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The Impact of the Influencer Economy on Gen Z's Impulse Buying Behavior: An Empirical Study Using the SOR Model

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Abstract: To explore the mechanisms by which the influencer economy affects Generation Z's impulse buying behavior, this study, based on the SOR model, surveyed 500 Chinese Gen Z consumers who had made purchases recommended by influencers within the past three months. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), structural equation modeling (SEM), and Bootstrap mediation tests were employed for empirical analysis. The results revealed that influencer traits, content quality, promotional activities, and monetization strategies all had significant positive effects on Gen Z's impulse buying behavior. Perceived value and pleasure played a significant mediating role between these stimuli and impulse buying behavior, demonstrating a "cognitive-affective" dual-pathway mechanism. Specifically, promotional activities stimulated price-sensitive impulses, influencer traits and content quality enhanced emotional motivation, and monetization strategies enhanced perceived value and purchase intention through contextualized placement. This study expanded the application of the SOR model in the context of digital consumption and provided practical references for content creators, brands, and platforms to promote rational consumption among Generation Z.

Keywords: influencer economy;impulse buying behavior;SOR model;Generation Z

Introduce

With the development of new media and digital technologies, consumer decision-making gradually shifted from a traditional "shelf-driven" model centered on product display to a "socially driven" model based on social interaction and emotional connection, thereby making the influencer economy an important form of digital consumption[1]. As digital natives, Generation Z was deeply embedded in the social media ecosystem, and their purchase decisions were more easily influenced by emotional resonance, social identity, and interactive experiences[2]. Influencers therefore gradually evolved into key opinion leaders

who significantly shaped Generation Z's consumption behavior [3].

Existing studies showed that influencer marketing significantly affected consumer attitudes, trust formation, and purchase intentions[4]. However, the literature mainly focused on single factors such as influencer credibility, interactivity, or promotional incentives [5], and lacked a systematic examination of the synergistic mechanisms among influencer traits, content quality, promotional activities, and monetization strategies. Meanwhile, research on impulse buying behavior was still largely grounded in traditional retail or platform-based e-commerce contexts[6], and had not sufficiently explored the interactive mechanisms of emotional immersion and instant decision-making in social media environments.

Based on the stimulus − organism − response (SOR) framework, this study constructed an integrated model incorporating key elements of the influencer economy and examined how influencer traits, content quality, promotional activities, and monetization strategies influenced Generation Z's impulse buying behavior through the dual-path mechanisms of perceived value and pleasure, thereby extending the theoretical applicability of the SOR model in social media consumption contexts.

1. Literature review

1.1. SOR Model

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, proposed by Belk and Russell, explains how external stimuli influence behavioral responses through an individual's psychological and emotional state[7]. In this model, stimulus refers to the external factor that triggers a response, the organism reflects the individual's cognitive and emotional state, and the response is the final behavioral manifestation. In consumer research, studies have shown that in live e-commerce scenarios, the host's atmosphere and interactive experience can promote impulse buying intentions by influencing consumers' psychological state[8].

1.2. Generation Z impulse buying behavior

Impulse buying referred to "unplanned, emotionally driven immediate consumption decisions" and was mainly influenced by marketing stimuli, individual characteristics, and situational factors. Generation Z, driven by the pursuit of instant gratification, emotional experiences, and social recognition, was more prone to engage in impulse buying in immersive shopping environments such as short videos and live-streaming e-commerce[2]. Studies also found that highly interactive content, influencer traits, and promotional activities with social attributes significantly increased this group's purchase intentions[9], and that the quality of brand reputation and the credibility of information on social media platforms played an important role in shaping Generation Z's purchase behavior[10].

1.3. Influencer Economy and Key Variables

The influencer economy is an economic model in which Internet celebrities, relying on their personal influence and fanbase, convert traffic into commercial value[11]. Its development has gone through stages such as blogging, social topic marketing, short videos, and live streaming. Its core characteristics include reliance on personal IP, emphasis on interactivity, and industry chain integration. Existing research shows that the following four types of variables play an important role in the operation of the influencer economy and consumer decision-making:

1.3.1. Influencer traits

The personality, reputation, affinity and professionalism of influencer are important factors that influence consumers' trust and purchasing decisions. Their authenticity and professionalism significantly enhanced fans' trust, thereby increasing purchase intention[12]. In addition, influencers' cultural background, fan base, and social influence also affected their commercial value[13]. By showcasing personalized lifestyles or accumulated expertise in professional domains, influencers were able to build fan trust and convert this trust into actual consumer behavior[14].

