

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE AND TRUST: ITS INFLUENCE ON GENERATION Z PLAYERS' LOYALTY IN MOBILE LEGENDS MEDIATED BY PLAYER SATISFACTION

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How to cite: Marsha, Deni., Karunia, Erick., Azis, Muh. Irfandy., Aswan, Aswan., Febrian, Muhammad Rully. (2026). Digital Experience And Trust: The Influence On Gen Z Player Loyalty In Mobile Legends: The Mediating Role Of Player Satisfaction. *Jurnal Ilmiah Akuntansi, Manajemen Dan Ekonomi Islam (JAM-EKIS)*, 9(1), 425-436. <https://doi.org/10.36085/jam-ekis.v9i1.9744>

INFORMASI ARTIKEL

Article History:

Accepted : 20 Dec 2025

Revised : 17 Jan 2026

Approved : 20 Jan 2026

Keywords:

Digital Experience, Trust, Player Satisfaction, Player Loyalty

Pages: 425-436

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of Digital Experience and Trust on the loyalty of Generation Z players in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, with Player Satisfaction as a mediator. Using a quantitative approach and PLS-SEM analysis of 100 active Gen Z players in Indonesia, the results show that while Digital Experience and Trust significantly enhance satisfaction and loyalty, Player Satisfaction surprisingly exerts a significant negative effect on loyalty. This indicates a satisfaction paradox where satisfaction acts as a competitive mediator; rising expectations among digital natives reduce satisfaction's effectiveness in driving long-term commitment. Theoretically, this highlights a shift in the role of satisfaction in high-tech markets. Practically, developers should prioritize building trust and continuous digital innovation over merely increasing satisfaction to retain Gen Z players.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has become a primary accelerator for global social and economic transformation, with the digital entertainment sector—specifically mobile gaming—emerging as the most dynamic industry. In Indonesia, this phenomenon is highly evident in the game *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* (MLBB), which has not only established itself as a popular competitive game but has also built a massive community ecosystem and digital economy. The long-term success of a game is measured not only by its number of downloads but by the developer's ability to maintain Player Loyalty amidst increasingly fierce competition, particularly among its primary audience: Generation Z (Balerejo, 2025).

Generation Z, known as digital natives, possesses unique characteristics in consuming digital content (Abdurrachman, 2023). They demand instant interaction, personalized experiences, and superior visual aesthetics. For them, a mobile game is not merely a product, but a social platform that requires continuous feature innovation. Their high adaptability to new technology results in low switching costs; they can easily migrate to competing platforms that offer better experiences or value (Tuong et al., 2025). Consequently, the driving factors of loyalty within this segment must be analyzed specifically and in depth.

In the context of mobile gaming, Digital Experience (DE) has become a fundamental element. DE encompasses the quality of the interactive experience perceived by players, ranging from ease of navigation (user interface) and system stability to interface responsiveness. Previous literature (Yulianto, 2025) consistently demonstrates that a superior and seamless digital experience creates strong functional and emotional value, which is a prerequisite for building Satisfaction and, ultimately, driving Loyalty. Effective DE management serves as a vital strategy for game developers to differentiate themselves from competitors.

Beyond experience, Trust plays a non-negotiable role in long-term digital relationships (Kim & Peterson, 2017). Trust is measured by a player's confidence in the platform's reliability, integrity, and security (Toii et al., 2025). In *Mobile Legends*, this includes confidence in the fair play system, the security of personal data and in-game transactions, as well as the developer's integrity in addressing technical issues. Trust serves as a psychological foundation that reduces a player's perceived risk and, according to commitment-trust theory, directly drives the player's commitment to remain loyal (Brown et al., 2019).

Theoretically, within the classic marketing paradigm, Customer Satisfaction is consistently positioned as the primary mediating variable. Classic theory posits that positive experience and trust will result in Satisfaction, which then serves as the main emotional bridge leading to Loyalty (Giovanni & Winarto, 2023). The majority of research in conventional contexts adopts this model, where Satisfaction is the most stable predictor of Loyalty (Kumar et al., 2013). This study initially hypothesized that Player Satisfaction would positively mediate the influence of Digital Experience and Trust on Loyalty.

