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Gamers' interest in microtransaction activities at valve corporation

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of the online gaming industry has led to the rise of microtransactions, which have become a core component of the gaming experience. Valve Corporation, a prominent player in this industry, implemented a widely recognized microtransaction model through its platform. This study explored the factors influencing gamers in Bali to engage in microtransaction activities offered by Valve Corporation. Specifically, it investigated the effects of functional quality and price utility on purchase interest, with enjoyment serving as a mediating factor. The research targeted gamers in Bali who had previously engaged in microtransactions, employing an Accidental Sampling technique to collect data from 112 respondents. The analysis utilized Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to test the hypotheses. The findings revealed that functional quality and price utility both had significant positive effects on enjoyment and purchase interest. Furthermore, enjoyment not only directly influenced purchase interest but also mediated the effects of functional quality and price utility on purchase interest. These results highlight the critical role of enjoyment in shaping gamers' decisions to participate in microtransactions, offering valuable insights for companies aiming to optimize their gaming platforms.

Keywords: Functional quality, price utility, role of excitement, and purchase intention

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INTRODUCTION

The current advancement in technology has seen significant progress, especially in the video game industry. One

aspect that has transformed is game accessibility. Previously, video games could only be played on computers or consoles. However, access has now expanded through the use of smartphones and tablets. Initially, games were seen as a simple form of entertainment enjoyed by a limited audience. With the development of computer and internet technology, the gaming industry has experienced extraordinary growth. Games are no longer viewed solely as a means of entertainment; they have evolved into a promising, large-scale industry.

According to data from Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), public interest in online games reached 16.5% in 2020 (Mulyana et al., 2023). Jawapos.com reported in 2020 that there were 50.8 million online game users (Sudirman et al., 2022). Based on the *We Are Social* report in 2022, 94.5% of internet users in Indonesia, aged 16-64, engage in video games (Rasidi, 2024).

TABLE 1. Online Game Users

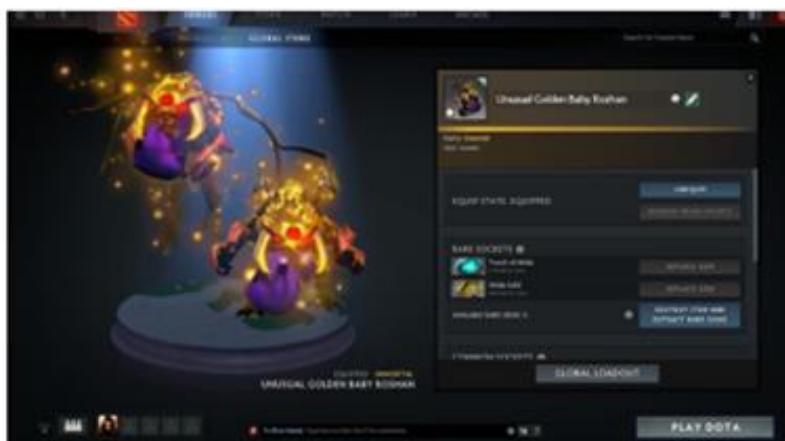
No	Country	Percentage (%)
1	Philippines	96.4
2	Thailand	94.7
3	Indonesia	94.5
4	Vietnam	93.4
5	India	92.0
6	Taiwan	91.6
7	Turkey	91.5
8	Saudi Arabia	91.4
9	Mexico	91.2
10	United Arab Emirates	90.3

Source: We Are Social, January 2022

The development of online gaming in Bali has experienced significant growth. With advancements in technology and the expanding connectivity of the internet, it has become easier to play online games. Many people in Bali have begun to show interest and actively engage in various types of online games, such as web-based games, mobile games, and online games that involve players from different parts of the world. According to the Chairman of the Bali Provincial E-Sports Association (Pengrov ESI Bali), Brigadier General Hadi Purnomo, during the Bali Porprov Esports event in November 2022, there has been a notable increase in competitions and tournaments within the esports industry in Bali, even reaching international levels (DetikBali, 2022). Examples include the World Esports Championship 2022 in Nusa Dua and the IESF MLBB tournament. This rapid development reflects Bali's growing prominence as a hub for esports and online gaming.

Bali was chosen as the location for this study due to its vibrant and rapidly growing gaming community, coupled with its status as a host of international esports events, such as those mentioned above. These factors make it an ideal setting to explore the dynamics of gaming-related microtransactions. Additionally, Bali's unique cultural environment and demographic diversity provide valuable insights into gaming behaviors. References supporting this include Indonesian Game Industry Report 2022 and reports by the Bali Esports Association.

