The Influence of Character Image to Word-of-Mouth Through Gamer Satisfaction of Impulse Spending in the Genshin Impact Mobile Game

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Abstract— **This research explores the impact of character image, encompassing both symbolic representation and self-image congruence, on impulse buying, satisfaction, and word-of-mouth recommendations in the context of Genshin Impact in Indonesia. Through an online survey involving 488 Gen Z Genshin Impact gamers, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with LISREL 8.8 is employed to empirically test hypotheses, revealing a positive correlation between character image and consumer behaviors. This study contributes valuable insights to academia and business by emphasizing the crucial role of character image in shaping consumer preferences. In the case of Genshin Impact, the findings highlight character image as a key driver of revenue growth for game companies, attributed to the effective utilization of in-game characters as a strategic selling point. By identifying this positive relationship, the research provides actionable insights for game developers and marketers aiming to optimize character creation and promotion, fostering increased revenue and player satisfaction.**

Keywords— *Genshin Impact, game, character image, symbolic representation, self-image congruence, impulse buying, satisfaction, word-of-mouth*

I. INTRODUCTION

The increasing number of gamers worldwide has been consistently growing, driven by technological advancements, globalization, and innovation within the gaming industry in creating and developing numerous games. Additionally, the accessibility of games to newcomers and experienced gamers without tie restrictions has contributed to this growth [37]. The increase has seen a cumulative addition of 450 million players globally from 2019 to 2022. Asia has the highest number of gamers, with 1,48 billion gamers and 1,42 billion active gamers, surpassing other countries [36]. Indonesia, as one of the Asian Regions, ranks third globally in terms of gamers population [41].

The increase of gamers is an opportunity for game companies to promote their games and increase their company's revenue. There are three categories of how to increase revenue from their game: pay-to-play [28], in-game purchases [4][23], and advertisements [37][65]. In-game purchases are one of the most popular monetization categories game companies use, especially for freemium games, which are free to play but offer additional premium features that require in-game payments [33]. This category represents a mutually beneficial strategy for both game companies and

gamers, where the companies generate revenue that enables them to provide extra services, such as offering new exclusive content and events in their games, thereby enhancing the gaming experience for their players [26]. According to APPMAGIC (2023) [6], the total revenue earned from freemium games surpassed over US$100 billion in 2022. Additionally, from Statista (2022) estimated that the total revenue earned by game companies globally reached US$267 billion in 2022 [63]. Therefore, this study investigates the factors that drive gamers to make in-game purchases.

There are various reasons why individuals develop an interest in games, including seeking enjoyment, fantasy, interacting, game design, satisfaction, escaping from reality, and the desire to compete with other gamers [13][32][33][65] [68]. Playing online games such as Genshin Impact provides enjoyment and satisfaction for their players, particularly through storyline, character design, and functional features such as being able to play with friends simultaneously [47]. Genshin Impact is a popular action role-playing game with a large global community, including Indonesia. Genshin Impact is a *gacha*-based game, which means it operates on a certain probability and relies on player luck. In order to obtain desired items or exclusive characters, players need to make in-game purchases with real currency [5].

Nowadays, *the gacha* system has been implemented in most freemium games worldwide [56]. There are several stages depicted in the customer journey of freemium games with a *gacha* system, especially for Genshin Impact, including *past experience*, *awareness*, *ask*, *play/act*, *pre-purchase*, *purchase*, *post-purchase*, and *advocate* [1][15][25]. The *past experience* is the initial phase where newcomers and gamers feel bored and seek to play a game with a genre similar to what they have experienced before and look for something new. *In the awareness* stage, consumers become curious and explore the new existence of an appealing game through various sources (e.g., friends, community, and game reviewers) and advertisements. *In the ask*ing stage, consumers seek information about the game from credible external source*s*. *The play/act* stage involves consumers downloading and continuously playing the game. In the subsequent stage, there are three phases in the purchasing stage: *pre-purchase experience*, *purchase*, *and post-purchase experience*, and it concludes with *advocat*ing. In the *pre-purchase experience*, consumers become interested and seek information about the game's exclusive items, characters, costumes, or cosmetics.

Next, in the *purchase* stage, consumers make in-game purchases to obtain exclusive items or characters in *gacha* activities. *Finally, in the post-purchase experience*, gamers have spent money and engaged in *gacha* activities [57][58]. At this stage, consumers either become loyal and continuously play the game after obtaining what they want or disengage from the game. Lastly, *the advocate* stage is when consumers recommend the game to others, providing positive or negative reviews based on their personal experiences.

