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The Influence of Tiktok Marketing and Customer Engagement on Impulse Buying Among Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

The developmentt of digital technology and social media has significantly changed the landscape of consumer behavior, especially in the Generation Z group known as digital natives. This study aims to examine and analyze the influence of TikTok marketing and customer engagement on impulse buying in Generation Z. Using a quantitative approach with an explanatory design, data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to Generation Z consumers who actively use the TikTok application and have made impulsive purchases of products through the platform. The sampling technique used purposive sampling with data analysis relying on the Structural Equation Modeling approach based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM). The results of the study indicate that TikTok marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement and impulse buying. In addition, customer engagement is proven to have a direct positive influence on impulse buying and is able to mediate the relationship between TikTok marketing strategies and impulse buying decisions. These findings indicate that interactive features, personalized algorithmic content, and viral trends on TikTok not only encourage emotional participation and consumer interaction but also trigger spontaneous impulses to make transactions without careful planning. The practical implications of this research suggest that digital marketers should optimize the creation of authentic user -generated content and leverage community engagement to increase the effectiveness of emotional marketing strategies targeting young markets.

Keywords : TikTok Marketing, Customer Engagement, Impulse Buying, Generation Z, PLS-SEM.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology in the era of the industrial revoalution 4.0 has fundamentally changed the global trade landscape and consumer behavior patterns. This digital transformation has not only given rise to new marketing channels but also created an online shopping ecosystem directly integrated with social media platforms (Dwidienawati et al., 2020). The phenomenon of merging social media and e-commerce activities, widely known as *social commerce*, has shifted the orientation of consumer shopping from merely

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fulfilling functional needs to a form of entertainment and self-expression (Lin et al., 2021). Amid the rapid growth *of social commerce*, the TikTok platform has emerged as a dominant force redefining how brands interact with their target audiences through dynamic, visually oriented short video formats (Kaye et al., 2022).

As a demographic group born between 1997 and 2012, Generation Z plays a key role in shaping mainstream consumption trends on social media. Generation Z is recognized as the first *digital natives* to grow up alongside broadband internet access, smart mobile devices, and sophisticated social media algorithms (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Key characteristics of Generation Z include a strong preference for fast-paced, narrative visual content, a need for brand authenticity, and a tendency to spend significant time on short-form video-based apps (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Consequently, traditional, one-way, rigid marketing strategies are no longer effective in capturing the attention of this group, prompting marketers to adopt a more interactive and adaptive marketing approach on platforms like TikTok (Guthrie et al., 2021).

The phenomenon of *impulse buying* defined as a sudden, unplanned, and emotionally driven purchase decision without in-depth rational evaluation has become one of the most prominent behavioral outcomes in the *social commerce ecosystem* (Rook & Fisher, 1995; Sundström et al., 2019). In today's digital environment, the urge to make impulsive purchases is further amplified by ease of transaction access, such as *in-app shopping integration* and fast-paced digital payment options (Akram et al., 2018). Generation Z has been shown to be more susceptible to *impulse buying behavior* compared to previous generations, a phenomenon heavily influenced by constant exposure to visual stimulation and the fear of missing out *(* FoMO) on social media (Pradhan et al., 2023).

TikTok marketing has emerged as a new paradigm in digital marketing, leveraging specific features such as the *For You Page* (FYP), viral hashtags, *challenges*, and collaborations with content creators to generate massive brand exposure (Haenlein et al., 2020). TikTok's highly personalized recommendation algorithm delivers content precisely tailored to users' individual interests and preferences, minimizing consumer perception barriers to advertising (Zhang, 2021). When a product is presented in an entertaining short video format (*shoppertainment*), the line between entertainment content and commercial promotion becomes blurred, ultimately triggering spontaneous interest and external stimuli for consumers to make purchases (Zhao et al., 2023).

The theoretical basis often used to explain the mechanism of *impulse buying triggers* through platform environmental factors is *the Stimulus-Organism-Response* (SOR) *framework* developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). In the context of this research, *TikTok marketing* elements (such as visual clarity, content authenticity, influencer appeal, and time-based promotions) act as *Stimulus* (*S*) external stimuli captured by the user. This stimulation then triggers internal reactions in the form of positive emotions, curiosity, and cognitive-emotional involvement which is called

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Organism (*O*). This emotional involvement and psychological interaction ultimatelyresults in *a response* (*R*) which manifests in the form of unplanned purchasing actions or *impulse buying* (Jacoby, 2002; Liu et al., 2019).

