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Understanding Generation Y Purchase Intentions: Mediating Effects of Uniqueness Needs and Experiential Marketing in MSME Snack Consumption

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ABSTRACT

Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) play a vital role in Indonesia's economic resilience, particularly in responding to global health and economic challenges. Among these, the snack food sector in Jambi Province faces increasing pressure to meet the evolving preferences of Generation Y (Gen Y) consumers, who value status, uniqueness, and engaging experiences. This study examines the influence of Gen Y consumer status on purchase intention for MSME snack products, mediated by the need for uniqueness and experiential marketing. Data were collected from 150 MSME owners officially registered with the Jambi BPOM, using stratified random sampling across three regions: Kerinci Regency, Jambi City, and West Tanjung Jabung Regency. The analysis employed SmartPLS 3.0. The findings reveal that Gen Y consumer status significantly influences both the need for uniqueness and experiential marketing. In turn, these mediating variables positively affect purchase intention. Furthermore, the indirect effects of Gen Y status on purchase intention, through both mediators, are stronger than the direct effect. These results underscore the importance for MSMEs to understand and leverage Gen Y consumers' psychological drivers status orientation, desire for uniqueness, and experience-seeking in designing effective marketing strategies. This study contributes to the consumer behavior literature by highlighting the mediating mechanisms underlying purchase intentions in an emerging market MSME context, and offers practical implications for MSME managers to enhance competitiveness by aligning their offerings with Gen Y's distinctive preferences.

Keywords: Generation Y, consumer status, need for uniqueness, experiential marketing, purchase intention

INTRODUCTION

The growing prominence of Generation Y (Gen Y), defined as individuals born between 1977 and 1994, has attracted considerable scholarly attention due to their distinctive consumption behavior. Gen Y consumers are characterized by confidence, internet-savviness, and brand consciousness, often seeking products that reflect their identity and core values (Morton, 2002; Thwaites et al., 2012). This cohort, benefiting from discretionary incomes provided by indulgent parents or grandparents (Fingerman et al., 2009), exhibits strong tendencies toward materialism, prestige sensitivity, and reference group influence, which significantly shape their consumption choices (Kim & Jang, 2014; Valentine & Powers, 2013). In particular, the psychological inclination of Gen Y toward status-driven consumption has positioned them as a critical segment for marketers (Eastman & Liu, 2012).

Alongside status-driven tendencies, the need for uniqueness has emerged as another salient psychological factor influencing consumer behavior. Consumers with a high need for uniqueness demonstrate differentiated purchasing patterns as an expression of their individuality (Tian et al., 2001), often resisting conformity pressures from reference groups. Yet, the interplay between status motivation and the need for



uniqueness remains theoretically underexplored, especially in contexts involving emerging market consumers and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). At the same time, experiential marketing has gained prominence as a strategy to enhance customer engagement and purchase intention. Rather than focusing merely on product features, experiential marketing emphasizes creating memorable and emotionally rich customer experiences that foster stronger brand connections (Schmitt, 1999; Yelkur, 2000). However, the literature has largely examined experiential marketing in large-scale corporate settings, leaving a significant empirical gap regarding its effectiveness in MSME contexts, particularly among Gen Y consumers in emerging economies.

In Indonesia, MSMEs play a vital role in economic resilience and recovery, particularly during periods of global economic downturns and public health crises. Jambi Province alone is home to more than 80,000 MSMEs, with snack food enterprises representing a notable sector (BPOM, 2020). Despite their critical contribution, MSMEs face stiff competition and must adapt to evolving consumer expectations, especially those of Gen Y, who demand not only high-status and unique products but also compelling experiences.

Yet, current empirical research has not adequately addressed how the status orientation of Gen Y consumers, mediated by their need for uniqueness and the impact of experiential marketing, influences purchase intentions toward MSME snack products. Previous studies have focused predominantly on luxury goods in developed markets, overlooking MSME products and the nuanced motivations of emerging market consumers.