Previous research analyzing word-of-mouth focused solely on the aspects of the freemium games, and more studies need to examine the character image, specifically digital characters in freemium games [38]. Therefore, this study aims to examine the variable of character image in the freemium game, specifically in Genshin Impact, and its influence on impulse buying, satisfaction, and word-of-mouth by developing the research by [13]. Character image refers to the impulsive buying factor that affects individuals to make sudden purchases for characters. Additionally, character image is crucial in games with a similar genre to Genshin Impact, where the main sales are the characters. This importance is particularly evident in the sales of Genshin Impact, which have increased due to the influence of character image on in-game characters, leading their player to engage in in-game purchases. Moreover, Genshin Impact is one of the popular games in Indonesia [6].

This research develops upon the previous research model by Chen et al., (2022) [13] and modifies it with references from five additional sources [48][12][64][42][3]. The variable of emotional value is replaced by satisfaction, which is developed by Chauhan et al., (2021) and Liang et al., (2009) [12][48]. This modification aligns with the customer journey of Genshin Impact players in Indonesia, where they make impulsive purchases of characters and subsequently experience satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the variable of satisfaction in studies by Chauhan et al., (2021) and Liang et al., (2009) has the same meaning as the emotional value in Chen et al., (2022) research, which describes the feeling of satisfaction experienced by consumers.

The modification of the five journals adopts several variables. Firstly, as referenced in the research by [13], this study adopted the variable of symbolic representations to impulse buying (H1a) and self-image congruence to impulse buying (H2a). Liang et al., (2009) adopts the variable of symbolic representation to satisfaction (H1b) [48]. Chauhan et al., (2021) adopts self-image congruence to satisfaction (H2b) [12]. Suyanto and Femi (2023) suggests a path from impulse buying to satisfaction (H3) [64]. Kim et al., 2015) proposes that self-image congruence influences word-of-mouth [42]. Finally, Al-Adwan (2022) suggests the path from satisfaction towards word-of-mouth (H4) [2]. This research model is developed based on the background of this study and the customer journey of Genshin Impact players in Indonesia.

The term customer journey was initially introduced by Court et al., (2009) [15], describing the customer's path, sequence, or flow in the decision-making process across all touchpoints and decision stages that can enhance the customer experience [24][46]. The customer journey model can provide an understanding of variations among consumers in learning and comprehending the decision-making process more profoundly [9][22][46][61]. The customer journey model is presented and analyzed based on conducted research, such as this model incorporating the perspective of the process

divided into pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase [18]. The three stages can be further broken down into awareness, ask, play/act, and advocate, supporting a detailed review and exploration of the customer journey [1][59].

Character image refers to the overall impression of a character recognized by consumers and the belief held between a character and the consumer. Character image also encompasses the emotions and feelings evoked by the character. Character image is recommended as a focal point for design and marketing strategies in creating a unique experience, particularly for characters that can resonate with consumers, thereby increasing revenue [13]. Character image measures impulsive purchases, satisfaction, and word-of-mouth, which consist of symbolic representation and self-image congruence.

According to Chen et al., (2022), characters are complex signs and symbols representing images and stories. Characters communicate a lot to consumers through their imagery [47], symbolic meanings, and the stories accumulated through dissemination across various media. Therefore, the symbolic representation of character images needs to be explored regarding their storytelling aspects and meanings. The symbolic value formed by the relationship between the production, consumption, and use of characters and the entire social environment should be explored. In customer satisfaction, additional measurement levels should include functional and emotional benefits (symbolic and experiential), the strongest purchase motivators [48]. De Young found that satisfaction increases with more individual marketing tactics, particularly relationship-building tactics that influence the perceived relationship quality between consumers and the products they use [20].

Furthermore, according to Stathopoulou and Balabanis (2016), symbolism attributes have experiential and emotional elements associated with emotional responses leading to satisfaction by evoking feelings of joy and individual excitement [62]. This premise is consistent with [7][14][44]. Accordingly, this study establishes Hypothesis 1 as follows.

