

The Analysis of Hard-Selling and Soft-Selling Marketing Strategies Toward Buying Interest for Sustainable Business Development

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Abstract. The increasing growth of companies has led to the increasingly fiercer business competition, in which company must design the right marketing strategy to increase its sales. Marketing strategy is a marketing communication including hard selling and soft selling. This study aims to measure the differences in the effectiveness of hard-selling and soft-selling marketing communication methods in attracting buying interest. The research adopts a survey approach with a descriptive quantitative method and a comparative research type. Data collection used a questionnaire distributed online to individuals from Generation Z (18-23 years old) in West Java. The sample was determined using the purposive sampling method, resulting in 80 respondents. The soft sell indicator shows a minimum score of 9 and an average of 15.23 as well as the hard-selling indicator that shows a minimum score of 6, with an average of 14.93. This means that the soft-selling marketing techniques are more effective to attract people's attention. Then, 46.3% of respondents start interested in buying products after seeing the ad with a soft-selling marketing technique and 73.8% or 59 respondents were interested in buying the advertised product with hard-selling marketing techniques. The findings indicate that factors with hard-selling marketing techniques have a more significant influence on purchasing effectiveness or consumer buying interest compared to soft-selling marketing techniques.

Keywords: Hard-selling, Soft-selling, Marketing Communication, Sustainable Development.

1 Introduction

TikTok Shop was officially closed starting from October 4, 2023, as a result of protests from traders at Tanah Abang Market in Central Jakarta [7]. These traders felt that the increasing public interest in online shopping through e-commerce, especially TikTok Shop, had a negative impact on them, leading to a decline in visitors at markets and other shopping centers. The implementation of marketing communication strategies through various e-commerce channels has indeed proven effective in attracting public interest, making people prefer online shopping over visiting traditional markets or shopping centers. This situation undoubtedly disadvantages traders who have not been able to adopt these marketing

communication strategies. The rapid developments in marketing strategies demand continuous innovation to keep up with the times and survive.

Moreover, the growth of marketing innovations are also supported by the economic growth in Indonesia. According to a press release held by the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia on August 5, 2022, Indonesia's economic growth increased by 5.44% (YoY) in the second quarter of 2022 [17]. This economic growth is further bolstered by the rising number of companies listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX), reaching 787 companies by May 2022 [13]. The growth of these companies has intensified business competition, prompting each company to design the right marketing strategy to boost its sales. One widely used marketing strategy in various e-commerce platforms, whether through live channels or video reviews, is marketing communication with hard selling and soft selling methods.

According to Firmansyah, marketing communication is a means to inform and persuade consumers about the products and services offered [10]. Marketing communication is one of the most important marketing strategies today because many similar products are sold in the market, and one of the factors affecting consumers' buying interest is how a salesperson promotes their products. The way a product or service is marketed can leave a lasting impression on the customer, affecting their perception of the product, service, or company. Therefore, companies must find the best marketing communication method. One of the currently rampant things is the marketing communication method using influencer services or Hard Selling through social media. This method is considered very effective, considering that internet users in Indonesia have reached 210 million people, as revealed by the Chairman of the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), Dewi [6]. With so many social media users in Indonesia, social media is considered an adequate platform for increasing brand visibility. Many companies have realized this potential and begun to take advantage of social media opportunities to increase their brand visibility [26]. Additionally, utilizing influencers to market products is also considered effective because influencers usually have strong bonds of trust with thousands or millions of followers.

Another marketing communication method that is often used is soft selling. This method of marketing communication does not directly promote a product or service; instead, its promotional activities are carried out implicitly [18]. Usually, the soft selling method uses different approaches than influencer services, such as Hard Selling, and more often utilizes other media, such as YouTube and Television. This method is usually packaged in the form of storytelling or an exciting concept, which makes the public interested in listening to it, ultimately generating interest in buying goods or using these services.

This study aims to measure the difference in the effectiveness of the hard selling and soft selling marketing communication methods in attracting people's buying interest, especially Generation Z (shortened as Gen Z), who are significant internet users and comprise the largest population in Indonesia. The total population of Gen Z in Indonesia is approximately 74.93 million, accounting for 27.94% of the entire Indonesian population [4]. It can be assumed that Gen Z makes up a significant portion of consumers for all companies in Indonesia. Therefore, it is crucial to observe Gen Z to understand their characteristics and needs. This will assist companies in devising effective marketing strategies tailored to this demographic, enabling them to create well-suited and proficient marketing strategies. These two marketing

communication methods are highly developed because they are considered effective in increasing buying interest. However, the packaging and approaches of these two marketing communication methods differ significantly, thus likely having different influences on attracting people's buying interest.

