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# PERCEPRION OF EXCLUSIVE CONTENT VALUE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA USERS' INTEREST IN SUBSCRIBING

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**Abstract**

The growth of the creator economy has encouraged social media platforms to adopt subscription-based exclusive content as a monetization strategy. This study examines the influence of perceived exclusive content value and perceived price reasonableness on audience engagement level among social media users. Grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), exclusive content value is conceptualized through social interaction and community, informative and content quality, status and hedonic value, and perceived price reasonableness.
This research employed a quantitative explanatory approach using a survey of 128 social media users in Indonesia, analyzed through multiple linear regression with SPSS. The findings show that all examined variables positively and significantly influence audience engagement, with social interaction and community emerging as the most influential factor. These results highlight the importance of community building and fair pricing in sustaining audience engagement within the creator economy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Along with the rapid expansion of social media, the digital communication landscape has evolved into a creator-driven economic ecosystem, where individual creators compete not only for attention but also for sustained monetization. Unlike platform-based subscription models such as Netflix or Spotify, subscription mechanisms in individual creator ecosystems are inherently unstable. Audience engagement and subscription intention are highly volatile, relying heavily on emotional attachment, perceived personal value, and continuous interaction rather than contractual or platform-level lock-in mechanisms.

This instability highlights a critical behavioral challenge: while users may initially show interest in exclusive content, sustaining their willingness to subscribe over time remains difficult. Subscription intention in this context is not merely a transactional decision but a fragile behavioral outcome influenced by fluctuating perceptions of value, social attachment, and perceived fairness. Despite the growing prevalence of exclusive content features on social media platforms, limited empirical research has examined why audiences decide to financially commit to individual creators rather than remaining passive content consumers.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be explained through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which emphasizes intention as a function of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. However, TPB alone does not fully capture the gratification-seeking behavior of social media users. Therefore, this study integrates Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to explain how cognitive, emotional, and social needs are actively pursued through exclusive content consumption.

In the context of individual creators, perceived value becomes multidimensional. Users evaluate not only utilitarian benefits such as information quality, but also hedonic gratification in the form of enjoyment and status, as

well as social value derived from belonging to an exclusive community. These value perceptions jointly form users' attitudes toward subscribing, while perceived price reasonableness determines whether such attitudes translate into actual intention.

Despite extensive studies on digital subscriptions, prior research predominantly focuses on platform-based services or examines value dimensions in isolation. There remains a lack of understanding regarding how multiple value perceptions simultaneously operate within individual creator ecosystems, where engagement is personal, relational, and emotionally driven. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how perceived exclusive content value and perceived price reasonableness jointly influence subscription intention among social media users in Indonesia.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review aims to build a strong theoretical and empirical foundation for examining how exclusive content value and perceived price reasonableness influence subscription intention among social media users. It follows a structured approach that begins with an overview of relevant theories, specifically the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), followed by a critical synthesis of recent empirical studies that support the development of the research hypotheses. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this section clarifies the positioning of the present study and highlights the research gap it seeks to address.

### 2.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Background

This study adopts the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1991) as the primary theoretical foundation. TPB posits that the strongest predictor of actual behavior is Behavioral Intention, which in this study is represented by Subscription Intention (Y). According to TPB, intention is determined by three main constructs: Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Behavioral Control.

To elaborate on the formation of Attitude, this study integrates Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (McQuail, 2010). UGT assumes that social media users are active participants who intentionally select content to satisfy specific needs or "gratifications." In this research, these gratifications are conceptualized as the dimensions of Exclusive Content Value: Social Interaction and Community (X1), Information Quality and Content (X2), and Status and Hedonic Value (X3). These three dimensions collectively shape the user's positive or negative evaluation (Attitude) toward subscribing to exclusive content.

Furthermore, Social Interaction and Community (X1) also aligns with the Subjective Norm component of TPB, representing the social pressure or collective influence within a creator's community. Meanwhile, Perceived Price Reasonableness (X4) represents Perceived Behavioral Control, as it reflects the user's perception of their capability and the resource-related barriers (financial sacrifice) to performing the behavior.