The research primarily focuses on microtransactions, the digital transactions within online games that allow players to purchase virtual items. As seen in *Figure 1*, one such example is a virtual item in *Dota 2*, priced between 15 to 20 million Indonesian Rupiah, which players can buy directly in the game or through item barter on platforms like Steam



Source: Image Processed by The Researcher (2023)

FIGURE 1. Example of Virtual Goods That Can Be Purchased in Games

The image above illustrates a virtual item that can be purchased in-game using real currency. This item is recognized by the gaming community as one of the most expensive virtual goods in *Dota 2*, with a price ranging from 15 to 20 million Indonesian Rupiah (Suryawan et al., 2024). Purchases can be made directly within the game or through bartering with other players on the Steam trading platform. Virtual items in games generally lack intrinsic benefits for their users, a fact acknowledged by most gamers (Wu & Santana, 2022). Research conducted by Pokkt, Decision Lab, and the Mobile Marketing Association (MMA) in 2020 revealed that the number of gamers in Indonesia reached 60 million, collectively spending a total of 15 trillion Rupiah on various in-game needs, including virtual items (Reizano, 2024). This figure was projected to rise to 100 million by 2021. The types of goods and features available in microtransactions vary, one common example being "skins."

According to CNBC Indonesia (2023), playing games is an enjoyable activity that brings happiness to individuals (Hanafie et al., 2022). In the context of microtransactions or in-game purchases, these often include cosmetic items that enhance character appearances or modify game visuals. Additionally, they can provide benefits or improve the abilities of characters or items during gameplay. These factors significantly contribute to players' satisfaction and enjoyment by delivering a unique and engaging gaming experience. For those unfamiliar with online gaming, the practice of purchasing virtual items that lack a physical form may seem unusual. However, for gamers, playing online games without buying virtual items is akin to jogging without wearing a pair of Nike shoes.

This study examines factors such as functional quality, price utility, and excitement. Functional quality, as defined by Khan & Mohsin (2017) pertains to the utility and benefits derived from a product. However, a researcher observed that functional quality has a positive but insignificant effect on purchase intentions, as gamers often prioritize aesthetic appeal over functionality (Syahroni, 2021). Price utility, in contrast, plays a critical role in transactions, with perceived value influencing gamers' excitement and decision-making processes (Sari & Febriani, 2022). Excitement, as highlighted by Hsieh & Tseng (2018), significantly affects purchase intention, driven by the happiness and satisfaction associated with customizing characters and enhancing gameplay experiences.

To explore these aspects, this study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data collection was conducted through structured surveys distributed to active gamers in Bali, complemented by in-depth interviews with members of the Bali Esports Association. These methods provide a comprehensive understanding of gamer behaviors and their motivations for engaging in microtransactions. A purposive sampling technique was used to target respondents aged 16 to 50, with a focus on young adults aged 16 to 22, who form the majority of the gaming population. This methodological approach aligns with the study's objective of analyzing the influence of functional quality, price utility, and excitement on microtransaction behaviors within Bali's gaming industry.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Functional Quality

According to Gonçalves (2016), functional quality is focused on the utility of products and services based on their physical performance (Gonçalves et al., 2016). Khan & Mohsin (2017) state that functional quality involves functionality, utility, and the benefits that can be derived from a product. Syahroni (2021) concluded in their research that functional quality has a positive but insignificant effect on purchase intentions. This is because gamers do not purchase items based on their functionality but rather based on their aesthetic appeal, leading to the intention to buy virtual goods.

Price Utility

Price utility is a very important aspect in every transaction process. According to Sari & Febriani (2022), price is a factor that influences an individual's decision to purchase goods or services. In research conducted by Aggarwal et al. (2019), it was concluded that price utility has a positive and significant effect on the role of excitement. When a person agrees with the set price, a transaction will occur, which in turn influences their excitement and happiness (Friedman, 2017). In the context of online game microtransactions, price serves as a benchmark for the quality of items or skins being purchased. The higher the price of an item or skin, the rarer and higher quality it is perceived to be. However, many gamers are willing to spend tens of millions of Rupiah just to obtain their desired items or skins. Players believe that the more expensive the item or skin they purchase, the rarer it becomes, enhancing their gaming experience and providing a unique sense of excitement.