There has been limited prior research on the differences in the impact of two marketing communication methods: hard selling and soft selling, from a societal perspective. Most previous studies have focused on marketing communication as a whole or only examined specific methods. For instance, a research conducted by Asrul et al. (2022) about "Utilization Instagram as a Communication Marketing Media", utilizing qualitative methods and data obtained through observations conducted online and offline. The research found that leveraging social media platforms, particularly Instagram, for business marketing is highly effective, allowing businesses to reach a broader, potentially global, audience [3].

Additionally, Al-Zoubi's study (2022) about "The growth of influencer marketing: A comparison of TikTok and Instagram". This qualitative research involved interviews with businesses, influencers, and social media experts. The findings revealed that many businesses lack a comprehensive understanding of constructing an efficient influencer marketing strategy, despite their presence on social platforms with influencers. Instagram remains their preferred choice, particularly for influencer marketing initiatives [2].

Another study by Krchova et al. (2021) about "The Impact of Modern Communication Marketing Tools to Increase the Innovativeness of Business". This research employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, surveying 825 respondents from small, medium, and large enterprises in the Slovak Republic. The results indicated that innovative companies outperform non-innovative ones by 14.7% when utilizing modern marketing communication tools. The study emphasized the potential for improvement, highlighting opportunities such as integrating artificial intelligence in mobile apps, enhancing analytics, and optimizing chatbot functionalities [13].

2 Literature Review

2.1 Marketing Communications

Marketing communication comes from two words, namely communication and marketing. According to the Big Dictionary, Indonesian communication is receiving and sending messages by two or more people. At the same time, marketing is a process of offering an item to the broader community. Marketing communication is a company's effort to provide information and offer products, services, or brands that are sold to consumers directly or indirectly [10]. Therefore, marketing communication is vital for companies. In today's era, marketing communication is also known as integrated marketing communication or known as Integrated Marketing Communication, and Philip Kotler introduced this term. Integrated Marketing Communication is the concept of how to convey a company's message about a product or organization through various existing communication channels [25]. The integrated marketing communication concept aims to create brand awareness to gain trust and increase buying interest in a product. Running Integrated Marketing Communication requires the use of

all promotional media in order to increase the number of product offerings or the organization itself [20].

2.2 Soft-Selling

Soft-Selling is one of the marketing techniques to attract purchases. Syarifah stated that the definition of Soft Selling is a way to market products by utilizing interesting and valuable content and tips for the community [24]. Soft-Selling marketing technique focuses on interpersonal communication [8]. Interpersonal communication demands openness, empathy, and a sense of positivity so that the recipient can feel the message that the person wants to convey in the story he or she creates. This is also why the Soft-Selling marketing strategy significantly affects consumers' purchasing decisions [8]. Pasharibu also reveals that marketing activities that can make others enter the story have an excellent opportunity to influence consumers to buy these products or services [27].

2.3 Hard-Selling

Hard-Selling is a marketing technique to introduce products directly to consumers by focusing on price, benefits, and promotions [18]. The Hard-Selling strategy aims to introduce products directly to get a significant turnover from consumers. A technique that can be used in Hard-Selling is to apply endorsements by celebrities who are famous, have specific skills, and also already have public trust [7]. Brands that will be endorsed by celebrities must pay attention to the background of the celebrity who will promote the product following the background of the brand so that the celebrity endorsement strategy can run and the message that the brand wants to convey as a promotional medium [21]. Several things need to be seen in the endorsement strategy in order to influence consumers' purchasing decisions, including Visibility, Credibility, Attractiveness, and Power [26].

2.4 Buying Interest

Interest is a desire that results from confidence in the price and quality of a product or service [11]. Meanwhile, according to Sari, buying interest is a behavior that shows the extent of commitment or desire to buy something based on an evaluation [22]. In an evaluation, someone usually has several choices over the products to be purchased in terms of interests and needs. Satria reveals that the determining factors in a person's purchasing decision include attention, interest, desire, and, ultimately, making a purchase [23]. Sari also reveals that one other factor could shape a person's buying interest: the promotion of the goods or services offered [22]. This is because promotions aim to attract consumers' interest in a product or to abandon a product and switch to another product currently offered [23].