H1a: Symbolic representation has a positive influence on impulse buying
H1b: Symbolic representation has a positive influence on satisfaction

Self-congruity and impulse buying have significant roles in consumers' minds as they can motivate unplanned purchases. When consumers associate themselves with a product and feel enthusiastic and similar, they can make impulsive purchases to achieve their self-image. Additionally, an increased socioeconomic status within a society can stimulate consumer preference, leading to more impulsive buying [17][19][45]. Self-image congruence also has a significant impact on satisfaction. Experience will affect consumer satisfaction and loyalty and impact attitudes and subsequent actions in influencing repeat purchase intention [52][53].

Additionally, according to Bagozzi (1992), consumers develop a stronger sense of satisfaction when they feel their self-image is successfully fulfilled [8]. Consumers can express their self-concept and social identity through product design. Byun et al., introduced the concept of a dominant design, which reflects consumers' self-expression to product design rather than emotional brand attachment to a brand [10]. When

creating characters, designers give them personal attributes and characteristics as portrayals. Wojnicki and Godes also demonstrates the self-enhancement motive behind word-of-mouth by showing that consumers are more likely to engage in word-of-mouth when it can enhance an individual's expertise and boost their self-esteem [67]. Accordingly, this study establishes Hypothesis 2 as follows.

H2a: Self-image congruence has a positive influence on impulse buying
H2b: Symbolic representation has a positive influence on satisfaction
H2c: Symbolic representation has a positive influence on word-of-mouth

Shin-Young and Eun-Joo argues that two factors can influence satisfaction [60]. The first factor is intrinsic, which includes promotional offers, quality, product appearance, and product attributes such as websites. The second factor is extrinsic, which encompasses product variety, availability, and ease of shopping [30]. According to Handayani et al., (2018) in psychological terms, hedonic well-being can be experienced whenever an individual's pleasure needs are fulfilled, whether physically, intellectually, or socially [33][51]. Materialistic and narcissistic thinking is associated with the post-purchase mood that can generate high excitement.

In contrast, situational thinking may be associated with post-purchase satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the outcome. According to Gardner and Rook (1998), many people experience positive moods after impulsive purchases [29]. Individuals with fluctuating moods tend to experience negative moods after impulsive buying. They may feel a sense of regret or, more precisely, remorse if the outcome does not meet their expectations [55]. Accordingly, this study establishes Hypothesis 3 as follows.

H3: Impulse buying has a positive influence on satisfaction

Özdemir stated that transparent communication and satisfaction can lead customers to use word-of-mouth [54]. Additionally, a relationship between satisfaction and the first-time experience of customers in spreading word-of-mouth has been [66]. Liang et al., argues that although not all satisfied customers engage in word-of-mouth related to the purchased product or service, dissatisfied customers are likelier to share negative experiences with others [48]. Thus, word-of-mouth is recognized as a result of customer satisfaction because experiencing the offered service quality can stimulate customers to engage in word-of-mouth [40]. In support of this notion, customer satisfaction influences word-of-mouth, as an individual must have a satisfying experience before recommending it to others [43][49]. Accordingly, this study establishes Hypothesis 4 as follows.

H4: Satisfaction has a positive influence on word-of-mouth

II. METHODS

This research applies a quantitative research method by conducting a survey measured with a structured questionnaire spread online through social media platforms. Furthermore, this study utilizes a descriptive research approach, specifically a single-cross-sectional design, which involves collecting information from a population sample at a single point in time [50]. The questionnaire provided to respondents was self-administered. The researcher used a 1-7 Likert scale as it allows for a greater variety of response options for respondents and increases the likelihood of capturing individual objective realities [11][16]. The Likert scale ranges from 1, indicating "Strongly Disagree," to 7, indicating "Strongly Agree."

This research also utilizes a non-probability sampling technique with a judgment sampling method, where not all populations can be sampled in this research, and the sample selection criteria are based on the researcher's judgment [50]. The sample in this study consists of Gen Z individuals in Indonesia who are still playing the Genshin Impact game and have made at least one top-up transaction in the last three months. The age range of the respondents in this study is between 17 and 27 years old.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

514 respondents completed the questionnaire, but 15 did not meet the criteria, and 11 failed to pass the attention check questions. Therefore, the total number of respondents available for data processing is 488 respondents. The demographic profile table can be seen in Table 1.

Furthermore, after the descriptive analysis of the respondents, the next step is data analysis by checking the measurement model validity test through path estimates and statistical significance with Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using the LISREL 8.8 program. This measurement method can be accomplished by examining a t-value greater than 1.96 and checking the Standardized Load Factor (SLF) scores of observed variables, which should be greater than 0.5 [31]. There were several indicators whose SLF scores did not meet the criteria. There are SR1, SR2, SR3, SR5, SC1, SC2, SC6, IB4, and IB5. Therefore, the researchers removed these items. The results can be seen in Table 2.