1.3.2. Content quality

The innovation, attractiveness, and practicality of content produced by influencers played a central role in enhancing their influence. High-quality content increased fan engagement and loyalty, thereby enhancing consumers' purchase intention[15]. Different types of content, such as short videos, live streaming, and long-form posts, had varied effects on consumers, and research indicated that content with strong visual impact and rich storytelling more easily facilitated consumer behavior[16].

1.3.3. Promotional activities

Promotional activities, such as limited-time discounts, free gifts, and flash sales, effectively stimulated consumers' impulse buying behavior. These promotional activities not only created a sense of urgency but also enhanced consumers' interactive experiences, thereby increasing purchase intention[17]. Especially for Generation Z consumers, they were more inclined to participate in highly interactive promotional formats, such as group buying in social communities and live-streaming flash sales[18].

1.3.4. Monetization strategy

Influencers primarily realized commercial value through advertising endorsements, e-commerce sales, fan tipping, and membership subscriptions. Different monetization strategies exerted varying effects on influencers' influence and brand collaboration outcomes [19]. At the same time, adopting diversified monetization strategies not only enhanced the stability of income sources but also optimized the interaction between influencers, fans, and brands, thereby significantly increasing the profitability and risk resilience of the influencer economy [20]. In recent years, live-streaming commerce and social e-commerce became the main monetization approaches, but research indicated that excessive commercialization could undermine influencers' credibility, making it necessary to maintain a balance between content creation and monetization [21].

1.4. Perceived value

Perceived value referred to consumers' overall evaluation of the benefits obtained relative to the costs incurred during the shopping process, encompassing not only rational factors such as functionality and price but also non-material factors including emotion, experience, and social aspects. Studies indicated that the interactivity, immediacy, and scenario-based presentation in live-streaming e-commerce significantly enhanced consumers' perceived value; through detailed product introductions, trial demonstrations, and personalized interactions by influencers, consumers were able to better understand product features, advantages, and usage experiences, thereby reducing perceived risk of unfamiliar products and increasing purchase intention[6]. In addition, high-quality content and emotional resonance further deepened consumers' product cognition and pleasure, making perceived

value a key factor in promoting impulse buying behavior[22]. Meanwhile, perceived value also reflected the formation of consumer trust and brand identification, which strengthened users' dependency and engagement with the platform and influencers, thus serving as an important mediating variable connecting external stimuli and consumer behavior in live-streaming e-commerce[23].

1.5. Pleasure

Pleasure referred to the positive emotional responses that consumers experienced during the shopping process, typically driven by fun, entertainment, and interactivity. In live-stream shopping contexts, the influencers' personal charisma, humorous expression, and creative content significantly enhanced consumers' pleasure, which in turn increased their purchase intention[24]. Pleasure not only directly influenced impulse buying behavior but also reduced consumers' sensitivity to price and risk, thereby indirectly promoting purchasing decisions[4]. In addition, promotional activities, such as limited-time discounts, gifts, and flash sales, created a sense of urgency and accomplishment, which further strengthened consumers' pleasure[25].

2. Research Hypotheses and Model

Based on the SOR model and literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

2.1. The impact of external stimulus (S) on organism (O) response

H1: Influencer traits have a positive effect on perceived value.
H2: Influencer traits have a positive effect on pleasure.
H3: Content quality has a positive effect on perceived value.
H4: Content quality has a positive effect on pleasure.
H5: Promotional activities have a positive effect on perceived value.
H6: Promotional activities have a positive effect on pleasure.
H7: Monetization strategies have a positive effect on perceived value.
H8: Monetization strategies have a positive effect on pleasure.

2.2. The impact of organism (O) response on behavioral outcome (R)

H9: Perceived value has a positive effect on impulse buying behavior.
H10: Pleasure has a positive effect on impulse buying behavior.