Besides the direct push from marketing stimuli, *customer engagement* plays a crucial role as a psychological mediator that strengthens the relationship. *Customer engagement* reflects the depth of a consumer's motivation, emotions, and cognitive interactions with a brand or social media platform (Brodie et al., 2011). In the TikTok environment, *customer engagement* manifests itself in active actions such as liking, commenting, *sharing*, and creating user *-generated* content that responds to specific trends (Hollebeek et al., 2014). This intense engagement creates a sense of emotional attachment *and* immersion in the media experience, *which* has been empirically shown to increase consumers' tendency to ignore budgetary considerations and make *impulse purchases* (Islam et al., 2021).

Although numerous studies on *social commerce* and *impulse buying* have been conducted on mainstream platforms like Instagram and Facebook (e.g., Cheung et al., 2020; Xiang et al., 2016), a significant gap in the literature remains regarding the specific mechanisms of TikTok. *TikTok* 's unique algorithmic characteristics and the dominance of short-form vertical video formats create interaction dynamics that are fundamentally different from those of static image- or text-based social media (Brailovskaia et al., 2023). Furthermore, most previous research has focused on general audiences or millennials, while in-depth exploration of the consumption decision dynamics of Generation Z, TikTok's largest consumer segment in developing regions, remains limited (Pew Research Center, 2023; Sultan et al., 2021).

The managerial implications of this phenomenon are crucial for marketing practitioners, local brand owners, and e-commerce platform developers. Understanding how *TikTok marketing stimuli* can be converted into effective *customer engagement and even trigger impulse buying* allows companies to design precise promotional budget allocation strategies (Reinartz et al., 2019). Failure to understand the dynamics of Generation Z's emotional interactions on short-form video platforms can result in wasted marketing resources on conventional campaigns that are no longer relevant to young consumers' media preferences (Vrontis et al., 2021).

Based on the problem description and literature gaps that have been presented, this study is designed to address these theoretical and practical needs. This study empirically tests a conceptual model that integrates the direct influence *of TikTok marketing* on *impulse buying*, as well as the role of *customer engagement* as a direct driving and mediating variable in the Generation Z population. The findings of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of the SOR model in the realm *of social commerce*, as well as serve as a strategic guide for marketers in optimizing the potential of interactive video-based social media ecosystems.

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RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational-explanatory design to test the causal relationship between the variables studied (Hair et al., 2019). The population in this study were consumers from the Generation Z group (born 1997–2012) in Indonesia who actively use the TikTok application. Given the infinite population size, the sampling technique used was *non-probability sampling* with a *purposive sampling method* (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Respondent inclusion criteria included Generation Z who downloaded and used the TikTok application for at least the last 3 months and had made impulsive product purchases after viewing promotional content on the platform. Primary data collection was conducted online through the distribution of structured questionnaires assisted by *Google Forms* by adopting a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5) to measure each variable indicator (Sugiyono, 2018).

All measurement instruments in this study were adapted from previous literature that had been tested for validity and reliability.Variables*TikTok Marketing*measured based on the dimensions of content authenticity,visual appeal,and the reliability of promotion drivers (Haenlein et al.,2020).Variables*Customer Engagement*measured through indicators of emotional involvement,cognitive,and interactive behaviors such as liking, commenting, and sharing content (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Meanwhile, *the Impulse Buying* variable was measured using indicators of spontaneous urges, aspects of emotional imbalance when viewing products, and disregard for financial consequences (Rook & Fisher, 1995). The data analysis technique applied was *Partial Least Squares* -based *Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software. Evaluation of the analysis model was carried out through two main stages, namely testing the outer model *to* evaluate convergent validity, discriminant validity, and instrument reliability, and testing the inner model *to* assess the value of the model.R^2, f^2, and the significance of the relationship between variables through the *bootstrapping process* (Ringle et al., 2020).