By combining TPB and UGT, this study provides a comprehensive framework to explain how users' active search for value driven by social, utilitarian, and hedonic needs combined with their assessment of price, ultimately shapes their intention to subscribe.

### 2.2 Empirical Review and Hypothesis

This section reviews prior empirical studies relevant to each research hypothesis. While digital subscriptions have been studied, there is a need to understand these variables specifically within the context of the creator economy on social media.

#### 2.2.1 The Influence of Social Interaction & Community on Subscription Intention

Subscription intention in the creator economy is formed through a layered decision-making mechanism that involves cognitive evaluation, emotional gratification, and social attachment. Rather than operating independently, these dimensions interact to shape users' overall assessment of whether subscribing is worthwhile.

Social Interaction and Community refers to the extent to which a media platform or content creator facilitates meaningful engagement, dialogue, and a sense of belonging among users and between the user and the creator. From the perspective of communication psychology and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), social interaction represents a fundamental human need for relatedness and social integration. In digital environments, this gratification is manifested through the formation of "gated communities" where users can engage in exclusive discussions, direct Q&A sessions, or private forums that are not accessible to the general public.

In the context of the creator economy, social interaction creates a "sense of belonging" that functions as a Subjective Norm within the TPB framework. When users perceive that their social circle or the community they admire values exclusive access, they feel a social pressure or motivation to comply by subscribing. Users tend to feel more satisfied and loyal when they are part of an "inner circle." Contemporary studies indicate that social value significantly influences purchasing behavior in social media. Zhang et al. (2025) demonstrated that social interaction and the emotional connection within online communities are primary drivers of consumer adoption behavior. This finding reinforces the notion that the social bonds fostered through exclusive content serve as a critical determinant of a user's intention to pay for a subscription.

**H1 :** Social Interaction and Community (X1) has a positive and significant effect on Subscription Interest (Y) Audience Engagement Level.

### 2.2.2 The Influence of Information Quality & Content on Subscription Intention

From a cognitive perspective, users evaluate exclusive content based on its functional usefulness and economic justification. High-quality information serves as utilitarian value that strengthens positive attitudes, while perceived price reasonableness determines whether users feel capable of performing the behavior.

Information Quality and Content refers to the depth, accuracy, uniqueness, and practical utility of the material provided by a creator. According to Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), users are active seekers of "cognitive gratifications," meaning they purposefully select media that can provide knowledge, solve problems, or improve their skills. In the era of information overload, exclusive content is often perceived as a "premium filter" that offers high-value insights, specialized tutorials, or "behind-the-scenes" data that is not available for free.

Theoretically, high information quality shapes a positive Attitude toward the subscription behavior in the TPB model. When users perceive that the content provides a significant utilitarian advantage, they evaluate the act of subscribing as a beneficial investment rather than a mere expense. In digital marketplaces, information quality acts as a signal of expertise and reliability. Studies by Shin & Park (2021) and Sulaiman & Tjhin (2023) confirm that the utilitarian value of digital content is a fundamental driver of subscription intention. Their research suggests that when users believe the content is of superior quality and highly relevant to their needs, their intention to convert from a free follower to a paid subscriber increases significantly.

**H2** : Information Quality and Content (X2) has a positive and significant effect on Subscription Intention (Y).

### 2.2.3 The Influence of Status & Hedonic Value on Subscription Intention

Emotional gratification plays a central role in digital consumption. Hedonic enjoyment and perceived status enhance affective attitudes, reinforcing users' emotional attachment to creators and increasing willingness to subscribe.

Status and Hedonic Value represents the degree to which a subscription provides pleasure, entertainment, and a sense of prestige or "VIP" status to the user. From a psychological perspective, hedonic value fulfills affective needs, providing emotional experiences such as joy, excitement, and ego enhancement. In the context of social media subscriptions, this is often manifested through exclusive "badges," unique emojis, or the simple psychological satisfaction of having access to something "limited" or "exclusive" that the general audience cannot obtain.