2.3. Mediation hypotheses

H11: Perceived value mediates the relationships between influencer traits, content quality, promotional activities, monetization strategies, and impulse buying behavior.

H12: Pleasure mediates the relationships between influencer traits, content quality, promotional activities, monetization strategies, and impulse buying behavior.

Based on the SOR framework, this study built the model in Figure 1, showing how stimuli influence impulse buying via perceived value and pleasure.

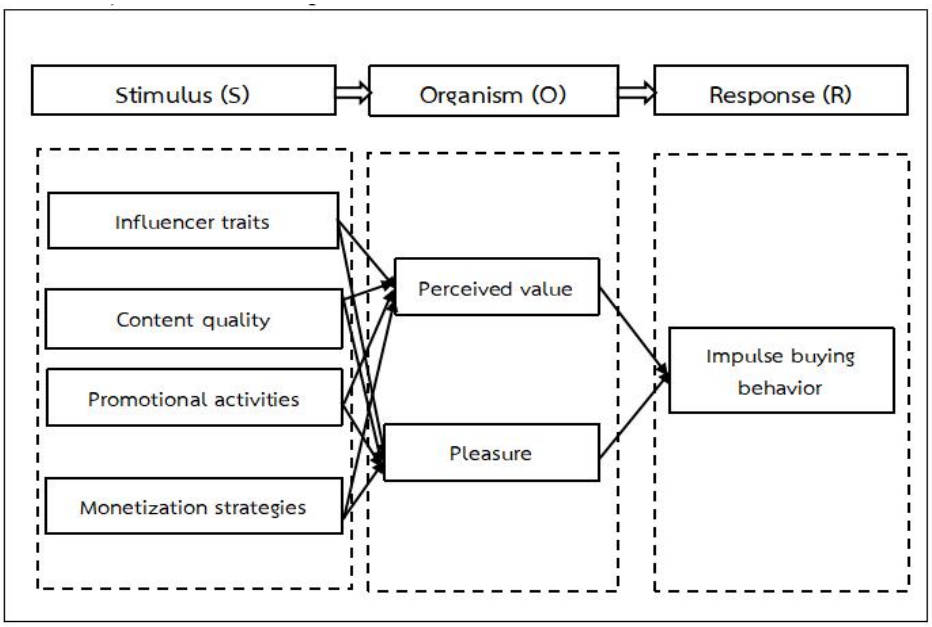

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

3. Questionnaire Design and Sample Size

3.1. Questionnaire Design and Measurement Instrument Validation

The questionnaire was designed based on a literature review and research hypotheses. It uses a five-point Likert scale (1 = very low (0–20%)), 2 = low (21–40%), 3 = moderate (41–60%), 4 = high (61–80%), and 5 = very high (81–100%). The 28 items cover four sections:

(1) Screening and Basic Information: Eligible Gen Z samples were selected based on birth year (1995–2009) and purchase experience with influencer recommendations within the past three months. Demographic and behavioral characteristics such as gender, social status, spending amount, purchase platform, and purchase frequency were collected.

(2) External Stimuli (S): These included influencer traits, content quality, promotional activities, and monetization strategies, each measured with three items.

(3) Somatic Response (O): These included perceived value and pleasure, each with three items.

(4) Outcome Variable (R): Impulse buying behavior, measured with three items.

To ensure the scientific rigor and measurement quality of the research instrument, a pilot survey was conducted prior to the formal investigation, and reliability and validity tests were performed on the questionnaire.

In terms of reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to examine the internal consistency of each scale. Generally, an alpha value greater than 0.70 indicated that the scale demonstrated good reliability and stable measurement performance.

In terms of validity, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to assess the construct validity of the measurement model. Convergent validity was evaluated using factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was examined by comparing the square roots of AVE with the inter-construct correlation coefficients. In general, factor loadings above 0.60, CR values above 0.70, and AVE values above 0.50 indicated satisfactory construct validity.

After the pilot testing and subsequent refinement, all dimensions of the formal questionnaire met the established reliability and validity criteria, indicating that the research instrument demonstrated good measurement stability and sound structural validity and was suitable for subsequent empirical analysis.