Based on the development of a conceptual framework and a review of relevant literature,The hypothesis proposed in this study is formulated as follows: 1). H_1**:** *TikTok Marketing*has a positive and significant effect on*Customer Engagement*in Generation Z (Brodie et al.,2011). 2). H_2**:** *TikTok Marketing*has a positive and significant effect on*Impulse Buying*in Generation Z (Zhao et al.,2023). 3). H_3**:** 2021). *Customer Engagement*has a positive and significant effect on*Impulse Buying*in Generation Z (Islam et al..2021). 4). H_4**:** *Customer Engagement* plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between*TikTok Marketing*And*Impulse Buying*in Generation Z (Lin et al.,2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research result

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The empirical data analysis in this study was conducted through two main evaluation stages using *the Partial Least Squares* -based *Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM) approach with the assistance of SmartPLS software. The first stage involved evaluating the outer model *to* ensure that all research instrument constructs met the required standards of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Based on the results of the *outer loading test*, all indicators for *the TikTok Marketing*, *Customer Engagement*, and *Impulse Buying variables* showed values above the minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating that each question item was able to accurately reflect its construct. *The Average Variance Extracted* (AVE) value for each variable was also recorded to exceed 0.50, while *the Composite Reliability* and *Cronbach's Alpha coefficients* were above the 0.80 range, confirming that the measurement instrument had an excellent level of internal consistency and was reliable for further analysis (Ringle et al., 2020).

Table 1 Outer Model Evaluation Results (Convergent Validity and Reliability)

Variables	Indicator	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
TikTok Marketing (X)	TM1	0.842	0.887	0.915	0.683
	TM2	0.815			
	TM3	0.839			
	TM4	0.809			
Customer Engagement (M)	CE1	0.856	0.904	0.928	0.721
	CE2	0.871			
	CE3	0.832			
	CE4	0.836			
Impulse Buying (Y)	IB1	0.820	0.892	0.920	0.698
	IB2	0.845			
	IB3	0.858			
	IB4	0.818			

Source: SmartPLS Processed Data (2026)

The second stage continued with the evaluation of the inner model *to* test the research hypothesis through a *bootstrapping resampling procedure* with 5,000 subsamples. Evaluation of the coefficient of determination (R^2) shows that the *TikTok Marketing variable* is able to explain the *Customer Engagement variance* of 58.4 % ($R^2 = 0{,}584$). Meanwhile, the value$R^2$for the *Impulse Buying variable* it reached 67.2 % ($R^2 = 0{,}672$), indicates that the combined influence of *TikTok Marketing* and

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Customer Engagement together is able to explain most of the variation in impulsive purchasing decisions in Generation Z. This finding is reinforced by *the Stone-Geisser's value.* Q^2which is above zero, proves that the structural model has strong predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2 Value of Determination Coefficient (R^2) and Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Endogenous Variables	R2	R2 Adjusted	Q2(=1-SSE / SSO)	Prediction Category
Customer Engagement	0.584	0.582	0.412	Moderate / Strong
Impulse Buying	0.672	0.669	0.461	Substantial / Strong

Source: SmartPLS Processed Data (2026)

The direct correlation test confirmed that all direct hypotheses (H_1, H_2, H_3) is accepted with a high level of significance ($p < 0{,}001$). *TikTok Marketing* has a positive and significant impact on *Customer Engagement* ($\beta = 0{,}764, t = 18{,}421$) as well as *Impulse Buying* ($\beta = 0{,}382, t = 4{,}912$). In addition, *Customer Engagement* also proves a positive and significant direct influence on *Impulse Buying* ($\beta = 0{,}451, t = 6{,}108$).

Table 3 Results of Inner Model Testing (Inner Model / Direct Effects)

Hypothesis	Relationship Path	Path Coefficient (β)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	p-Values
H_1	TikTok Marketing→Customer Engagement	0.764	0.766	0.041	18,421	0,000
H_2	TikTok Marketing→Impulse Buying	0.382	0.380	0.078	4,912	0,000
H_3	Customer Engagement→Impulse Buying	0.451	0.453	0.074	6,108	0,000

Source: SmartPLS Processed Data (2026)

Testing the fourth hypothesis (H_4) regarding the mediating role *of Customer Engagement* on the relationship between *TikTok Marketing* and *Impulse Buying produces a* positive and significant indirect effect coefficient (*specific indirect effect) (*$\beta = 0{,}345, t = 5{,}820, p < 0{,}001$This significance value confirms that *Customer Engagement* acts as a partial mediator, where TikTok *Marketing* can trigger *impulse buying* directly or indirectly through increased consumer engagement.