In the framework of Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), these emotional rewards contribute to a strong, positive affective attitude. Users do not only subscribe for the "what" (the information) but also for the "how it makes them feel" (the status). The feeling of being "special" or more valued by a creator creates a powerful motivational force. Kembau (2025) emphasizes that hedonic motivation and the pursuit of digital status are critical factors in maintaining user loyalty and driving subscription growth in the digital age. This suggests that the psychological gratification of status and the entertainment value of exclusive content are essential determinants that trigger a user's intention to commit financially to a creator.

**H3** : Status and Hedonic Value (X3) has a positive and significant effect on Subscription Intention (Y).

### 2.2.4 The Influence of Perceived Price Reasonableness on Subscription Intention

Social interaction functions as both gratification (UGT) and subjective norm (TPB), where community belonging and peer influence reinforce behavioral intention.

Perceived Price Reasonableness refers to the consumer's subjective evaluation of whether the subscription fee is fair, justified, and proportional to the benefits received. In the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), price is a key component of Perceived Behavioral Control. It represents the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior based on the resources (money) required. If the price is perceived as "reasonable," the financial barrier is lowered, making the user feel more capable and in control of their decision to subscribe.

In the fast-paced creator economy, users often perform a rapid mental "cost-benefit analysis." Subscription intention will only manifest if the user feels that the "sacrifice" of paying the fee is outweighed by the utilitarian, social, and hedonic values they receive. If the price is deemed unfair or too high relative to the perceived value, it acts as a significant barrier that prevents intention from becoming action. Menhard, Syafwandi, & Yulasmi (2025) demonstrated that price perception and fairness have a direct and significant influence on purchase and repurchase intentions in digital environments. Their findings reinforce that price reasonableness is a fundamental facilitator that determines whether a user's interest in a creator will actually result in a paid subscription.

**H4**: Perceived Price Reasonableness (X4) has a positive and significant effect on Subscription Intention (Y).

### 2.3 Research Model

The research model demonstrates that the fulfillment of user needs through social interaction, content quality, and hedonic value serves as a fundamental driver in shaping positive perceptions of exclusive content. Furthermore, the satisfaction derived from these gratifications, when reinforced by perceived price reasonableness, acts as a primary determinant that enhances audience engagement levels and their commitment to long-term subscriptions.

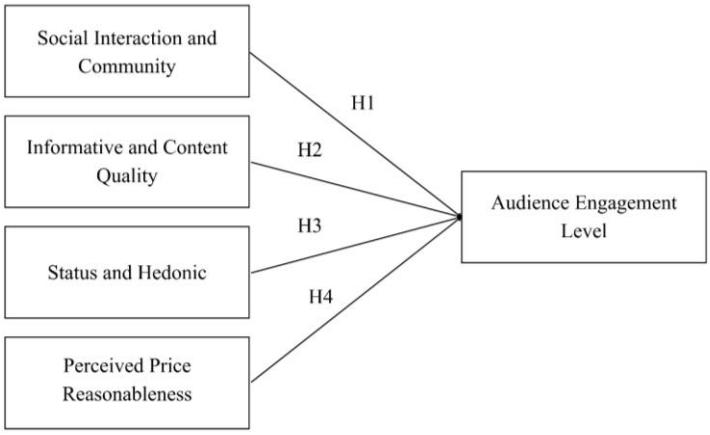



**Figure 1**. Research Model
**Source** : Authors (2025)

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study was designed as an explanatory study aimed at analyzing causality and explaining the extent to which independent variables influence dependent variables (Ghozali, 2018). The main focus of this design is to empirically test the influence of the dimensions of Exclusive Content Value Perception, which consist of Social Value, Utilitarian Value, and Hedonic Value, as well as the variable of Perceived Price Fairness on the subscription interest of social media users. To achieve this objective, this study applied a quantitative approach using a survey method. The quantitative approach was chosen so that the data collected in numerical form could be analyzed using statistical methods to test hypotheses and generalize the sample findings to a broader population. Through the survey method, a structured questionnaire was distributed to respondents online via the Google Forms platform, which is considered highly efficient in reaching a large sample in a short time and effective for measuring latent variables such as perceptions and behavioral intentions.