3.2. Sample Size and Sampling Method

This study targeted Chinese Generation Z consumers born between 1995 and 2009 who had made online purchases based on influencer recommendations within the past three months. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via high-frequency social media platforms used by Generation Z, including Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and Weibo. A combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling was adopted to obtain the research sample.

With regard to sample size determination, this study employed both the conservative proportion estimation formula and the sample size requirements of structural equation modeling (SEM) for justification.

First, based on the conservative proportion estimation formula:

$$n = \frac{(Z_{\alpha/2})^2 \pi(1-\pi)}{E^2} \quad (1)$$

The control confidence level is 96%, that is, $Z_{\partial/2}$=2.06, and within a $\pm 5\%$ error range, the required sample size is:

$$n = \frac{2.06^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.05^2} = 424.3 \approx 424 \quad (2)$$

Considering practical factors and a 15% invalid response rate, the required sample size is approximately 500:

$$n' = \frac{n}{(1-0.15)} = 498.82 \approx 500 \quad (3)$$

Second, the sample size was further justified based on the requirements of structural equation modeling. Previous studies indicated that the SEM sample size should be at least 10–20 times the number of observed variables [26]. In this study, the core measurement scale consisted of 24 items, suggesting a minimum required sample size of 240. In addition, considering the number of free parameters in the model, including path coefficients, factor loadings, and error terms, a sample size of 500 was considered sufficient to ensure estimation stability and adequate statistical power.

In summary, the final sample size of 500 respondents met the statistical requirements for both proportion estimation accuracy and SEM analysis, and was considered adequate to represent the characteristics of the target population and provide a reliable data foundation for subsequent empirical testing.

4. Empirical Analysis and Research Results

4.1. Descriptive Sample Analysis

This study targeted Chinese Generation Z consumers born between 1995 and 2009 who had made online purchases based on recommendations from influencers within the past three months. Online questionnaires were distributed through platforms such as Douyin (TikTok), Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book), and Weibo, resulting in a total of 500 valid responses.

Table 1. Basic statistics of samples (N=500)

Name	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative percentage(%)
Gender	Male	262	52.4	52.4
	Female	238	47.6	100
Identity Status	High school students	45	9	9
	College students	97	19.4	28.4
	Undergraduate students	140	28	56.4
	Graduate students and above	61	12.2	68.6
	Enterprise/ Unit Employees	81	16.2	84.8
	Freelancer	24	4.8	89.6
	Unemployed	23	4.6	94.2
	other	29	5.8	100
Shopping Amount	<¥500	156	31.2	31.2
	¥500-1000	171	34.2	65.4
	¥1001-2000	121	24.2	89.6
	>¥2000	52	10.4	100
Purchase Platform	TikTok	205	41	41
	Little Red Book	145	29	70
	Weibo	52	10.4	80.4
	Bilibili	53	10.6	91
	Taobao Live	30	6	97
	Other	15	3	100
Shopping Frequency	Frequent (3 times a week or more)	164	32.8	32.8
	Occasionally (1-3 times a month)	235	47	79.8
	Rarely (1-2 times in the past three months)	101	20.2	100
	Total	500	100	100

Table 1 shows that the sample's gender distribution is relatively balanced, most are students, spending is mainly 500 – 1,000 yuan and below 500 yuan, shopping platforms are mainly Douyin and Xiaohongshu, and shopping frequency is mainly 1–3 times a month and 3 times a week or more.

4.2. Reliability Test

Cronbach's ∂ coefficient was used to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire. Table 2 shows that Cronbach's ∂ for each dimension was >0.7, indicating that the scale items were well consistent with the target concepts.