Role of Excitement

Excitement is an important factor influencing online gamers to engage in microtransaction purchases. Research conducted by Hsieh & Tseng (2018) concluded that the role of the excitement variable has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. This is due to the emergence of happiness that affects a person's positive emotions, such as excitement, joy, or satisfaction, leading them to feel that life is better and more meaningful. Players purchase items or skins to maximize the customization and modification of their characters in the game.

In online gaming, buying skins makes players believe that their gaming skills can improve, resulting in excitement while playing, which serves as a motivation for microtransactions. According to Park & Lee (2011), the enjoyment of playing and visual awareness describe how online gamers evaluate and influence their decisions regarding microtransactions.

Purchase Intention

Consumer purchase intention refers to the planning involved in purchasing something, where individuals consider various factors such as product quality or price. Research conducted by Chen et al. (2019) indicates that purchase intention arises when functional quality offers solutions that meet gamers' needs. In this context, microtransactions in online games often leverage quantity in selling items or skins. Yulius (2017) found in his research that the variable of playfulness or excitement has a positive and significant effect on the purchase intention of virtual items offered by online gaming service providers. In online games, it is common to encounter events with limited-time offers that sell items or skins at high prices. This results in these items or skins being rare and exclusive, only obtainable during those events.

METHODS

The location of this research was in Bali, where the development of online gaming had recently experienced significant growth. The reason for choosing this location was that many residents of Bali were actively involved in various types of online games, such as web-based games and online games that engaged players in active microtransactions. This research was limited to consumers, rather than the active community that was present in Bali at the time. The sampling technique used was accidental sampling, and the sample size was determined using Hair's formula, resulting in a total of 112 respondents.

In this research, the functional quality experienced by gamers typically occurs when they engage in microtransactions within games such as Mobile Legends, DOTA 2, Free Fire, and others. They purchase skins for both their game characters and the weapons they possess, or to activate battle passes. The functional quality perceived is the reliability in gameplay (as it adds points that are different from users who do not use microtransactions), gaining advantages by receiving more rewards for completed missions, and enhancing the abilities of characters, weapons, or accounts used, which leads to greater mastery of the game during play.

According to Indriastanti (2008), the indicators of functional quality include:

1. **Reliability:** Refers to the extent to which the product can function without interruptions or technical issues.
2. **Responsiveness:** Refers to the degree to which the product can respond accurately to given inputs.
3. **Graphic Quality:** Refers to the visual quality displayed.
4. **Sound Quality:** Refers to the assessment of the sound effects presented.
5. **Additional Features.**

Price is the agreed value that serves as a condition in the purchasing transaction process. According to Harjanto (2009), price can be defined as the amount that must be paid by the buyer to obtain a product. Price is viewed as the sum of money that has a specific value or utility in acquiring an item (Tjiptono, 2014). According to Dinawan (2010), the concept of price can be viewed from three aspects: 1. the appropriateness of the price in relation to product quality, 2. the alignment of price with the value provided by the product, and 3. the affordability of the price for consumers. Based on Herawati et al. (2019), there are three indicators of price utility in product purchasing: 1. Price comparison with other products, which refers to how the price of the product compares to that of competing products. 2. The alignment of price with product quality, which assesses whether the offered price corresponds with the quality of the product provided. 3. Price affordability, which reflects the consumer's ability to purchase the product at the price offered by the producer.

According to experts, the theory of need satisfaction leads to happiness (Synder & Lopez, 2008). Indicators that can be used to measure excitement, based on Thin (2012), include: 1. **Emotional Involvement Level:** Refers to the extent to which a person feels emotionally engaged with a product. 2. **Frequency of Laughter:** Refers to how often a person laughs or feels joy from the product they possess. 3. **Excitement Score:** Assesses the overall happiness experienced by a person regarding the product they own.

According to Meldarianda & Lisan (2010), consumer purchase intention refers to the planning process involved in purchasing a product, where consumers consider factors such as the number of product units needed over a specific period, brand, and consumer attitudes toward the product. On the other hand, Nugraha et al. (2018) explains that purchase intention is the result of thoughts that shape an individual's perception. Based on Rubianti (2014), online purchasing intention refers to the desire to buy products offered through online sites. The perceived risks associated with online transactions can make consumers hesitant or uncomfortable in executing those transactions.

According to Rubianti (2014), there are several indicators of purchase intention, which include:

1. **Customer Interest:** Refers to the appeal that a product possesses, attracting consumers and motivating them to purchase.

2. **Desire:** Represents a strong drive within consumers to own the product.
3. **Customer Attention:** Represents the influence shown by consumers to attract purchase intention toward the virtual product.