### 3.2 Population and Sample

The population in this study includes all active social media users in Indonesia who are at least 18 years old and have an understanding of or have been exposed to exclusive content offers or paid subscriptions from individual creators. The respondent criteria were designed to ensure behavioral relevance rather than mere demographic representation. Only users who were familiar with exclusive content features or had prior exposure to paid creator subscriptions were included. This criterion is essential because subscription intention cannot be meaningfully assessed without experiential awareness of gated content mechanisms. Additionally, respondents' frequency of social media consumption ensures that their perceptions reflect actual engagement behavior rather than hypothetical evaluation.

This population limitation is crucial as a screening criterion to ensure that respondents have contextual experience and a relevant perception of the gated content phenomenon. In determining participants, this study used non-probability sampling techniques by combining purposive sampling and convenience sampling methods. The purposive sampling method was applied to establish specific inclusion criteria such as age restrictions and awareness of subscription features, while convenience sampling was used to facilitate the distribution of questionnaires through the researcher's social network. Based on Hair et al.'s (2021) statistical rules for multivariate analysis, the ideal sample size is 10 times the number of variables tested. With a total of five variables in this study, the minimum sample target of 50 respondents was exceeded with an actual sample of 128 respondents, which aimed to strengthen statistical validity and minimize the error rate.

### 3.3 Research Instrument and Data Analysis

The main research instrument used was an online questionnaire designed using a 5-point Likert scale to measure the intensity of respondents' attitudes, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The questionnaire structure consisted of an identity and screening section to validate respondent eligibility, followed by a core question section that measured all variable constructs with five statement items per variable, as well as an additional demographic section. All collected data were then processed and analyzed using SPSS software. The data analysis stage began with instrument testing through validity and reliability tests to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the questionnaire. Next, descriptive statistical analysis was performed to describe the respondent profile. As a final

stage, hypothesis testing was conducted through Multiple Linear Regression Analysis, which included partial t-tests, simultaneous F-tests, and determination coefficient analysis ($R^2$) to comprehensively conclude the effect of independent variables on Subscription Interest.

### 3.4 Measurement of Variables

The measurement of variables in this study is based on a structured questionnaire developed from established constructs in consumer behavior research and adapted to the e-commerce context. All constructs are measured using multiple items to ensure adequate representation of each variable. The measurement items are assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