2.5 Relation between Soft-Selling and Hard-Selling

According to Syarifah, soft-selling aims to influence consumers to the level of cognition and affection [24]. Soft-Selling emphasizes more on company or brand communication in introducing products. Marketing using the soft-selling technique does not influence consumers' purchasing interests but greatly affects brand awareness [15]. In addition to using the Soft-Selling strategy in marketing, known as the hard selling strategy or direct marketing, one example of implementing a hard-selling marketing strategy is celebrity endorsement-based marketing. According to Ridha, a celebrity endorsement strategy is a promotion carried

out by someone who is famous and has public trust in social media in conveying the message of the product you want to introduce [9]. Marketing strategies using direct sales techniques using the celebrity endorsement method effectively build brand awareness and can increase interest in buying products [1].

Based on the explanation of the relationship between soft selling and hard selling and product purchase interests and review from previous descriptions and research, it can be concluded that soft-selling and hard-selling marketing communication strategies both contribute to the increase of consumer buying interest, especially Generation Z in West Java. Nevertheless, the two still have different impacts because they create different customer experiences.

3 Methods

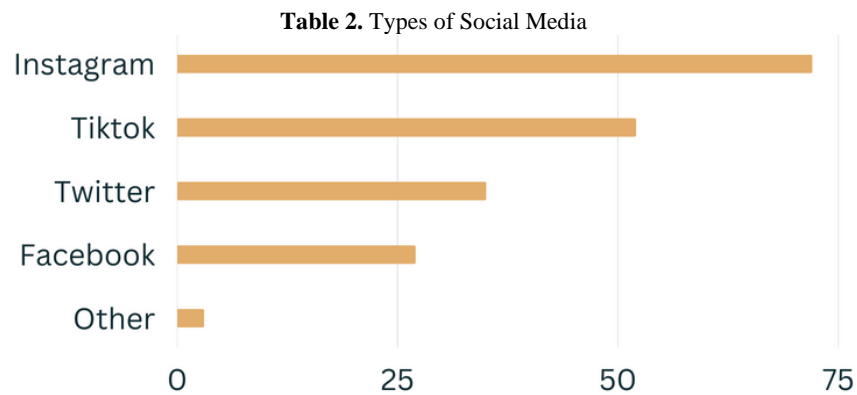
This study used the descriptive quantitative approach conducted as a comparative research. The data collection in this study was conducted through questionnaires distributed online to generation Z in the province of West Java aged between 18 and 23 years old. The respondents were selected under the criteria that they were active users of social media, had seen endorsement videos from influencers, and were interested in buying products after seeing endorsement videos. The purposive sampling method is a method that determines samples based on identities that match the research objectives [16]. The questionnaire includes an answer sheet with a scale of 1-5, which represents a gradation of answers from strongly disagree to strongly agree with a sample target size of 30 as the minimum number of respondents.

Table 1. Questionnaire Characteristic

Scale	Explanation
1	Strongly disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neural
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

4 Results and Discussions

Using a random distribution method, a Google Form questionnaire was distributed to 80 people domiciled in West Java. The respondents who became the object of our research, namely people domiciled in West Java, had an average age of 15-19 years, as many as 41 respondents were 20-23 years old, around 70% were women, and 30% were men. Instagram and TikTok are the most frequent social media used by the respondents.



Descriptive Statistics

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Soft_Sell	80	9	20	15.23
Hard_Sell	80	6	20	14.93
Valid N (listwise)	80			

The model used in this study is a quantitative descriptive model. Based on the information listed in Table 1, there the N has a total of 80 respondents. The soft sale indicator shows a minimum score of 9 and a maximum score of 20. The average on the soft sale indicator shows 15.23. The hard sale indicator shows a minimum score of 6 and a maximum score of 20. While the average on the hard sale indicator shows 14.93. The average soft selling shows 15.23, which is superior to hard selling at 14.93. This proves that the use of soft selling marketing is superior to the use of hard selling marketing.

Soft selling

Table 4. Questions of Soft Selling

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neural	Agree	Strongly Agree
The endorsement video looks interesting	0% (0)	1.3% (1)	12.5% (10)	32.5% (26)	53.8% (43)
I was interested in buying the product before watching the video	13.8% (11)	25% (20)	25% (20)	13.8% (11)	22.5% (18)

I was interested in buying the product after watching the endorsement video	2,5% (2)	6.3% (5)	17.5% (14)	27.5% (22)	46.3% (37)
I prefer to buy the endorsed product compared to other brands	5% (4)	3.8% (3)	13.8% (11)	31.3% (25)	46.3% (37)

Based on the results of a questionnaire obtained from 80 respondents consisting of Gen Z living in West Java, sales through soft selling marketing attracted the attention of respondents after seeing advertisements that were displayed by 53.8% or as many as 43 respondents, while one respondent expressed disapproval.