The proposed model is as follows:

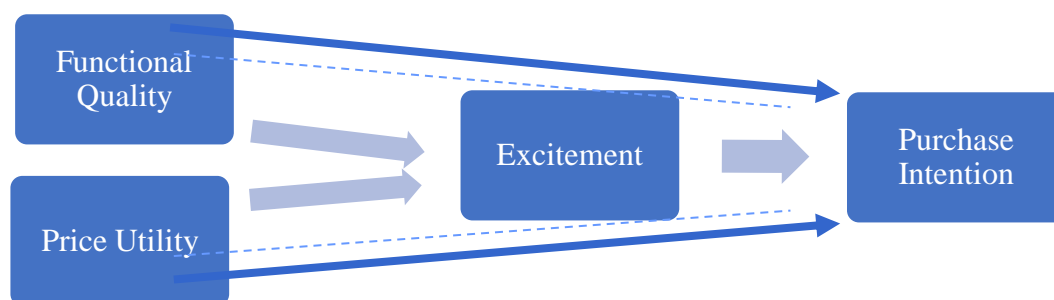


FIGURE 2. Conceptual model of gamers' interest in Bali regarding microtransaction activities at Valve Corporation

Based on the proposed model, the hypotheses in this research are: 1) The influence of Functional Quality on Excitement, 2) The influence of Price Utility on Excitement, 3) The influence of Functional Quality on Purchase Intention, 4) The influence of Price Utility on Purchase Intention, 5) The influence of Excitement on Purchase Intention, 6) The role of Excitement in mediating the influence of Functional Quality on Purchase Intention, and 7) The role of Excitement in mediating the influence of Price Utility on Purchase Intention. This research uses Partial Least Squares (PLS) data analysis techniques. There are two models in this technique: the Outer Model Evaluation, which consists of Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha, and the Inner Model Evaluation, which consists of Inner Model Evaluation through R-Square, Q-Square Testing, and Hypothesis Testing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Table 2 shows the respondent characteristics by gender, with the majority being male. This indicates that males are more interested in playing online games, such as web-based games and mobile games. In terms of age, respondents aged 22–26 years dominate this study, totaling 59 respondents, followed by the 17–21 age group with 35 respondents and the 27–31 age group with 18 respondents. This suggests that the 22–26 age group represents a demographic that has reached maturity in decision-making, especially regarding microtransactions on Valve Corporation platforms.

Regarding occupation, students or university students dominate the study, totaling 52 respondents. Private employees follow with 38 respondents, while entrepreneurs account for 16 respondents, and 6 respondents fall under other occupations. This indicates that students are more likely to play online games and engage in microtransactions at Valve Corporation.

TABLE 2. Respondent Characteristics by Gender

Gender	Number (people)
Male	77
Female	35

TABLE 3. Respondent Characteristics by Age

Age	Number (people)
17 – 21 years	35
22 – 26 years	59
27 – 31 years	18

TABLE 4. Respondent Characteristics by Occupation

Occupation	Number (people)
Private Employee	38

Student	52
Entrepreneur	16
Other	6

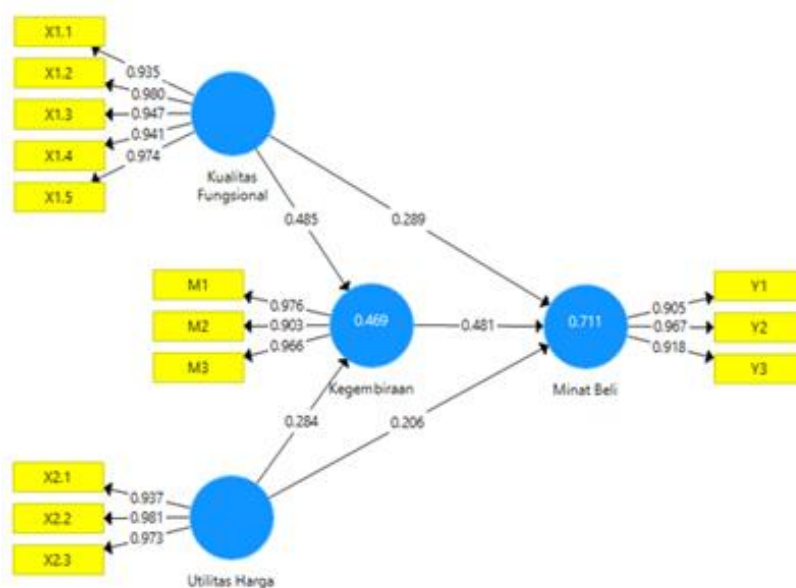


FIGURE 3. Evaluation of the Measurement Model

The convergent validity test results, as shown in Table 5, indicate that almost all indicators for the study variables (functional quality, price utility, excitement, and purchase intention) have loading values exceeding the threshold of 0.60, confirming their validity.