**Table 1**. Measurement of Variables

| | |
|---|---|
| **Social Interaction and Community** | **Skala Scale 1-5**<br>SIC1 : Berlangganan membuat saya merasa lebih terhubung secara emosional dengan kreator tersebut<br>SIC2 : Akses eksklusif ini memungkinkan saya untuk berinteraksi lebih intim (misalnya Q&A khusus atau grup chat) dengan kreator<br>SIC3 : Saya merasa menjadi bagian dari kelompok penggemar elite (inner circle) yang solid dan saling mendukung<br>SIC4 : Ada dorongan dari teman atau orang yang saya kagumi untuk ikut berlangganan konten eksklusif ini<br>SIC5 : Saya mencari rasa kepemilikan (sense of belonging) yang lebih kuat dengan komunitas saat berlangganan |
| **Informative and Content Quality** | **Skala Scale 1-5**<br>ICQ1 : Konten eksklusif menawarkan informasi, tips, atau studi kasus yang lebih mendalam dan bernilai tinggi<br>ICQ2 : Konten yang saya dapatkan sangat unik dan tidak mungkin ditemukan secara gratis di sumber lain.<br>ICQ3 : Saya yakin konten eksklusif dapat secara signifikan membantu saya meningkatkan pengetahuan atau keterampilan<br>ICQ4 : Saya menilai kualitas produksi (audio/visual) dan struktur konten eksklusif jauh lebih profesional<br>ICQ5 : Konten eksklusif secara konsisten memberikan nilai yang fungsional dan praktis bagi kehidupan saya |
| **Status and Hedonic** | **Skala Scale 1-5**<br>SH1 : Mengonsumsi konten eksklusif memberikan saya kesenangan dan hiburan yang tidak saya dapatkan dari konten umum<br>SH2 : Saya merasa bangga karena memiliki akses ke konten yang hanya bisa diakses oleh pelanggan berbayar<br>SH3 : Ada sensasi kegembiraan dan pengalaman emosional yang memuaskan saat saya menonton konten eksklusif<br>SH4 : Memiliki akses eksklusif meningkatkan citra diri atau status saya di mata komunitas kreator tersebut<br>SH5 : Saya berlangganan terutama karena faktor kesenangan pribadi dan mood booster |
| **Perceived Price Reasonableness** | **Skala Scale 1-5**<br>PPR1 : Biaya langganan yang ditetapkan kreator sangat wajar dan sebanding dengan nilai total (konten + komunitas) yang saya terima<br>PPR2 : Harga langganan ini tidak terasa memberatkan dan sesuai dengan anggaran belanja saya untuk hiburan/edukasi<br>PPR3 : Saya bersedia membayar lebih mahal jika kualitas konten eksklusif tersebut benar-benar luar biasa<br>PPR4 : Saya merasa bahwa saya mendapatkan pengembalian nilai yang memadai untuk uang yang saya keluarkan<br>PPR5 : Dibandingkan dengan produk sejenis, harga langganan konten eksklusif ini terasa adil |
| **Audience Engagement** | **Skala Scale 1-5** |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Level** | AEL1 : Saya sangat berniat untuk segera mencoba berlangganan konten eksklusif yang ditawarkan kreator favorit saya<br>AEL2 : Saya akan dengan senang hati mengeluarkan uang untuk mengakses konten eksklusif yang menarik perhatian saya<br>AEL3 : Saya memiliki kecenderungan kuat untuk mencari dan membeli layanan berlangganan serupa di masa depan<br>AEL4 : Saya akan merekomendasikan layanan langganan ini kepada teman atau orang lain yang memiliki minat serupa<br>AEL5 : Jika saya sudah menjadi pelanggan, saya pasti akan memperpanjang langganan di bulan/periode berikutnya |

**Source**: Authors (2025)

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Respondent Profile

The demographic profile of the 128 participants reveals a sample dominated by students (66%) and employees (32%), highlighting a strong interest in the creator economy among young academics and professionals. In terms of gender, 62% of respondents are female and 38% are male, suggesting that women may be more actively engaged with influencer-led subscription models.

The age distribution identifies a predominantly "digital native" audience, with 64% aged 18-25 and 30% over the age of 25. Only a small fraction (6%) are under 18. Significantly, 100% of respondents confirmed their awareness of exclusive content and subscription features. This unanimous familiarity ensures that the participants possess the necessary context to provide valid and reliable data regarding their subscription intentions.

**Table 2**. Respondent Profile

| Question | Category | Frequency | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Female | 79 | 62% |
| | Male | 49 | 38% |
| **Age** | <18 | 8 | 6% |
| | 18 - 25 | 82 | 64% |
| | >25 | 38 | 30% |
| **Occupation** | Student | 84 | 66% |
| | Employee | 41 | 32% |
| | Not Working | 3 | 2% |
| **As a social media user, have you ever seen or heard of features/offers such as subscriptions, paid exclusive content, or premium access offered by individual creators/influencers?** | Yes | 128 | 100% |
| | No | 0 | |

**Source**: Authors (2025)

### 4.2 Reliability and Validity Testing

The validity and reliability tests indicate that the measurement model possesses adequate construct validity and internal consistency. Analysis of factor loadings shows that all retained items scored above the 0.70 threshold, supported by item-to-total correlations exceeding 0.30, confirming their accuracy as latent variable indicators.