Table 2. Scale reliability test results

Dimensions	Question	α coefficient with term deleted	Cronbach's α coefficient
Influencer Traits	S1_8	0.748	0.849
	S1_9	0.821	
	S1_10	0.795	
Content Quality	S2_11	0.768	0.821
	S2_12	0.734	
	S2_13	0.76	
Promotional Activities	S3_14	0.67	0.769
	S3_15	0.672	
	S3_16	0.723	
Monetization Strategies	S4_17	0.757	0.814
	S4_18	0.732	
	S4_19	0.746	
Perceived Value	O1_20	0.826	0.866
	O1_21	0.796	
	O1_22	0.813	
Pleasure	O2_23	0.762	0.821
	O2_24	0.773	
	O2_25	0.725	
Impulse buying behavior	R_26	0.694	0.777
	R_27	0.723	
	R_28	0.678	

4.3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

4.3.1. Overall fit evaluation of the model

The study conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the measurement model. CFA was used to verify whether the observed variables effectively reflected the latent constructs and to assess the overall fit between the model and the data.

As shown in Table 3, all indicators met the commonly accepted standards, indicating that the overall model fit was good.

Table 3. CFA model fit indices

Index	Fitting criteria	Result
x^2/ df	<3	1.714
GFI	>0.8	0.95

RMSEA	<0.08	0.038
CFI	>0.9	0.972
TLI	>0.9	0.965
AGFI	>0.8	0.931
IFI	>0.9	0.973
SRMR	<0.1	0.034

4.3.2. Convergent Validity

This study thoroughly assessed the reliability and convergent validity of the latent variables using composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). CR was used to measure the internal consistency of each latent variable, while AVE evaluated the degree of convergence.

As shown in Table 4, all latent variables had CR values above 0.7, AVE values above 0.5, and standardized item loadings exceeded 0.6, indicating that the items effectively aggregated onto their respective latent variables. The measurement model demonstrated good internal consistency and convergent validity, providing a reliable basis for subsequent structural equation modeling analysis.

Table 4. CFA convergent validity results

Latent variables	Measurement items	Non-standard load factors	Standard error	Standard load factor	CR	AVE
Influencer Traits	S1_8	1	-	0.859	0.851	0.656
	S1_9	0.896	0.05	0.767		
	S1_10	0.929	0.05	0.801		
Content Quality	S2_11	1	-	0.741	0.822	0.606
	S2_12	1.07	0.068	0.817		
	S2_13	1.012	0.066	0.776		
Promotional Activities	S3_14	1	-	0.74	0.769	0.527
	S3_15	1.056	0.08	0.771		
	S3_16	0.894	0.072	0.663		
Monetization Strategies	S4_17	1	-	0.726	0.814	0.593
	S4_18	1.09	0.072	0.819		
	S4_19	1.053	0.071	0.763		
Perceived Value	O1_20	1	-	0.788	0.866	0.683
	O1_21	1.056	0.054	0.866		
	O1_22	1.002	0.053	0.823		
Pleasure	O2_23	1	-	0.764	0.823	0.607
	O2_24	0.924	0.06	0.757		
	O2_25	0.999	0.063	0.815		

Impulse Buying behavior	R_26	1	-	0.728	0.778	0.539
	R_27	0.909	0.071	0.696		
	R_28	1.016	0.077	0.776		

4.3.3. Discriminant Validity

This study assessed the discriminant validity of the latent variables using the Fornell-Larcker method to determine whether each latent variable could independently measure its corresponding construct. As shown in Table 5, the square roots of the AVE for all latent variables exceeded their inter-construct correlations, indicating good discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Table 5. Latent variable correlation coefficients and AVE square roots (discriminant validity test)

	IT	CQ	PA	MS	PV	P	IBB
Influencer Traits (IT)	0.81						
Content Quality (CQ)	0.339	0.779					
Promotional Activities (PA)	0.247	0.243	0.726				
Monetization Strategies (MS)	0.293	0.285	0.311	0.77			
Perceived Value (PV)	0.304	0.277	0.295	0.281	0.827		
Pleasure (P)	0.289	0.298	0.245	0.288	0.228	0.779	
Impulse buying behavior (IBB)	0.267	0.237	0.218	0.189	0.277	0.232	0.734

4.4. Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis results showed that all variables were significantly positively correlated ($p < .001$). Among them, perceived value had the highest correlation with impulse buying behavior, indicating that in influencer marketing, consumers' perception of product value had the most direct impact on their impulse buying behavior, while also reflecting the multidimensional influence of influencer marketing on consumer behavior.