This study seeks to fill these theoretical and empirical gaps by examining the mediated effects of experiential marketing and the need for uniqueness on the relationship between Gen Y's status orientation and their purchase intention for MSME snack products in Jambi Province. The findings aim to offer practical insights for MSMEs to better align their marketing strategies with the psychological drivers of Gen Y consumers and contribute to the broader literature on consumer behavior in emerging market contexts.

Given the strategic economic role of MSMEs and the critical importance of understanding Gen Y as a consumer segment, this research is both timely and relevant. It provides an evidence-based foundation for MSME development policies, enhances MSME competitiveness, and addresses a significant gap in the literature on consumer behavior in under-researched emerging economies.

METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative survey approach, supplemented by qualitative insights, to investigate the mediating roles of need for uniqueness and experiential marketing in the relationship between Generation Y consumer status and purchase intention for MSME snack products. The mixed-methods design was chosen to enhance the validity and depth of the findings by integrating numerical analysis with contextual understanding.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed to MSME snack business owners across three regions in Jambi Province Jambi City, West Tanjung Jabung Regency, and Sungai Penuh City. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation of MSMEs across regions, with 150 MSME owners (50 per region) participating in the study. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended items measured on Likert scales to capture

the latent variables (consumer status, need for uniqueness, experiential marketing, and purchase intention), and a small number of open-ended questions to gather contextual perspectives.

In addition, qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with MSME stakeholders, including government officials and MSME development officers, to provide additional context on marketing practices and consumer behavior trends.

Data Sources

The primary data sources consisted of responses from the MSME owners and qualitative insights from key informants. Secondary data were drawn from the Jambi Provincial Office of Cooperatives and MSMEs and BPOM records, including MSME statistics, employment figures, and social media adoption rates, to support the analysis and provide descriptive background.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3.0 software. This technique was selected due to its suitability for predictive models, small to medium sample sizes, and its ability to assess both measurement reliability/validity and structural relationships simultaneously. The analysis included testing for convergent and discriminant validity, composite reliability, path coefficients, and mediation effects.

The qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were analyzed thematically through content analysis and triangulated with survey results to enhance the interpretation of findings and strengthen construct validity. This complementary use of qualitative evidence helped ensure that the quantitative relationships identified were grounded in the lived experiences and contextual realities of MSMEs in Jambi.

This methodological design ensures both rigor and relevance, providing robust empirical evidence for the proposed model while addressing the unique socio-economic context of MSME snack businesses in an emerging market.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION Results

This section presents the empirical findings of the study, which aimed to examine the mediating roles of need for uniqueness and experiential marketing in the relationship between Generation Y consumer status and purchase intention for MSME snack products. The results are summarized through hypothesis testing outcomes in Table 1 and the structural model illustrated in Figure 1. These results reflect the magnitude and significance of the direct and indirect effects among the study variables, as estimated using PLS-SEM.

Table 1 reports the path coefficients, p-values, and hypothesis outcomes. As shown, Generation Y consumer status significantly and positively affects both experiential marketing (β = 0.610, p = 0.004) and need for uniqueness (β = 0.359, p = 0.002), supporting H1 and H2. This indicates that status-conscious Gen Y consumers are more likely to value unique products and respond positively to experiential marketing efforts. In turn, both experiential marketing (β = 0.298, p = 0.011) and need for uniqueness (β = 0.632, p < 0.001) significantly enhance purchase intention, confirming H3 and H4. Notably, the indirect effects of Generation Y status on purchase intention, mediated through experiential marketing (β = 0.429, p = 0.001) and need for uniqueness (β = 0.586, p = 0.021), are stronger than the direct pathway. This

underscores the pivotal role of the two mediators in translating status orientation into actual purchase intention.