However, along with the evolution of the digital market, empirical anomalies have emerged within the context of high technology and Gen Z target audiences (Putri et al., 2025). Some contemporary studies have begun to question the positive linear relationship between Satisfaction and Loyalty (Hidayah, 2025). Satisfaction is now increasingly regarded as a hygiene factor—a mandatory requirement that must be met, but is no longer effective as a determinant of Loyalty. Given that the expectation standards of satisfied Gen Z players are exceptionally high, even a minor service failure can trigger significant disappointment and a rapid intention to switch. This gap underscores the need to re-examine the role of Satisfaction, specifically whether it acts as a complementary mediator that strengthens the relationship or as a competitive mediator that weakens it.

Based on the contradictions and research gaps identified above, the primary objective of this study is to empirically and comprehensively examine the influence of Digital Experience and Trust on the Loyalty of Gen Z players in *Mobile Legends*, with a critical focus on the mediating role of Player Satisfaction. Specifically, this research seeks to verify the type of mediation occurring within these relationships. The theoretical contribution of this study is to provide empirical evidence regarding the shifting role of Satisfaction in Gen Z loyalty models within the highly competitive mobile gaming market.

This article is structured as follows. The next section provides a Literature Review, which offers a theoretical synthesis of all the variables involved. The Research Methodology section details the quantitative approach and the data analysis technique employed, namely PLS-SEM. The Results and Discussion section presents the empirical findings, including validity and reliability analyses as well as hypothesis testing. Finally, the article concludes with the Conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Experience

The concept of Digital Experience (DE) describes the entirety of a user's interaction with a digital platform, including the perceptions, emotions, and responses that arise during the use of the service. According to (Novak et al., 2003), digital experience encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions formed when users interact with technology-based media. In the context of digital marketing, digital experience is viewed as a crucial factor influencing user satisfaction and loyalty (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

In online gaming platforms such as *Mobile Legends*, digital experience is manifested through an engaging user interface, ease of navigation, server speed, graphics quality, and social interaction between players. A positive digital experience is capable of creating emotional value, fostering engagement, and increasing user satisfaction with the platform (Zahra et al., 2025). Consequently, digital experience is not merely a functional interaction but also an emotional experience that strengthens the relationship between the user and the brand or

platform.

Several previous studies indicate that digital experience has a positive influence on user satisfaction and loyalty. An enjoyable digital experience can enhance perceived value and customer satisfaction within digital entertainment applications (Yum & Kim, 2024). In a similar context, Sismiati et al., (2025) demonstrate that an optimal digital experience contributes significantly to a user's intention to continue using the platform and exhibit loyalty.

Trust

Trust is an individual's belief in the reliability, integrity, and competence of a party in fulfilling expected requirements. In the digital context, trust becomes a fundamental factor influencing a user's decision to continue using a platform sustainably (Le et al., 2017). According to Alkhalifah (2022), user trust is formed through three main dimensions: integrity trust, benevolence trust, and competence trust..

On the *Mobile Legends* platform, trust can be reflected in a player's confidence that the gaming system operates fairly, is non-manipulative, and is capable of protecting user data and transactions. Hidayah (2025) states that trust in digital service providers is a strong predictor of customer satisfaction and loyalty. This is because players who trust the platform will feel secure, comfortable, and possess a stronger emotional attachment to the game.

In the context of the younger generation, particularly Gen Z, digital trust holds special significance. Gen Z is known as a generation that is critical regarding privacy, data security, and brand authenticity (Priya, 2025). Therefore, trust serves as an essential foundation for the development of long-term loyalty among young players.