Table 6. Pearson correlation coefficient matrix between variables

	IT	CQ	PA	MS	PV	P	IBB
Influencer Traits (IT)	1						
Content Quality (CQ)	0.339***	1					
Promotional Activities (PA)	0.247***	0.243***	1				
Monetization Strategies (MS)	0.293***	0.285***	0.311***	1			
Perceived Value (PV)	0.304***	0.277***	0.295***	0.281***	1		
Pleasure (P)	0.289***	0.298***	0.245***	0.288***	0.228***	1	
Impulse buying behavior (IBB)	0.267***	0.237***	0.218***	0.189***	0.277***	0.232***	1

Note *** $p<0.001$

4.5. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

This study was grounded in the SOR theory and employed the Amos structural equation model (SEM), applying maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) to examine both the causal relationships among latent variables and the overall goodness of fit of the model.

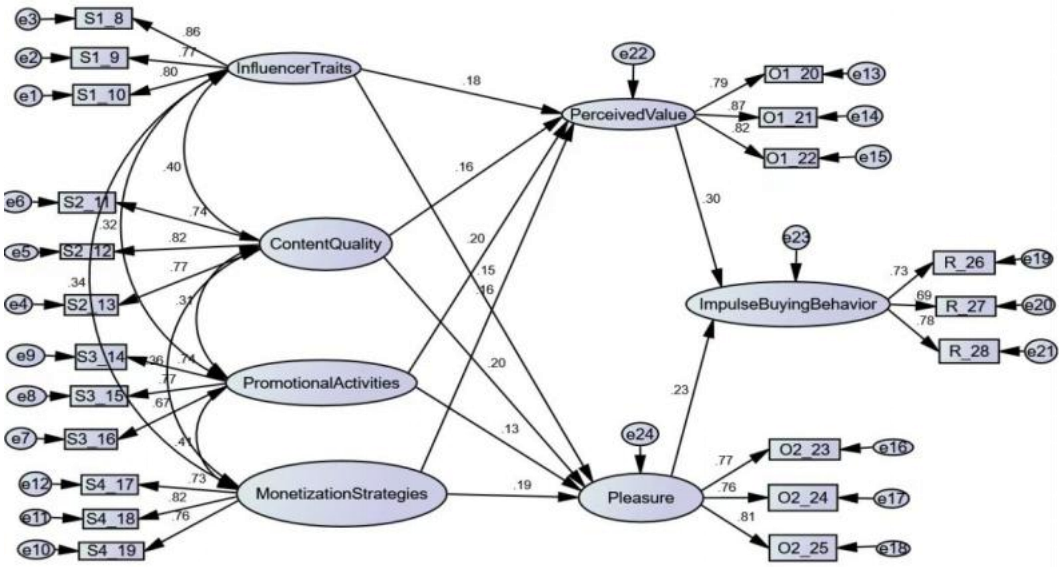

Figure 2. Structural Equation Model path diagram

The results, as shown in Figure 2, show that influencer traits, content quality, promotional activities, and monetization strategies all had significant positive effects on perceived value and pleasure. Among them, perceived value (β=0.30) and pleasure (β=0.23) further significantly promoted impulse buying behavior, confirming the "cognition-affective" dual mediation mechanism. Item loadings ranged from 0.77 to 0.86, indicating that the model possesses high reliability and validity, and the research conclusions are robust and reliable.

4.5.1. Model Fit

Table 7. Structural Equation Model fit indicators

Indicator Category	Indicator name	Adaptation standards	Test results	Is it acceptable?
Absolute fitness parameter	GFI	>0.9	0.947	accept
	AGFI	>0.9	0.929	accept
	RMSEA	<0.06	0.039	accept
Value-added fitness parameters	NFI	>0.9	0.933	accept
	IFI	>0.9	0.97	accept
	CFI	>0.9	0.97	accept
	RFI	>0.9	0.918	accept
Simple fitness parameter	CMIN/df	<3	1.758	accept
	PGFI	>0.5	0.709	accept

This study systematically evaluated the overall fit of the structural equation model (SEM)

from three dimensions: absolute fit, incremental fit, and parsimonious fit, in order to assess how well the model matched the actual data. The results in Table 7 showed that all indicators met or exceeded the recommended standards, indicating that the model fit was satisfactory and adequately reflected the theoretical relationships among the latent variables.