Table 1. H	vpothesis	Testing	Results
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Hypotheses	Path	Coefficient (β)	<i>p</i> -value	Result
H1	Gen Y Status → Experiential Marketing	0.610	0.004	Supported
H2	Gen Y Status → Need for Uniqueness	0.359	0.002	Supported
H3	Experiential Marketing → Purchase Intention	0.298	0.011	Supported
H4	Need for Uniqueness → Purchase Intention	0.632	<0.001	Supported
H5	Gen Y Status → Experiential Marketing → Purchase Intention	0.429	0.001	Supported
H6	Gen Y Status → Need for Uniqueness → Purchase Intention	0.586	0.021	Supported

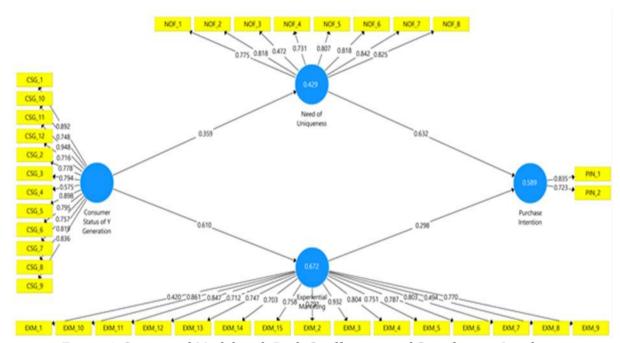


Figure 1. Structural Model with Path Coefficients and Significance Levels

As shown in Figure 1, the model visually represents the positive and significant relationships among the constructs. The direct paths from Generation Y consumer status to experiential marketing and need for uniqueness are both significant, with higher coefficients observed for the path to experiential marketing. Both mediators, in turn, exhibit substantial positive effects on purchase intention, with need for uniqueness showing a stronger effect than experiential marketing. The model also highlights the indirect pathways from Generation Y status to purchase intention, which pass through the mediators. The thickness of the arrows in the diagram reflects the strength of the relationships, indicating that need for uniqueness is the more dominant mediator in this context.

Overall, the results support the proposed conceptual model and provide evidence that Generation Y consumers' status orientation alone does not directly translate into purchase intention. Instead, their psychological needs for uniqueness and

engaging experiences play crucial mediating roles, enabling MSME marketers to target these drivers more effectively.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the mediating roles of need for uniqueness and experiential marketing in the relationship between Generation Y consumer status and purchase intention for MSME snack products. The findings support all proposed hypotheses, providing meaningful insights into consumer behavior in the MSME context and offering important implications for theory and practice.

The significant positive effect of Generation Y consumer status on both need for uniqueness and experiential marketing confirms previous findings that Gen Y consumers are highly status-conscious and motivated by a desire to signal distinction and prestige through their consumption choices (Eastman & Liu, 2012; Kim & Jang, 2014). This aligns with the view that Gen Y has been socialized in a materialistic culture, where consumption is a primary means of expressing identity and achieving social recognition (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003). Such consumers are not only influenced by reference groups but also strive to balance conformity with individual expression, making them a complex and highly desirable market segment (Goldsmith et al., 2010).

In particular, the strong relationship between consumer status and need for uniqueness observed in this study supports Tian et al.'s (2001) conceptualization of uniqueness as a psychological need that manifests through differentiated purchase behaviors. This suggests that, even within the context of MSME snack products—typically regarded as low-involvement purchases—Gen Y consumers actively seek unique offerings that set them apart from others. Similar findings in luxury and fashion markets (Bhaduri & Stanforth, 2016; Walley et al., 2013) indicate that uniqueness is not limited to high-end products but can also drive preferences for niche, artisanal, and culturally distinctive MSME products. Thus, MSMEs offering localized, innovative, or customized snack products can effectively tap into this need.

Experiential marketing was also found to positively influence purchase intention, corroborating Schmitt's (1999) and Williams' (2006) arguments that experiential consumption enhances emotional engagement, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intention. This finding emphasizes the importance of staging memorable and emotionally resonant customer experiences, even in the MSME context, where resources may be limited. Recent studies have shown that experiential elements such as sensory cues, interactive packaging, or storytelling can significantly boost perceived value and purchase intention (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Nasution, 2020). Therefore, MSMEs in Jambi Province could leverage their cultural heritage, unique production processes, and customer interactions to create distinctive brand experiences that appeal to Gen Y's desire for both status and emotional connection.