In the measurement model testing phase, the Goodness of Fit (GoF) Statistic assessment will be conducted, divided into three parts: absolute fit measures, incremental fit measures, and parsimonious fit measures. The results of the measurement model and structural model fit tests can be seen in Table 3, and it can be concluded that based on the RMSEA value, both models demonstrate a good fit.

The hypothesis testing stage is conducted by analyzing the t-value in the structural model, and the hypothesis is accepted if the t-value is greater than the t-table value with a 1.645 significance level. The estimation values and t-values of the structural model are depicted in Fig. 1 and Table 4.

Hypothesis 1a (H1a) generates a t-value of 1.61, indicating that symbolic representation does not significantly influence impulse buying. This finding aligns with [13], suggesting that digital characters can only bring joy and satisfaction but lack a long historical background and can only create trends [13]. Therefore, to capture consumers' attention, especially in impulse buying, game companies and designers must create characters that are appealing and meaningful in their storyline before promotion. Regarding the relationship between symbolic representation and satisfaction (H1b), it obtained a value of 5.71, indicating a positive influence. This finding is consistent with [48]. To attract new consumers or retain loyal ones, game companies must emphasize the symbolic meaning of their game characters to ensure customer satisfaction.

Self-image congruence positively influences impulse buying, satisfaction, and word-of-mouth (H2a; H2b; H2c). The character certainly has a personality that can be self-expressed through creative design, compelling storytelling representations, and symbolic values. Suppose this self-expression aligns with a strong design image displayed. In that case, it can trigger consistency with the consumer, arousing their desires and impulsive emotions, thereby leading to impulsive buying. According to Ekinci and Riley (2003), individuals satisfy their desires by choosing products that align with their ideal self, and the influence of congruence on satisfaction is stronger when individuals have appropriate preferences [21][69]. Consumers can be satisfied when the offered product has relatively high quality or low price. Word-of-mouth is connected to self-congruence because individuals often build their self-image through social media and specific online content related to their self-image.

The relationship between impulse buying and word-of-mouth (H3) obtained a non-significant value of 0.62. This finding is consistent with the research results of the source [64], which indicate that high-income consumers are not always influenced to make impulsive purchases, even when incentives are provided. Genshin Impact also features a *gacha* system with certain probabilities to obtain a character that can bring both satisfaction and disappointment to consumers. Furthermore, this is supported by demographic profile data, where most respondents are categorized as low spenders. Lastly, the relationship between satisfaction and word-of-mouth (H4) obtained a significant value of 9.06, aligning with the findings of [2], which suggest that satisfied consumers who experience high-quality service before purchase, during purchase, and after purchase are more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth about the product or service they received [3].

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis and hypothesis testing, several conclusions were obtained from the research. Firstly, symbolic representation does not influence impulse buying behavior in Genshin Impact characters, which means there is a lack of symbolic influence and meaning in the characters that would lead consumers to impulse purchases. However, symbolic representation positively influences satisfaction, indicating that consumers feel content with the narrative and story provided by the characters in Genshin Impact. On the other side, self-image congruence positively influences impulse buying and satisfaction, meaning that there is a match between individuals' self-concept and preferences for Genshin Impact characters, which makes them feel satisfied and stimulates desire and emotions for impulsive purchases. Self-image congruence also positively affects word-of-mouth, indicating that consumers can share their experiences on social media or with others when having positive experiences in Genshin Impact.

Impulse buying does not significantly influence satisfaction, indicating that consumers still think carefully before making in-game purchases and *gacha* for a character in Genshin Impact. Lastly, satisfaction positively impacts word-of-mouth, meaning that Genshin Impact consumers are satisfied with the services provided by the game. This study demonstrates that character image in a game character, based on the research model by Chen et al., [13], modified with other research [48][12][64][42][3], following the customer journey of Genshin Impact players, is crucial in triggering consumers do word-of-mouth recommendations for the game. The research is limited to Gen Z, aged 17 – 27, in Indonesia.