For the Social Interaction and Community construct, items SIC3 and SIC4 were retained with factor loadings of 0.826. Although the Cronbach's Alpha was 0.524, this lower value is primarily due to the limited number of items

used. As noted by Tavakol & Dennick (2011), Cronbach's Alpha is highly dependent on the number of items and does not solely reflect a lack of correlation; since the corrected item-total correlations remain above 0.30, these items contribute significantly and are retained based on their validity.

The Informative and Content Quality and Status and Hedonic constructs demonstrated high reliability with Alpha values of 0.727 and 0.787, respectively, and factor loadings exceeding 0.83. Similarly, Perceived Price Reasonableness (Alpha 0.752) and Audience Engagement Level (Alpha 0.775) showed strong internal consistency, with all items exhibiting robust loadings between 0.739 and 0.851. Items with insufficient loadings or weak correlations were excluded to ensure the model's overall integrity.

**Table 3**. Reliability and Validity Testing

| Items | Factor Loading | Eigen Value | Cumulative Explained | Item-to-total Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social Interaction and Community | | 1.364 | 68.185% | | 0.524 |
| SIC3 | 0.826 | | | 0.364 | Valid |
| SIC4 | 0.826 | | | 0.364 | Valid |
| Informative and Content Quality | | 1.582 | 79.095% | | 0.727 |
| ICQ3 | 0.889 | | | 0.582 | Valid |
| ICQ4 | 0.889 | | | 0.582 | Valid |
| Status and Hedonic | | 2.109 | 70.302% | | 0.787 |
| SH1 | 0.839 | | | 0.631 | Valid |
| SH2 | 0.832 | | | 0.619 | Valid |
| SH5 | 0.844 | | | 0.638 | Valid |
| Perceived Price Reasonableness | | 2.008 | 66.943% | | 0.752 |
| PPR2 | 0.799 | | | 0.553 | Valid |
| PPR4 | 0.803 | | | 0.560 | Valid |
| PPR5 | 0.851 | | | 0.632 | Valid |
| Audience Engagement Level | | 2.399 | 59.980% | | 0.775 |
| AEL1 | 0.739 | | | 0.532 | Valid |
| AEL2 | 0.816 | | | 0.635 | Valid |
| AEL4 | 0.765 | | | 0.567 | Valid |
| AEL5 | 0.776 | | | 0.586 | Valid |

**Source**: Authors (2025)

### 4.3 Coefficient of Determination

The Coefficient of Determination ($R^2$) serves as a critical measure in assessing the explanatory power of the regression model. It quantifies the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is accounted for by the independent variables. In this study, the $R^2$ values indicate the strength of the relationship between each pair of variables, while the $R^2$ values provide insight into how much of the variance in the outcome is explained by the predictors. Additionally, the Standard Error of the Estimate reflects the precision of the model's predictions.

**Table 4.** Coefficient of Determination

| Path | R | R-square | Result |
|---|---|---|---|
| H1 : Social Interaction and Community → Audience Engagement Level | 0.707 | 0.500 | Moderate |
| H2 : Informative and Content Quality → Audience Engagement Level | 0.416 | 0.173 | Acceptable |
| H3 : Status and Hedonic → Audience Engagement Level | 0.530 | 0.280 | Acceptable |
| H4 : Perceived Price Reasonableness → Audience Engagement Level | 0.647 | 0.418 | Moderate |

**Source**: Authors (2025)

The path between Social Interaction and Community and Audience Engagement Level ($R^2$ = 0.500) demonstrates a moderate explanatory power, indicating that 50% of the variance in audience engagement can be attributed to the social and community-driven aspects of exclusive content. This suggests that the sense of belonging and interaction within a creator's inner circle is a significant driver of user engagement.