Notably, the results demonstrate that the indirect effects of Generation Y status on purchase intention, mediated by need for uniqueness and experiential marketing, are stronger than the direct effect. This suggests that status motivation alone does not sufficiently drive purchase behavior, but rather it operates through the fulfillment of deeper psychological needs and experiential gratifications. This observation refines consumer behavior theories by highlighting the mediating mechanisms through which status orientation translates into action (Lea et al., 1995; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). It also supports the growing consensus that contemporary consumers value not just the functional attributes of products but the symbolic and experiential benefits associated with them (Schmitt, 1999; Bigné et al., 2009).

From a practical perspective, these findings underscore the need for MSMEs to adapt their marketing strategies to the psychological profiles of Gen Y consumers. By offering products that are perceived as unique and delivering experiences that are emotionally engaging and socially shareable, MSMEs can enhance customer loyalty and competitiveness (Yelkur, 2000; Chin et al., 2016). Moreover, these strategies may help MSMEs differentiate themselves in crowded markets and command premium prices based on perceived value rather than cost alone.

Theoretically, this study contributes to extending the literature on consumer status and experiential marketing by demonstrating their interrelated roles in an emerging-market MSME context a setting that remains underexplored in comparison to the luxury or corporate settings typically studied (Francis et al., 2015; Kim & Jang, 2014). By integrating status motivation with uniqueness and experience-driven consumption, this research enriches existing frameworks and suggests avenues for modifying established theories to better capture the dynamics of emerging markets and younger consumer cohorts.

Future research could build on these findings by exploring additional moderating or mediating factors, such as digital engagement, social media influence, or peer recommendations, which are particularly salient among Gen Y consumers (Jin, 2012; Kim & Hong, 2010). Longitudinal studies could also shed light on how these psychological drivers evolve over time and how MSMEs can sustain competitive advantage in the face of shifting consumer expectations.

In sum, this study highlights the complex interplay of status, uniqueness, and experiential value in shaping Gen Y purchase intention. For MSMEs, understanding and leveraging these factors represents both a challenge and an opportunity to remain relevant and competitive in an increasingly experience-driven and status-conscious marketplace.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the mediating roles of need for uniqueness and experiential marketing in the relationship between Generation Y consumer status and purchase intention toward MSME snack products in Jambi Province. The findings demonstrate that Generation Y consumers' status orientation significantly influences both their psychological need for uniqueness and their receptiveness to experiential marketing strategies. In turn, these two factors positively affect purchase intention, with the indirect pathways proving stronger than the direct effect of status alone. These results underscore the critical role of addressing deeper psychological needs and creating experience-driven value propositions when targeting Generation Y consumers. The study thus extends the existing literature by elucidating how status motivation, uniqueness-seeking behavior, and experiential consumption interact to shape consumer behavior in the MSME context—an area often overlooked in prior research that has focused primarily on luxury or large-scale markets.

From a practical perspective, these findings imply that MSMEs need to reposition their marketing strategies to appeal to the distinctive characteristics of Generation Y consumers. Emphasizing uniqueness in product design, packaging, and cultural differentiation, alongside the creation of emotionally engaging and memorable customer experiences, can enhance the perceived value of MSME products and strengthen consumer purchase intentions. Policymakers and development agencies are also encouraged to support MSMEs by providing training, resources, and capacity building to adopt innovative and experiential marketing approaches, thereby improving their competitiveness in a consumer-driven economy. For scholars and future research,

these findings open opportunities to examine additional factors—such as social media engagement, peer influence, and digital interactions that may further mediate or moderate the relationships explored in this study, as well as to investigate the long-term dynamics of these psychological drivers through longitudinal designs.

In conclusion, the study highlights that aligning MSME marketing strategies with the status consciousness, need for uniqueness, and experience-seeking behavior of Generation Y consumers offers a viable path to enhancing purchase intentions and ensuring sustainable business growth in the highly competitive MSME sector.

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