This research implies that game companies should create unique and distinctive characters with a role in the game's storyline so that the meaning of the characters can be strongly embedded in consumers' minds and to increase the chances of impulsive purchases and able to design characters with distinct personalities, such as creative designs and attractive appearances, in order to trigger and awaken consumers' desires for impulsive purchases and provide them with a sense of satisfaction, leading them to recommend it to others. Furthermore, game companies also need to consider their low-spending consumers to influence them into impulsive purchases, particularly in internal and external impulse categories.

Nevertheless, the research has limitations there. This research only focused on the exclusive characters within Genshin Impact. It cannot be generalized to all types of games. Thus, the sample in this research is limited to Gen Z and self-reported by respondents, which may introduce bias in the data collection process.

The next research can increase the number of samples and involve respondents from various age ranges, domiciles, occupations, and other more proportional categorizations to enhance the generalization of research findings. Additionally, it can conduct comparative analysis using several classifications, such as players who spend their money on every update for exclusive new character changes and players who only spend their money if the character is worth obtaining. This classification is expected to provide additional references for deciding for game companies, especially regarding marketing strategies.

Next research can include willingness to spend as one of the variables in the research. This variable is because most of the research data indicates that the players are low spenders. By incorporating the willingness to spend variable, we can measure consumers' willingness to spend their money in the game. It is also worth considering including the "repurchase intention" variable. This variable is to gauge how likely consumers are to make future top-ups and *gacha* purchases in the game. Lastly, future research may also consider adding moderator variables, such as the amount of time spent playing Genshin Impact per day, which explains the variables of impulse buying, satisfaction, and word-of-mouth; the monthly expenses for Genshin Impact, which explains the impulse buying variable; and the age factor, which explains the variables of satisfaction and word-of-mouth.
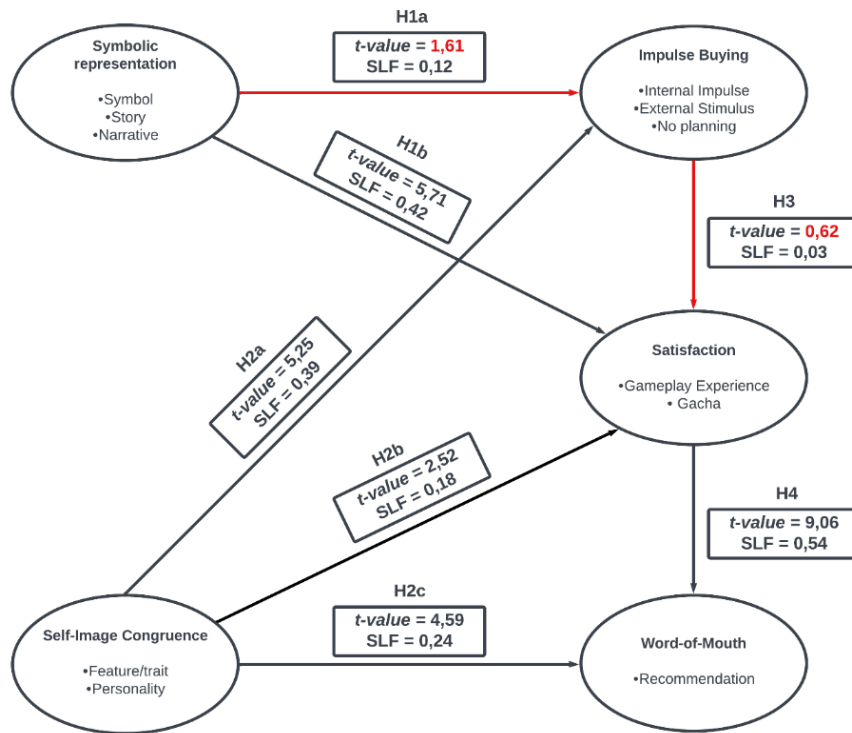
Fig. 1.   Demographic table