Before watching the ad, 13.8% or 11 respondents stated that they were not at all interested in buying the product. 25% of respondents said they disagreed and 25% of respondents answered undecidedly. 13.8% with 11 respondents agreeing and 22.5% of respondents agreeing strongly with the statement.

Ads with soft selling marketing can increase interest in buying interest with respondents amounting to 46.3% stating interest in buying products after seeing the ad. 27.5% of respondents agreed and 17.5% of respondents expressed doubt. 6.3% of respondents disagreed with the statement, and 2.5% or 2 respondents strongly disagreed. Soft selling marketing could persuade respondents to choose products compared to other brands by 46.3% or as many as 37 respondents strongly agreeing with this statement. 31.3% agreed and 13.8% expressed doubts about the statement. The respondents disagreed with the statement by 3.8% with as many as 3 respondents and strongly disagreeing, representing 5% of the population.

Hard Selling

Table 5. Questions of Hard Selling

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neural	Agree	Strongly Agree
The endorsement video looks interesting	1.3% (1)	0% (0)	6.3% (5)	17.5% (14)	75% (60)
I was interested in buying the product before watching the video ad	26.3% (21)	21,3% (17)	30% (24)	6,3% (5)	16,3% (13)
I was interested in buying the product after watching the endorsement video	2,5% (2)	13,8% (11)	10% (8)	31,3% (25)	42,5% (34)
I prefer to buy the endorsed product compared to other brands	5% (4)	11,3% (9)	21,3% (17)	21,3% (17)	41,3% (33)

After conducting a survey to 80 respondents regarding their interest in advertising with the hard selling marketing, around 75% or 60 respondents expressed very strong interest in the advertisement videos we presented. This is in accordance with the theory proposed by Satria about the determining factors in a person's purchasing decision, which includes attention, interest, desire, and, ultimately, making a purchase [23].

As many as 16.3% or 13 respondents were interested in buying the product before watching the ad presented. It is known that respondents had known the product well before and around 26.3% or 21 respondents were not interested in buying the product before seeing the ad.

Compared to respondents who have watched video advertisements with the hard selling method, it was found that around 73.8% or 59 respondents were interested in buying the advertised product. The comparison obtained is that large video ads with hard selling are able to increase respondents' buying interest by 51.2%. 41.3% of respondents stated that they strongly agreed to buy endorsed products after seeing the ad compared to other brand products. This indicates that hard selling promotions were more able to increase consumer buying interest with an initial percentage of 22.6% increased by 62.6%. This result aligns with the results from previous studies, that marketing communication through social media platforms, especially with hard-selling marketing, is effective in increasing buying interest.

Hard selling and soft selling are marketing strategies that are still often used and are still relevant if applied to Gen Z, for which these two marketing techniques can increase the interest to buy goods after seeing the ads. The use of hard selling and soft selling marketing has a significant effect if the presentation of the ad pays attention to attitude and displays messages in accordance with the value of the product itself [12]. These two advertising techniques can increase sales attractiveness and product trust among consumers and, thus, can produce a greater brand impact on the market. Meanwhile, if the company begins applying hard selling marketing, training is needed first so that the delivery is more customer-oriented; this in turn will give the company maximum results in using hard selling techniques such as loyalty in repeat purchase [18]. Hard selling and soft selling strategies have little difference if applied to Gen Z when the advertisers consider the use of language style, advertising concepts that are adjusted to the character of Gen Z, and the consistency between the truth conveyed in the ad and the reality of the original product.

5 Conclusions

Social media is one of the platforms that is often used by Gen-Z in promotions. Therefore, marketing techniques in social media must be optimized to see the potential and opportunities in the digital era. Marketing technique is important to make customers interested in buying products. Various marketing techniques are used to attract customers, including soft selling and hard selling marketing techniques, both of which are trusted by Gen-Z. They are potential to help introduce products to more people and invite customers to buy products.

Based on research that has been done on sales through marketing techniques, soft selling has a soft sale indicator showing a minimum score of 9 and an average of 15.23 with 46.3% of respondents stating that they are interested in buying products after seeing the advertisements displayed. Meanwhile, the hard selling marketing has a hard sale indicator that

shows a minimum score of 6, with an average of 14.93 with 73.8% of respondents stating that they are more interested in buying products after seeing advertisements with hard selling techniques. Thus, this study shows that soft selling marketing is more effective for introducing products and attracting the attention of new customers and hard selling marketing is more significant for increasing product purchases. But there will be differences between hard-selling and soft-selling marketing depending on the company, because each thing can circulate quickly and unexpectedly.

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