In a similar vein, the path involving Perceived Price Reasonableness ($R^2$ = 0.418) also exhibits moderate explanatory power. This finding indicates that while price fairness is an important factor in shaping engagement, it is not the sole determinant, as it accounts for 41.8% of the behavior variance.

In contrast, the paths involving Status and Hedonic Value ($R^2$ = 0.280) and Informative and Content Quality ($R^2$ = 0.173) exhibit a lower yet acceptable explanatory power. These findings indicate that while both status-seeking and information quality are relevant factors, they contribute less directly to the overall variance in audience engagement compared to social and price factors. The nature of these paths suggests that other external factors beyond the scope of this study may contribute to these relationships, and further research may explore these variables in more depth.

### 4.4 Hypothesis Testing Result

**Table 5**. Hypothesis Testing Result

| Path | β | t-value | p-value | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 : Social Interaction and Community has a positive effect on Audience Engagement Level | 0.707 | 11.235 | 0.000 | Positive |
| H2 : Informative and Content Quality has a positive effect on Audience Engagement Level | 0.416 | 5.135 | 0.000 | Positive |
| H3 : Status and Hedonic has a positive effect on Audience Engagement Level | 0.530 | 7.007 | 0.000 | Positive |
| H4 : Perceived Price Reasonableness has a positive effect on Audience Engagement Level | 0.647 | 9.521 | 0.000 | Positive |

**Source**: Authors (2025)

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that all independent variables exert a positive and significant influence on the Audience Engagement Level, with p-values of 0.000, which are well below the 0.05 threshold. Social Interaction and Community (H1) emerged as the most dominant driver, exhibiting the highest path coefficient (β = 0.707) and a t-value of 11.235, followed by Perceived Price Reasonableness (H4) with a β of 0.647 and a t-value of 9.521. These findings confirm that social engagement within a community and the fairness of pricing are the most critical factors in shaping audience commitment within exclusive content services.

Furthermore, Status and Hedonic Value (H3) demonstrated a significant impact on engagement with a β of 0.530 and a t-value of 7.007, while Informative and Content Quality (H2) contributed positively with a β of 0.416 and a t-value of 5.135. Collectively, these results validate that both emotional and functional gratifications significantly enhance user loyalty toward creators. With all hypotheses accepted, this study successfully demonstrates that the integration of social value, content quality, hedonic appeal, and price fairness are the primary determinants of audience behavior in the creator economy ecosystem.

### 4.5 Discussion

#### 4.5.1 Social Interaction and Community and Audience Engagement Level

The results of this study indicate that Social Interaction and Community has a positive and significant effect on the Audience Engagement Level. This is evidenced by the highest path coefficient in the model (β = 0.707) and a t-value of 11.235, which is well above the required threshold. Furthermore, the $R^2$ value of 0.500 suggests that social factors possess a moderate explanatory power, accounting for 50% of the variance in audience engagement. These findings suggest that the desire for relatedness and the sense of belonging within a "gated community" are primary motivators for users to engage deeply with creators. Within the context of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), social interaction fulfills the need for social integration, making it the most dominant driver in the digital creator economy.

#### 4.5.2 Informative and Content Quality and Audience Engagement Level

The relationship between Informative and Content Quality and Audience Engagement Level was also found to be positive and significant, with a path coefficient (β) of 0.416 and a t-value of 5.135. However, this variable showed an $R^2$ value of 0.173, indicating a relatively lower explanatory power compared to social and price factors. This result implies that while high-quality and useful content is a necessary foundation for engagement, it is not the sole reason users commit to premium subscriptions. Users expect informative value as a standard (utilitarian gratification), but the actual intensity of their engagement is often driven more by the emotional and social layers added to the content.

