-Zoubi, 2024). Digital cultural consumption, such as the use of Instagram to access trap music culture, also shows that digital platforms democratize cultural access and expand the meaning of consumption through aspects of social identity (Małecka et al., 2022). Similarly, engagement within digital spaces is shaped by symbolic value and the experiences derived from social network interactions (Cortés-Ramos et al., 2021). These findings reinforce the historical trajectory: engagement among Genshin Impact players is no longer driven solely by gameplay but also by social experiences, digital collections, character aesthetics, and narrative immersion that foster a sense of belonging within the community—key characteristics of experience-based digital consumption in the contemporary digital era.

Socially, the direct influence of e-WOM observed in this study demonstrates the central role of digital communities in shaping identity, preferences, and a sense of belonging among Generation Z. This pattern aligns with research on digital social influence, which emphasizes that interactions among users, the credibility of digital figures, and user-generated content form a new trust ecosystem in digital environments. Generation Z tends to rely on peer-generated information because authentic experiences—through reviews, recommendations, and community interactions—are perceived as more credible than corporate promotions. This trend is supported by research on influencer characteristics such as social attractiveness, perceived expertise, and parasocial relationships, all of which strengthen digital persuasion

(Pereira et al., 2023; Santiago & Serralha, 2022). Moreover, influencer content strategies that reduce social risks and build consumer trust have been shown to increase consumer responses and purchase intention in various digital sectors (Koutsogiannopoulou et al., 2025; Sarkis et al., 2025). Forms of social power held by influencers—from referent to informational power—also contribute to increased consumer participation and engagement on digital platforms (Wang & Huang, 2023), while traits such as trustworthiness and authentic endorsements influence purchase intentions, especially among Generation Z (Mubin & Tiantian, 2024). Even the presence of AI-powered tools on social media enhances users' capacity to influence one another and create increasingly personalized digital experiences (Rathee, 2025; Shafik, 2024). Thus, the findings of this study illustrate that legitimacy surrounding a product among Generation Z is constructed more through collective interactions and digital social influence than through corporate authority, positioning digital communities as a new social arena that shapes meaning, reputation, and value.

Ideologically, value and engagement in digital games reflect the logic of contemporary capitalism, which centers on immersion, continuous engagement, and experience-based monetization. This framework aligns with the characteristics of digital capitalism, in which digital technologies create new commercial spaces while shaping social relations, representational structures, and consumption practices through mechanisms of surveillance, commodification of experience, and intensified user engagement (Grimshaw, 2017; Topçu, 2024). The findings of this study indicate that although perceived value reinforces engagement and consumption, not all experiences translate into financial transactions. e-WOM, for instance, functions more as a social connector that constructs product legitimacy through collective interaction rather than directly driving purchase behavior. This dynamic reflects the nature of digital capitalism, in which value production shifts from traditional economic activities to forms of cognitive labor and user participation, making digital communities ideological spaces where social, symbolic, and collective identities are negotiated (Boucas, 2020; Negri, 2024). Therefore, the gaming industry has become part of the broader configuration of digital capitalism, which not only pursues monetization but also organizes user experiences, emotions, and social relations as sources of new value within digital ecosystems.

These findings generate several positive functions for companies and game developers. Specifically, the results enhance understanding of the factors that shape customer engagement, particularly how perceived value and e-WOM influence engagement both directly and indirectly. This insight allows developers to design more effective strategies to enhance user experience, whether through gameplay quality, reward system design, or social interaction features within the application. Furthermore, the findings reaffirm that emotional and social values contribute substantially to long-term retention, enabling companies to strengthen emotional bonds between players and the application through narratives, characters, or features that support long-term engagement.