4.5.2. Path Analysis

Table 8. Path coefficient estimation results of the structural equation model

Path			Estimate	SE	CR	P	Std. Estimate
Influencer Traits	→	Perceived Value	0.194	0.061	3.179	0.001	0.177
Content Quality	→	Perceived Value	0.185	0.065	2.849	0.004	0.162
Promotional Activities	→	Perceived Value	0.264	0.079	3.345	***	0.197
Monetization Strategies	→	Perceived Value	0.177	0.065	2.725	0.006	0.159
Influencer Traits	→	Pleasure	0.152	0.059	2.558	0.011	0.147
Content Quality	→	Pleasure	0.216	0.064	3.374	***	0.201
Promotional Activities	→	Pleasure	0.164	0.076	2.161	0.031	0.131
Monetization Strategies	→	Pleasure	0.205	0.064	3.207	0.001	0.195
Perceived Value	→	Impulse buying behavior	0.259	0.048	5.338	***	0.297
Pleasure	→	Impulse buying behavior	0.211	0.052	4.079	***	0.229

Based on the estimated path coefficients in Table 8, all external stimuli had significant positive effects on perceived value and pleasure ($p<0.05$). Promotional activities had the strongest impact on perceived value (standardized coefficient = 0.197), while content quality had the greatest effect on pleasure (standardized coefficient = 0.201). Both organism response variables significantly promoted impulse buying, with perceived value slightly stronger than pleasure.

4.5.3. Mediation Effect

Table 9. Results of the mediation effect test

Parameter	Estimate	Lower	Upper	P
Influencer traits →Perceived value → Impulse buying behavior	0.05	0.014	0.096	0.005
Content quality → perceived value → Impulse buying behavior	0.048	0.016	0.093	0.003
Promotional activities → Perceived Value → Impulse buying behavior	0.068	0.027	0.122	0.001
Monetization strategies → perceived value → Impulse buying behavior	0.046	0.011	0.094	0.01
Influencer traits → Pleasure → Impulse buying behavior	0.032	0.007	0.075	0.014
Content quality → Pleasure → Impulse buying behavior	0.046	0.018	0.092	0
Promotional activities → Pleasure →Impulse buying behavior	0.035	0.006	0.085	0.017
Monetization strategies → pleasure → Impulse buying behavior	0.043	0.015	0.087	0.001

The mediating effects were tested using the Bootstrap method. As shown in Table 9, influencer traits, content quality, promotional activities, and monetization strategies all significantly influenced impulse buying behavior through perceived value and pleasure ($P<0.05$). Among them, promotional activities had the strongest indirect effect via perceived value (0.068), while content quality had the most significant indirect effect via pleasure (0.046), indicating that both cognitive and emotional factors played a crucial role in influencer marketing, facilitating the conversion of external stimuli into actual purchasing behavior.

5. Conclusions, Discussion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

Based on the Stimulus − Organism − Response (SOR) model, this study systematically examined the influence mechanisms of influencer traits, content quality, promotional activities, and monetization strategies on Generation Z's impulse buying behavior in the context of the influencer economy. Using structural equation modeling and mediation effect testing, the following main conclusions were obtained.

First, all four elements of the influencer economy exerted significant positive effects on Generation Z's perceived value and pleasure. Among them, promotional activities had the strongest effect on perceived value, while content quality had the most significant effect on pleasure, indicating that both "benefit-oriented stimuli" and "emotional resonance" played a dual driving role in the digital consumption context.

Second, both perceived value and pleasure significantly promoted Generation Z's impulse buying behavior, with perceived value exerting a stronger effect than pleasure. This finding revealed that Generation Z's impulse consumption was not purely driven by emotions but rather constituted a form of "rational impulse" grounded in value evaluation.

Third, perceived value and pleasure played significant mediating roles between the four elements of the influencer economy and impulse buying behavior, establishing a dual-path mechanism of "cognition − emotion" and further validating the applicability of the SOR model in social media consumption settings.