Player Satisfaction

Player satisfaction is a subjective evaluation of the experience perceived while using a gaming platform. According to Giovanni & Winarto (2023) satisfaction is the result of a comparison between initial expectations and perceived actual performance. If performance exceeds expectations, the user will feel satisfied, and this satisfaction becomes the foundation for the formation of loyalty.

In the context of mobile gaming, player satisfaction is influenced by various factors such as graphics quality, the fairness of the gaming system, social interaction, server stability, and the reward system. Ashofi & Migunani (2025) emphasize that satisfaction in online games stems not only from technical aspects but also from the emotional and social experiences gained by players during gameplay. Satisfied players tend to have a higher inclination to remain active, make in-app purchases, and recommend the game to others.

Player Loyalty

Player loyalty reflects the psychological and behavioral commitment of players to continue using and supporting a gaming platform over the long term (Deni Marsha,

2024). Loyalty is a form of attachment that encourages consumers to engage in repeat purchases and resist competitor offerings (Putri et al., 2025). In the context of online games, loyalty can be manifested through gameplay intensity, a willingness to participate in events, making in-game purchases, and active participation in the player community.

Zhao et al., (2024) state that player loyalty is influenced by satisfaction, trust, and the perceived value of the gaming experience. Players who are satisfied with the features, system, and community within a game will tend to develop an emotional loyalty toward the platform. Consequently, loyalty is not merely the result of technical quality but also of the emotional experiences that build long-term relationships between the player and the gaming platform.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with a causal-explanatory design. The objective is to examine the cause-and-effect relationships between variables, specifically the influence of Digital Experience (X1) and Trust (X2) on Player Loyalty (Y), with Player Satisfaction (Z) acting as the mediating variable. The population in this study consists of all Generation Z *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* players who are actively playing in Indonesia. The research sample comprises 100 respondents, determined through a purposive sampling technique. The primary criteria for respondents are being between 18 and 25 years old (representing Gen Z) and being active players of *Mobile Legends*.

The data utilized in this study are primary data collected through an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The variables of Digital Experience, Trust, Satisfaction, and Loyalty were measured using indicators adopted and modified from relevant previous studies. Prior to distribution, the research instrument underwent validity and reliability testing to ensure its robustness.

The data analysis technique employed is Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), conducted using SmartPLS software. The PLS-SEM analysis process consists of two primary stages. The first stage is the evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model) to ensure convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability, utilizing factor loading values, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability. The second stage is the evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model) to test the hypotheses, which includes examining the direct effects between variables and analyzing the mediating effect of Player Satisfaction using the bootstrapping method with 100 samples. The results of this analysis serve as the basis for drawing conclusions and identifying the research implications.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Validity and Reliability Analysis

The results of the reliability test (Table 1) demonstrate that all variables possess Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) values above the minimum threshold of 0.70. The CA values range from 0.841 to 0.854, while the CR values range from 0.882 to 0.891. These results indicate that all constructs (Digital Experience, Trust, Satisfaction, and Loyalty) exhibit good internal consistency and are highly reliable.

Table 1 Cronbach's Alpha & Composite Reliability

variabel	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Digital Experience	0,854	0,891
Trust	0,846	0,884
Player Satisfaction	0,841	0,882
Player loyalty	0,846	0,884

Source: Processed primary data (2025)

The convergent validity test, as seen from the factor loading values of the indicators (Figure 1), which are all above 0.70, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, which exceed the 0.50 threshold (ranging from 0.518 to 0.544), indicates that each indicator successfully reflects its respective construct. Furthermore, the discriminant validity test was conducted using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Table 2). The results show that the square root of the AVE on the table's diagonal (ranging from 0.720 to 0.738) is greater than the correlation values with other constructs (non-diagonal). For instance, the square root of the AVE for Loyalty is 0.724, which exceeds its highest correlation coefficient with Satisfaction (0.637). These results ensure that discriminant validity is fulfilled and that each construct is empirically distinct, thus the measurement model is considered feasible for further analysis.