#### 4.5.3 Status and Hedonic and Audience Engagement Level

Statistical analysis confirms that Status and Hedonic Value significantly impacts the Audience Engagement Level, supported by a path coefficient of 0.530 and a t-value of 7.007. The $R^2$ value of 0.280 indicates an acceptable level of explanatory power, where approximately 28% of user engagement can be explained by the pleasure and prestige derived from exclusive content. This aligns with the psychological perspective that users are motivated by affective needs, such as the excitement of "VIP" access and the joy of consuming entertaining content. In the creator economy, the feeling of being special or having higher status compared to the general public acts as a powerful reinforcement for active engagement.

#### 4.5.4 Perceived Price Reasonableness and Audience Engagement Level

Finally, Perceived Price Reasonableness was found to have a significant positive effect on Audience Engagement Level, with a β of 0.647 and a t-value of 9.521. With an $R^2$ value of 0.418, price fairness demonstrates a moderate and critical role in the decision-making process. In terms of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), price reasonableness serves as a form of Perceived Behavioral Control; when users perceive the subscription cost as fair and proportional to the value received, they feel more capable and willing to engage. This finding highlights that even if the content quality and social value are high, engagement may be hindered if the price is perceived as unjustified.

#### 4.5.5 Integrated Value Perception and Subscription Intention

Beyond the individual effects, the findings suggest that value perceptions operate cumulatively rather than independently. Social interaction strengthens emotional attachment, which in turn amplifies the perceived hedonic and utilitarian benefits of exclusive content. Likewise, perceived price reasonableness functions as a reinforcing mechanism that legitimizes emotional and social gratification. When users perceive strong community belonging and emotional satisfaction, price fairness reduces psychological resistance, allowing these values to translate into stronger subscription intention.

This interaction indicates that exclusive content value should be understood as a holistic perception system, where social, emotional, and cognitive evaluations mutually reinforce engagement behavior.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The primary theoretical contribution of this study lies in advancing the integration of the Theory of Planned Behavior and Uses and Gratifications Theory within the context of individual creator subscriptions. This research demonstrates that gratification motives do not operate independently but are embedded within a behavioral control and value-justification structure. Social and emotional gratifications shape attitudes and subjective norms, while perceived price reasonableness enables these gratifications to translate into subscription intention.

By positioning exclusive content consumption as a behavior driven by relational and emotional value rather than purely functional benefits, this study extends TPB beyond rational decision-making models and enriches UGT by incorporating behavioral control mechanisms.

This research concludes that the proposed structural model effectively explains the factors driving audience engagement within the digital creator economy. All four working hypotheses were empirically proved, confirming that Social Interaction and Community, Informative and Content Quality, Status and Hedonic Value, and Perceived Price Reasonableness each exert a positive and significant influence on the Audience Engagement Level. The primary contribution of this study to the field of digital business lies in the discovery that social gratification specifically the sense of belonging to an "inner circle" is the most dominant driver of engagement, surpassing even the functional quality of the content itself. This shifts the focus of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) in the context of paid subscriptions, where emotional and social connectivity become the core value proposition.

Furthermore, the integration of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is validated through the significant role of Perceived Price Reasonableness, which acts as a critical facilitator for user commitment. When price is perceived as fair and proportional to the value received, it mitigates the perceived risks of subscription, thereby strengthening the relationship between value perception and actual engagement. However, this research is not without limitations; the sample of 128 respondents and the use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of these results to broader demographic segments beyond the Indonesian youth market. Additionally, the relatively low Cronbach's Alpha for the social interaction construct suggests that future scales could be refined to capture more nuanced dimensions of digital community belonging.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to observe how audience engagement evolves as creator-follower relationships mature over time. Investigating moderating variables such as user income levels or specific content niches (e.g., educational vs. entertainment) would also provide deeper insights. From an institutional and systemic perspective, these results suggest that platform developers should implement more robust tools for community management, while creators are encouraged to adopt transparent, value-aligned pricing models. Such changes in the digital economic system would foster a more sustainable environment for both creators and consumers, ensuring long-term loyalty and growth in the global digital economy.

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