5.2. Discussion

This study took the emerging digital consumption context of the influencer economy as its point of departure and introduced the Stimulus − Organism − Response (SOR) model into the investigation of Generation Z's impulse buying behavior, thereby extending the theoretical applicability of the model to social commerce and content-driven consumption settings. Previous studies had primarily applied the SOR framework to traditional online retail or platform-based e-commerce contexts, focusing on environmental cues such as webpage design, information presentation, and price stimuli in shaping consumer behavior [27]. In contrast, the present study incorporated influencer characteristics, content quality, promotional activities, and monetization strategies into an integrated analytical framework, revealing the critical roles of "personalized influence" and "immersive experience" in shaping consumers' psychological responses in content-oriented social commerce environments. In doing so, this study enriched the theoretical connotation of the SOR model in emerging digital consumption contexts.

Furthermore, prior research on impulse buying had largely emphasized the dominant role of rational stimuli such as price discounts and time pressure [17]. However, the present findings demonstrated that content quality and emotional experience exerted equally important driving effects on the formation of impulse purchase decisions, suggesting that the

mechanism of impulse buying had shifted from a purely price-oriented logic toward a dual-driven model integrating "rational value" and "emotional experience." This result echoed the experience economy perspective, which conceptualized consumption as fundamentally an emotional and symbolic experience [28], and provided a new explanatory lens for impulse buying behavior in digital content consumption settings.

In addition, by focusing on Generation Z consumers, this study verified their heightened sensitivity to interactive experiences and emotional arousal in influencer-mediated contexts, which amplified the transmission effect from environmental stimuli to purchasing behavior. This finding offered new empirical evidence for existing generational consumption research concerning Generation Z's experience-oriented and socially driven consumption patterns [29], and further illuminated the deep coupling mechanism between the influencer economy and youth consumer psychology.

5.3. Recommendations

5.3.1. Practical Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations are made:

First, influencers and content creators should focus on professionalism and personal appeal to enhance fan trust and emotional engagement. Content creation should be both practical and engaging, using scenario-based presentations and interactive content to enhance engagement and a delightful experience, while also achieving a natural integration of content and monetization.

Second, companies and platforms should optimize marketing strategies based on the "rational and impulse" consumption characteristics of Generation Z. They should design promotional campaigns centered on value perception, strengthen emotional experiences through interaction and scenario-based building, and leverage algorithmic recommendations to improve marketing efficiency. Furthermore, different products should be matched with appropriate distribution channels. For example, promotion-sensitive products can focus on short video platforms, while emotion-driven products are better suited for community content distribution.

Third, Generation Z consumers should improve their media literacy and consumer rationality, enhance their ability to discern information, balance emotional experience with rational judgment, and rationally plan their spending to achieve a balance between enjoyable and rational consumption.

5.3.2. Research Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study revealed, through empirical analysis, the mechanisms by which the influencer economy affected impulse buying behavior among Generation Z consumers. However, due to limitations in research scope and variable design, further investigation was necessary. Future research may be conducted in three directions.

First, future studies may expand the sample to examine the cross-cultural and intergenerational applicability of the findings. This study focused on Chinese Generation Z consumers, whose consumption behavior was influenced by local cultural contexts and social media platform ecosystems. Subsequent research could investigate response differences across countries or generational groups and explore the moderating effects of cultural factors such as individualism and collectivism.

Second, future research may introduce moderating variables to reveal heterogeneity in consumer responses. While the current model validated the main effects and mediating mechanisms, it did not account for moderating factors. Variables such as self-control, trust in influencers, and platform usage experience could be incorporated to more comprehensively

understand differences in impulse buying pathways across psychological states and usage contexts.

Third, future studies may refine research settings to enhance the contextual explanatory power of the conclusions. Different product categories (e.g., fast-moving consumer goods and luxury goods) or platforms (e.g., Xiaohongshu and Douyin) exhibited significant differences in user motivations and content presentation, which may influence the formation mechanisms of perceived value and pleasure. Future research could conduct group-based analyzes by specific platforms or product types to improve the model's external validity and practical relevance.

In summary, future research should continue to expand sample diversity, variable design, and application contexts to deepen theoretical understanding of Generation Z's impulse buying behavior within the influencer economy and to provide more practically valuable academic insights.

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