TABLE 5. Convergent Validity Testing

Indicator Correlation to Variable	Outer Loading	Description
M1 <- Excitement	0.976	Valid
M2 <- Excitement	0.903	Valid
M3 <- Excitement	0.966	Valid
X1.1 <- Functional Quality	0.935	Valid
X1.2 <- Functional Quality	0.980	Valid
X1.3 <- Functional Quality	0.947	Valid
X1.4 <- Functional Quality	0.954	Valid
X1.5 <- Functional Quality	0.974	Valid
X2.1 <- Price Utility	0.937	Valid
X2.2 <- Price Utility	0.981	Valid
X2.3 <- Price Utility	0.973	Valid
Y1 <- Purchase Intention	0.905	Valid
Y2 <- Purchase Intention	0.967	Valid
Y3 <- Purchase Intention	0.918	Valid

To assess the explanatory power and predictive relevance of the research model, R-square and Q-square calculations were conducted. The results are summarized in the tables below:

TABLE 6. R-Square Calculation Results

Variable	R-Square (%)
Excitement	46.9
Purchase Intention	84.7

The R-square results indicate that 46.9% of the variability in excitement is explained by the model, while 84.7% of the variability in purchase intention is accounted for by the combined effects of functional quality, price utility, and excitement.

TABLE 7. Q-Square Calculation Results

Variable	R-Square (%)
Excitement	84.7
Purchase Intention	84.7

The Q-square values demonstrate high predictive relevance for both excitement and purchase intention, confirming that the model fits the data well. The remaining unexplained variance can be attributed to other factors, such as promotions and trust, which were not included in this study.

The hypothesis testing results in Table 8 confirm that all direct and indirect relationships in the model are statistically significant, with p-values below 0.05.

TABLE 8. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	p-values	Note
Direct Effect			
Functional Quality -> Excitement	0.485	0.000	Accepted
Price Utility -> Excitement	0.284	0.013	Accepted
Functional Quality -> Purchase Interest	0.289	0.000	Accepted
Price Utility -> Purchase Interest	0.206	0.038	Accepted
Excitement -> Purchase Interest	0.481	0.000	Accepted
Indirect Effect			
Functional Quality -> Excitement -> Purchase Interest	0.234	0.001	Accepted
Price Utility -> Excitement -> Purchase Interest	0.137	0.014	Accepted

Discussion

Functional Quality and Excitement

The influence of functional quality on excitement has a correlation coefficient of 0.485 and a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating a significant positive effect. This suggests that functional quality contributes substantially to the excitement gamers experience during microtransactions at Valve Corporation. Specifically, gamers feel greater satisfaction when in-game items provide both functional utility and visual appeal. For example, in shooting games, high-quality weapons with superior attributes (e.g., precision or power) amplify enjoyment. This aligns with research by De Keyser & Lariviere (2014), which found that functional quality drives happiness in microtransactions due to its direct impact on user satisfaction. Similarly, Liao et al. (2019) noted that the immersive nature of online gaming increases player happiness when items meet expected quality standards, as players temporarily escape routine life while playing.

The findings underscore the dual importance of functionality and aesthetics in driving excitement. This is consistent with Hagtvedt & Patrick (2014); Han et al., (2021) in the context of virtual product purchases, which emphasized the interplay between functional and aesthetic value in enhancing consumer experience.

Price Utility and Excitement

The influence of price utility on excitement has a correlation coefficient of 0.284 and a p-value of 0.013 (< 0.05), confirming a significant positive relationship. The study highlights that gamers assess item quality based on price and derive excitement when items meet their price expectations. For instance, rare items with higher price tags often signify exclusivity, leading to increased satisfaction upon acquisition. These findings align with Aggarwal et al. (2019), who observed that price fairness and perceived utility significantly enhance consumer excitement in digital marketplaces. Similarly, Friedman (2017) concluded that when price utility aligns with perceived benefits, it evokes stronger positive emotions like happiness and excitement.

This correlation reflects the growing importance of pricing strategies in the gaming industry, where higher-priced items often indicate rarity and prestige, thereby enhancing emotional engagement.