However, the findings also reveal several dysfunctions, particularly concerning the ethics of digital game monetization. Heavy reliance on digital community dynamics may lead to rapid and unstable shifts in sentiment, while the ability of perceived value to increase engagement may also encourage unhealthy consumptive behavior—especially in freemium models with microtransactions that often employ psychological mechanisms to stimulate spending (Karlsen, 2022; King & Delfabbro, 2019). Monetization practices such as loot boxes have been compared to gambling due to their randomness, addictive potential, and financial risks, especially for vulnerable players including adolescents (Fitton et al., 2024; Harvey, 2021). Additionally, perceptions of unfairness arising from pay-to-win models can damage user experience and generate negative reviews (Freeman et al., 2022), consistent with the finding that premium

players often enjoy advantages inaccessible to non-premium users, thereby increasing inequality and threatening inclusivity within the game ecosystem. Design practices that exploit psychological vulnerabilities also raise ethical dilemmas, as techniques such as dark patterns or manipulation of probabilities may be viewed as exploitative when lacking transparency (Bergström et al., 2024). In light of these challenges, the literature highlights the need for industry regulation and self-regulation to mitigate social and financial risks for players, including improving transparency, enhancing consumer protection, and adopting ethical principles in monetization design (Denoo & Petrovskaya, 2025). Thus, beyond being a commercial space, the digital gaming industry introduces ethical risks that require developers and regulators to balance profitability with player well-being.

Based on the identified dysfunctions, a set of strategic action plans is needed to mitigate social and ethical risks associated with monetization practices and community dynamics in digital games. One important step is to design engagement systems that do not rely solely on financial transactions. Developers should create alternative engagement spaces, such as free events, daily rewards, collaborative missions, or non-paid social features that offer meaningful experiences without pressuring players to make purchases. This approach not only reduces experiential inequality between premium and non-premium players but also lessens the psychological burden often associated with microtransaction-based games. Additionally, given the significant influence of digital communities on engagement, maintaining community stability requires more active community management, including consistent moderation, digital literacy campaigns, and reputation mechanisms to prevent misinformation, conflict, or negative sentiment that may affect perceived game value. Developers should also expand non-transactional participation opportunities by introducing open exploration modes, cooperative gameplay, or community activities that strengthen social ties without emphasizing purchases. Furthermore, to reduce risks of consumptive behavior and impulsive spending—a major dysfunction identified—developers can implement monthly spending limits, transparent item probability disclosures, or provide light financial education on managing digital expenditures within the game. If implemented consistently, these action plans provide solutions to the identified dysfunctions and contribute to building a more ethical, inclusive, and healthy gaming ecosystem for Generation Z, who are among the most affected by contemporary digital monetization practices.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that perceived value and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) play essential roles in shaping customer engagement among Generation Z users of the Genshin Impact application. Perceived value exerts a strong direct influence on user engagement while also affecting purchase intention, which subsequently reinforces that engagement. Meanwhile, e-WOM directly influences engagement but does not operate through the mediating mechanism of purchase intention. These findings indicate the presence of two distinct pathways through which engagement is formed: an evaluative pathway driven by perceived value and a social pathway shaped by digital community dynamics. Accordingly, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and social mechanisms that underpin consumer behavior and player engagement within digital gaming ecosystems.

Scientifically, this study offers an important contribution to the development of digital consumer-behavior research by integrating four key variables—perceived value, e-WOM, purchase intention, and customer engagement—into a single, cohesive structural model. The study introduces new insights into the differential mechanisms through which the two exogenous variables exert their influence and provides empirical evidence that customer engagement in gaming applications is shaped not only by product-

related value but also by social interaction dynamics within digital communities. These findings align with the evolution of engagement theory in digital contexts and extend academic discourse on how younger generations consume, evaluate, and engage with experience-based digital products.

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges several limitations. First, the use of purposive sampling restricts the representativeness of the findings, limiting their generalizability to the broader population of digital game players. Second, all variables were measured using self-reported data, which may be subject to perceptual biases. Third, the study focuses on a single gaming application and one generational cohort, implying that the contextual dynamics may differ when applied to other platforms or age groups. Future research is therefore encouraged to employ more diverse sampling methods, incorporate moderating variables such as gamification loyalty or social identity, and extend the analysis across different types of games or digital platforms to generate a more comprehensive understanding of user engagement dynamics in digital.

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