TABLE I.　　DEMOGRAPHIC TABLE

Characteristic	Category	N	%
Gender	Men	166	34,0%
	Women	322	66,0%
Age	17 – 20 years old	231	47,3%
	21 – 24 years old	189	39%
	25 – 27 years old	68	14,0%
Monthly expenditure Amount (IDR)	≤ Rp 1.000.000	291	59,6%
	Rp 1.000.000 - Rp 2.000.000	114	23,4%
	Rp 2.000.000 - Rp 5.000.000	63	12,9%
	≥ Rp 5.000.000	20	4,1%
Education Level	Junior High School or Equivalent	116	23,8%
	Senior High school or Equivalent	214	44,1%
	Diploma	11	2,3%
	Bachelor	145	29,7%
	Magister	1	0,2%
Domicile	Jawa non-Jabodetabek	220	45,1%
	Jabodetabek	166	34,0%
	Sumatera	54	11,1%
	Kalimantan	26	5,3%
	Sulawesi	11	2,25%
	Other provinces	11	2,25%
Monthly expenditure amount for Genshin Impact (IDR)	≤ Rp 300.000	439	90,0%
	Rp 300.000 - Rp 800.000	36	7,4%
	≥ Rp 800.000	13	2,6%
Duration of playing Genshin Impact	< 6 months	25	5,1%
	6 - 12 months	74	15,2%
	1 year - 2 years	190	38,9%
Time spent playing Genshin Impact per day	< 1 hour (*infrequent gamers*)*	54	11,1%
	1 - 2 hours (*Regular gamers*)*	242	49,6%
	> 2 hours (*Frequent gamers*)*	192	39,3%
Notes:	*according to Ip et al., (2008) [39]*		

TABLE II.   MEASUREMENT VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Variable / Category	*t-value* ≥ 1,96	SLF ≥ 0,5	CR ≥ 0,7	AVE ≥ 0,5	Results
Symbolic Representation (SR)			0,74	0,49*	Reliable
SR 4 / Narrative	13,93	0,64			Valid
SR6 / Story	17,85	0,79			Valid
SR7 / Story	14,57	0,66			Valid
Self-Image Congruence (SC)			0,75	0,50	Reliable
SC5 / Personality	15,81	0,71			Valid
SC6 / Personality	18,97	0,83			Valid
SC8 / Personality	11,94	0,56			Valid
Impulse Buying (IB)			0,83	0,51	Reliable
IB1 / Internal Impulse	17,81	0,75			Valid
IB2 / External Impulse	19,31	0,78			Valid
IB3 / External Impulse	17,95	0,74			Valid
IB6 / Internal Impulse	13,23	0,59			Valid
IB7 / Internal Impulse	15,48	0,67			Valid
Satisfaction (SAT)			0,85	0,54	Reliable
SAT1 / Gameplay Experience	20,26	0,80			Valid
SAT2 / Gacha	15,43	0,66			Valid
SAT3 / Gameplay Experience	17,90	0,74			Valid
SAT4 / Gameplay Experience	17,61	0,73			Valid
SAT5 / Gameplay Experience	17,78	0,73			Valid
Word-of-Mouth (WOM)			0,82	0,55	Reliable
WOM1 / Recommendation	22,56	0,86			Valid
WOM2 / Recommendation	19,81	0,79			Valid
WOM3 / Recommendation	19,70	0,79			Valid
WOM4 / Recommendation	10,18	0,46			Valid

Notes: *according to Fornell dan Larcker (1981) [27]*

TABLE III.   GOODNESS OF FIT TEST RESULTS

Goodness of Fit (GoF) Measurement	Measurement Model	Structural Model
Absolute Fit Measure		
Statistic Chi-square (X^2)	671,00; df = 160	685,88; df = 162
p-value	0,00	0,00
Non-Centrality Parameter (NCP)	455,24	468,65
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0,89	0,89
Root Mean Square Residual (RMSR) or RMR	0,055	0,059
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0,076	0,077
Expected Cross Validation Index (ECVI)	1,47	1,49
Incremental Fit Measure		
Tucker Lewis Index or *Non Normed Fit Index* (TLI / NNFI)	0,93	0,93
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0,92	0,92
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0,85	0,85
Relative Fit Index (RFI)	0,91	0,91
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0,94	0,94
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0,92	0,94
Parsimonious Fit Measures		
Akaike Information Criterion (AIC)	715,24	726,65
Consistent Akaike Information Criterion (CAIC)	974,75	975,79
Other GOFI		
Critical "N" (CN)	149,45	147,83

TABLE IV.   VALUE OF STRUCTURAL MODEL PATH DIAGRAM

Path			Hypothesis	T-value	SLF	Results
SR	=>	IB	H1a	1,61	0,12	Not supported
SR	=>	SAT	H1b	5,71	0,42	Supported
SC	=>	IB	H2a	5,25	0,39	Supported
SC	=>	SAT	H2b	2,52	0,18	Supported
SC	=>	WOM	H2c	4,59	0,24	Supported
IB	=>	SAT	H3	0,62	0,03	Not Supported
SAT	=>	WOM	H4	9,06	0,54	Supported

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