Table 2 Discriminant Validity Analysis

variabel	Digital Experience	Trust	Player Satisfaction	Player loyalty
Digital Experience	0,738			
Trust	0,591	0,723		
Player Satisfaction	0,683	0,655	0,720	
Player loyalty	0,588	0,601	0,637	0,724

Source: Processed primary data (2025)

Inner Model

The evaluation of the structural model aims to test the significance of the causal relationships between constructs as formulated in the hypotheses. The testing was conducted by examining the Path Coefficients (Original Sample), T-statistics, and P-

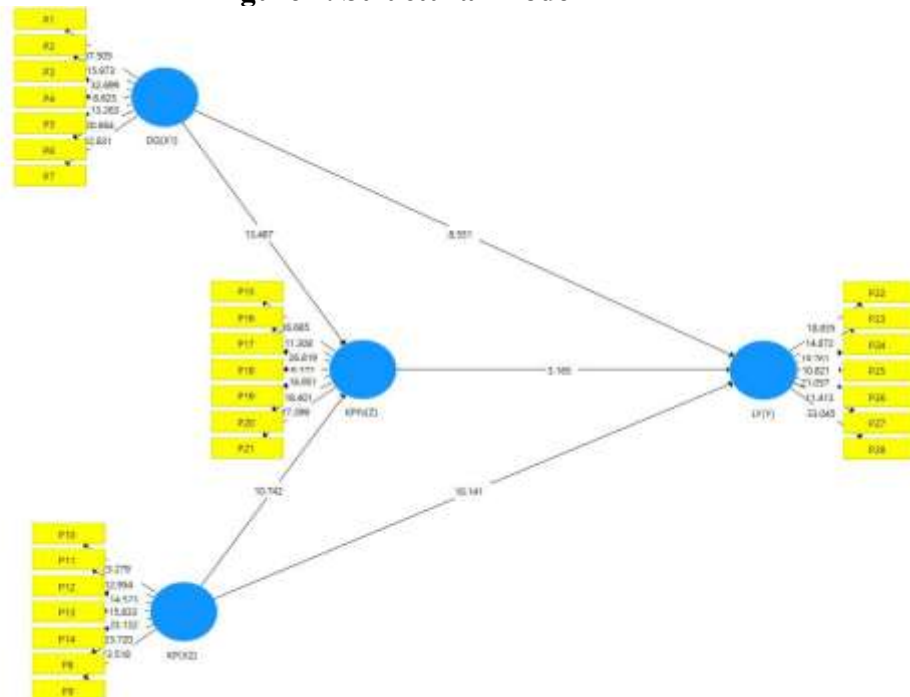
values derived from the bootstrapping results (Table 3). A hypothesis is considered accepted if the T-statistic is greater than 1.96 (or the P-value is less than 0.05)

Table 3 Structural Model Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Original Sample	T-statistics	P-value	Information
DG(X1) -> KPN(Z)	0,554	13,487	0,000	Accepted
KP(X2) -> KPN(Z)	0,693	8,551	0,000	Accepted
DG(X1) -> LY(Y)	0,453	10,742	0,000	Accepted
KP(X2) -> LY(Y)	0,700	10,141	0,000	Accepted
KPN(Z) -> LY(Y)	-0,383	3,165	0,002	Rejected
DG(X1) -> KPN(Z) -> LY(Y)	-0,212	3,427	0,001	Negative Mediation
KP(X2) -> KPN(Z) -> LY(Y)	-0173	2,696	0,007	Negative Mediation

Source: Processed primary data (2025)

Figure 1. Structural Model



Source: Processed primary data (2025)

H1: Hypothesis H1 is accepted as it possesses a positive path coefficient of 0.554 and a T-statistic well above the threshold (13.487; $P=0.000$). This result indicates that the better the players' perceptions of ease of use, interactivity, and visual aesthetics of *Mobile Legends* (Digital Experience), the higher the level of Player Satisfaction. This finding is consistent with literature asserting that a positive digital experience is key to creating user satisfaction in technology-based applications.