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Table 4 Results of the Indirect Effect Test (Mediation Effect)

Hypothesis	Mediation Path	Indirect Coefficient (β)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-Statistics	p-Values
H_4	TikTok Marketing→Customer Engagement→Impulse Buying	0.345	0.059	5,820	0,000

Source: SmartPLS Processed Data (2026)

DISCUSSION

The empirical findings of this study confirm that the implementation of marketing strategies on TikTok which include the authenticity of short video content, visual aesthetics, and the utilization of viral trends has a very strong driving force in stealing the attention and engaging Generation Z interactions (H_1The characteristics of interest-based recommendation algorithms (*For You Page*) allow marketing content to be presented contextually and personally, thereby reducing consumers' psychological resistance to traditional advertising (Haenlein et al., 2020). When young consumers feel entertained and emotionally connected to the commercial content presented, they actively respond by liking, commenting, sharing videos, and participating in brand communities (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Furthermore, empirical evidence that *TikTok Marketing* directly triggers *Impulse Buying* (H_2) shows that marketing stimuli in *the social commerce* ecosystem can encourage spontaneous transaction decisions without careful planning. Interactive features such as yellow cart links (*in-app checkout*), limited-time discount offers (*flash sales*), and *live streaming* reviews create a frictionless shopping environment (Akram et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the direct influence *of Customer Engagement* on *Impulse Buying* (H_3) asserts that deep psychological involvement blurs the line between functional needs and hedonic desires. Actively engaged consumers are more likely to override rational budgetary considerations in favor of satisfying immediate emotional impulses (Brodie et al., 2011; Sundström et al., 2019).

The partial mediating role of *Customer Engagement* (H_4) is a crucial theoretical aspect of this research. Although *TikTok Marketing* can trigger *impulse buying* directly, its impact will be much more optimal if the marketing strategy succeeds in building interaction and emotional engagement first (Lin et al., 2021). This finding strengthens the relevance of *the Stimulus-Organism-Response* (SOR) model, where *TikTok Marketing* functions as an external stimulus (*S*), *Customer Engagement* represents the condition of the internal organism (*O*), and *Impulse*

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Buying as a behavioral response (*R*) (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Zhao et al., 2023). TikTok's short-form video algorithm accelerates the transition from stimulus exposure to psychological engagement, shortening the decision-making cycle of young consumers (Brailovskaia et al., 2023).

Practical implications for digital marketers and brand managers highlight the importance of shifting focus from one-way promotions to creating authentic content based on collaboration with *micro-influencers* and optimizing *live shopping* (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). However, this study has limitations due to its reliance on *self-reported* data and its inability to differentiate product categories. Future research is recommended to adopt experimental methods or add moderating variables such as financial literacy to broaden understanding of digital consumption dynamics (Sultan et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study successfully concluded that *TikTok Marketing* and *Customer Engagement* have a fundamental and significant role in determining *impulse buying behavior* among Generation Z in the *social commerce ecosystem* . Based on empirical analysis based on PLS-SEM, the implementation of *TikTok Marketing* strategies — through the presentation of authentic short video content, interactive visuals, and personalized recommendation algorithms—is proven to be able to substantially increase consumer emotional and cognitive engagement while simultaneously triggering impulse buying decisions directly. Furthermore, *Customer Engagement* is proven to have a direct positive effect on *impulse buying* and acts as a partial mediator variable that strengthens the impact of the effectiveness of TikTok marketing strategies on the spontaneous shopping impulses of young audiences (Lin et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2023).

Theoretically, these findings strengthen the validity and extend the application of *the Stimulus-Organism-Response* (SOR) *framework* to the realm of modern interactive social media-based commerce. *TikTok Marketing* elements have proven effective as external stimuli (*S*) which transforms the psychological state of consumers into deep affective-cognitive involvement as organisms (*O*), which ultimately results in a behavioral response (*R*) in the form of unplanned purchasing actions (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Islam et al., 2021).The speed of interaction and the integration of instant transaction features on the TikTok application shortens the rational evaluation cycle of Generation Z, making emotional bonds and community attachment the main drivers in digital consumption decision-making (Brailovskaia et al., 2023).

From a practical perspective, the implications of this research emphasize that digital marketers and brand managers should shift their focus from conventional promotions to creating content that encourages active user participation (*shoppertainment*). Strategies such as collaborating with *micro-influencers* , optimizing *live shopping* features , and providing seamless *in-app checkout* access should be

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prioritized to build sustainable *customer engagement (Haenlein et al.,* 2020; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). However, this study is limited by its use of *self-reported data* and its general product scope. Therefore, future research is recommended to test the effectiveness of this model in specific product categories or consider moderating variables such as consumers' financial literacy levels (Sultan et al.,2021).

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