Functional Quality and Purchase Intention

Functional quality significantly influences purchase intention, with a correlation coefficient of 0.289 and a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). Gamers perceive functional quality as the degree to which an item meets their performance expectations, thereby enhancing skills and gameplay. The results echo findings by Syahroni (2021), who emphasized that functional quality directly influences purchase decisions by enhancing perceived value. Additionally, Chen et al. (2019) demonstrated that functional quality is pivotal in shaping consumer purchase intentions, especially in virtual environments.

The findings reinforce the notion that functionality-driven value propositions are central to encouraging microtransactions, as players increasingly seek items that enhance gameplay effectiveness.

Price Utility and Purchase Intention

The influence of price utility on purchase intention has a correlation coefficient of 0.206 and a p-value of 0.038 (< 0.05), indicating a significant positive effect. The study finds that price utility not only reflects the value-for-money perception but also influences the rarity and desirability of in-game items. Gamers are willing to pay premium prices for exclusive items, as evidenced by similar findings from Setiawan & Asiyah (2023), who noted a strong connection between price utility and the purchase of rare in-game skins. Asrori (2020) further highlighted the competitive advantage of pricing strategies in promoting virtual goods, where higher-priced items correlate with perceived functionality and exclusivity.

Excitement and Purchase Intention

Excitement significantly influences purchase intention, with a correlation coefficient of 0.481 and a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). Positive emotions, such as excitement and happiness, play a critical role in motivating gamers to make microtransactions. This aligns with findings by Hsieh & Tseng (2018), who demonstrated that emotional factors, such as excitement, strongly predict purchase behavior in virtual environments. Similarly, Yulius (2017) observed that playful excitement drives purchase intentions for in-game items.

The study highlights how emotional engagement, driven by customization and gameplay enhancement, fosters deeper consumer involvement, encouraging frequent microtransactions.

Mediating Role of Excitement

The role of excitement in mediating the relationship between functional quality and purchase intention is supported by a correlation coefficient of 0.234 and a p-value of 0.001 (< 0.05). Higher functional quality increases excitement, which in turn strengthens purchase intention. This is consistent with Alfarisi et al. (2022), who found that excitement mediates the effect of product quality on consumer behavior. Similarly, Tunjung Sari & Lunardy (2016) concluded that emotional factors, such as excitement, are critical in linking product functionality to purchase decisions.

Excitement also mediates the relationship between price utility and purchase intention, as indicated by a correlation coefficient of 0.137 and a p-value of 0.014 (< 0.05). Players derive emotional satisfaction from rare and exclusive items, which justifies higher price points. This finding aligns with Dinata & Risdayati (2017), who observed that emotional engagement amplifies the impact of price utility on purchase intention in competitive gaming environments.

Overall, the findings highlight the critical role of emotional factors in the gaming industry, emphasizing that functional quality and price utility must evoke excitement to maximize purchase intention. Future research could explore additional variables, such as brand loyalty or social influence, to further expand the understanding of consumer behavior in online gaming.

CONCLUSION

Functional quality and price utility significantly influence both excitement and purchase intention for microtransactions at Valve Corporation. The findings confirm that as gamers perceive higher functional quality and price utility in virtual items, their excitement increases, which subsequently enhances their intention to purchase. Excitement serves as an important mediating variable, amplifying the effects of functional quality and price utility on purchase intention.

To improve purchase intention, Valve Corporation should ensure rigorous quality control of its virtual items, providing assurance to users against potential glitches and bugs. Offering diverse product packages at various price points can attract a wider audience, while focusing on visually appealing designs, such as smooth animations, impressive visual effects, and intricate graphics, can further entice gamers. Additionally, providing 24/7 customer support will build trust and enhance the overall consumer experience.

This study has several limitations that future research could address. First, the sample was limited to gamers engaging with Valve Corporation, which may not represent the broader gaming community. Expanding the scope to include users of other platforms or companies would improve the generalizability of the findings.

Second, the research primarily focused on functional quality, price utility, and excitement. Future studies should explore additional factors, such as brand loyalty, peer influence, and cultural differences, which may also affect purchase behavior. A cross-cultural comparison could provide valuable insights into how these variables vary across different regions or countries.

Lastly, the study employed a specific methodological approach, which, while effective, may not capture the full complexity of user behavior. Future research could use experimental designs or longitudinal studies to examine changes in consumer behavior over time. By addressing these limitations and broadening the research

scope, future studies can provide more comprehensive strategies for enhancing user engagement and purchase behavior in online gaming environments.

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