H2: Hypothesis H2 is accepted with the highest path coefficient (0.693) and a T-statistic of 8.551 ($P=0.000$). This indicates that Trust in system reliability, data security, and developer integrity is a very strong predictor of Player Satisfaction in *Mobile Legends*. Gen Z's confidence in the platform provides a sense of security and comfort, which serves as a fundamental basis for satisfaction..

H3: Hypothesis H3 is accepted (coefficient 0.453; T-statistic 10.742; $P=0.000$). It was found that Digital Experience has a significant direct effect on Player Loyalty. This implies that superior interaction quality and in-game experiences directly drive players' commitment to continue playing and recommend the platform, aligning with the concept that loyalty is formed from excellent digital experiences.

H4: Hypothesis H4 is accepted (coefficient 0.700; T-statistic 10.141; $P=0.000$). Trust has the most dominant direct influence on Player Loyalty. This finding reinforces the commitment-trust theory, which states that trust is the foundation of long-term relationships. Security, system reliability, and developer integrity are crucial factors in retaining Gen Z players amidst intense competition.

H5: The results of this path analysis reveal a finding that contradicts traditional marketing paradigms: Player Satisfaction has a significant negative effect on Player Loyalty (coefficient -0.383; $P=0.002$). This finding supports the Satisfaction Paradox phenomenon occurring in competitive and high-tech environments, particularly among Gen Z audiences (Parasuraman, 2017). Player Satisfaction tends to function as a Hygiene Factor; it is a mandatory baseline expectation but is no longer effective as a determinant of long-term commitment (Oliver, 2019). When players feel highly satisfied, their expectation standards rise sharply. This escalation of expectations makes players prone to switching (low switching cost), which can ultimately trigger negative reactions and diminish loyalty intentions when minor bugs or service failures occur in the future. This suggests that in the context of Gen Z mobile gaming, Loyalty is driven more by structural and social bonds (such as Digital Experience and Trust) rather than mere emotional or functional Satisfaction.

H6: The mediation effect was found to be significant (coefficient -0.212; $P=0.001$). Since the direct effect (H3) is positive but the indirect effect through Satisfaction (H6) is negative, this indicates the occurrence of Inconsistent/Competitive Mediation. Player Satisfaction acts as a deterrent to loyalty rather than a strengthening intermediary.

H7: The mediation effect was also significant (coefficient -0.173; $P=0.007$). With a positive direct effect (H4) and a negative indirect effect, this is also classified as Inconsistent/Competitive Mediation.

Both mediation results reinforce the findings of H5: Player Satisfaction effectively negatively mediates the influence of Digital Experience and Trust on Loyalty. This implies that while Digital Experience and Trust directly increase Loyalty, the

increase generated through Satisfaction actually diminishes those positive effects. This suggests that loyalty strategies should focus on direct improvements to Digital Experience and Trust rather than through Satisfaction enhancement.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study concludes that Generation Z Player Loyalty in *Mobile Legends* is predominantly driven by Trust in the platform and the sustained quality of the Digital Experience. Although Player Satisfaction is strongly established, it does not act as a bridge that strengthens Loyalty; instead, it functions as a Competitive Mediator. This indicates that rising player expectation standards diminish the effectiveness of satisfaction as a determinant of long-term commitment.

The managerial implications of these findings suggest that *Mobile Legends* developers must prioritize Trust by investing in system stability, data security, and game integrity (fair play), as these are the most dominant predictors of Loyalty. Secondly, the company must continuously innovate in Digital Experience aspects—such as UI/UX, server speed, and engaging visuals—to meet the expectations of Gen Z digital natives. Finally, management must recognize that pursuing high levels of satisfaction does not always yield equivalent loyalty; therefore, player retention strategies should focus on building social bonds, community, and embedded value (switching costs), rather than mere functional satisfaction. Future research is encouraged to examine other mediating variables, such as Social Attachment or Engagement, which may play a more positive role in shaping player loyalty in the current mobile gaming era.

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