

Exploring Gen Z Users' Experiences of e-Service Quality Strategies in Shopee Marketplace: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the lived experiences of Generation Z users regarding e-service quality strategies in the Shopee marketplace in Indonesia. As digital natives, Gen Z consumers engage with online services not only functionally but also emotionally and socially, redefining traditional understandings of service quality. The research aims to uncover how Gen-Z users perceive, interpret, and assign meaning to Shopee's e-service quality dimensions within their daily interactions. Adopting a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 14 active Shopee users aged 19–27 in the Greater Jakarta area. Data were analyzed using Moustakas's phenomenological reduction combined with Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, resulting in six major themes: (1) digital convenience and efficiency, (2) emotional engagement through gamification, (3) trust and security in transactions, (4) social influence and community validation, (5) aesthetic and personalized experience, and (6) frustration and service recovery. The findings reveal that Gen Z users perceive e-service quality as a holistic experiential construct, where emotional enjoyment, peer influence, and trust-based recovery play a pivotal role alongside functional performance. This study concludes that for Gen Z, the essence of e-service quality lies in how the service feels, not merely how it functions. The research contributes to the theoretical expansion of e-service quality frameworks by emphasizing emotional and social dimensions and offers practical insights for marketplace managers to design more engaging, human-centered digital experiences.

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation sweeping Southeast Asia has significantly redefined consumer behaviour, especially within e-commerce ecosystems. In Indonesia, the online marketplace platform Shopee stands out for its convergence of mobile accessibility, interactive features, social commerce and gamified elements, which strongly appeal to younger consumers. Generation Z (Gen Z), born roughly between 1997 and 2012, are digital natives who expect speed, convenience, personalization and seamless online interactions (Jalantina & Minarsih, 2024). As their purchasing power and influence continue growing, understanding how Gen Z users perceive and experience e-service quality in marketplaces becomes strategically essential for platforms aiming to foster loyalty and sustain competitive advantage.

Traditionally, research on electronic service quality (e-service quality) has drawn on measurement instruments developed for offline service settings, such as the adaptation of the SERVQUAL or E-S-QUAL frameworks. However, recent reviews note that purely scale-based models may overlook contextual nuances, digital interactions, emotional dimensions and experiential quality (Ighomereho et al., 2022). In the dynamic marketplace environment, especially one infused with gamification, social proof and immersive interfaces, the experiential dimension of e-service becomes increasingly salient. This calls for a shift from merely measuring e-service quality to understanding how users live, interpret and make sense of their service interactions.

Research Problem

Despite the growing number of studies examining e-service quality in digital marketplaces, most have retained a positivist, survey-based orientation that emphasises quantifiable dimensions such as fulfilment, system availability, responsiveness and security (Vatolkina et al., 2020). These studies have contributed valuable insights, yet they often fall short of capturing the meaning, interpretation and emotional engagement that users, particularly Gen Z, derive from interacting with marketplace services. Moreover, while many studies focus on generic platforms, there remains limited in-depth qualitative inquiry into how Gen Z users uniquely experience e-service quality strategies in the context of Shopee in Indonesia, a platform embedded with distinctive features such as live-shopping, coin rewards and interactive campaigns.

According to (Agung, 2026) said, Within the contemporary consumer landscape, Generation Z has become one of the most prominent and influential segments shaping the digital economy. From Agung's statement serves as a foundational thesis: it accurately identifies Generation Z not merely as a demographic cohort, but as a primary catalyst driving market dynamics and digital economic transformation within modern consumer behavior paradigms, establishing a critical baseline for subsequent empirical investigation.

Although previous studies have confirmed the importance of e-service quality in shaping customer satisfaction and loyalty within digital marketplaces, most of these studies remain dominated by positivist and survey-based approaches that operationalize e-service quality through predefined dimensions such as efficiency, fulfilment, responsiveness, and security. While valuable, such approaches often reduce users' experiences into measurable indicators and provide limited understanding of how digital service quality is actually experienced, interpreted, and emotionally constructed by users in their everyday interactions.

Furthermore, existing studies on Indonesian e-commerce platforms predominantly examine the direct relationships between e-service quality, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty, with little attention given to the experiential processes through which these perceptions emerge. The increasing integration of gamification, live-commerce,

social interaction features, and algorithmic personalization has transformed online shopping from a purely transactional activity into a socially and emotionally embedded experience. Yet, the subjective meanings attached to these experiences remain underexplored.

This limitation is particularly relevant for Gen Z consumers, whose digital behavior is characterized by intensive mobile engagement, preference for interactive experiences, active participation in online communities, and reliance on peer-generated information during purchase decisions (Priporas et al., 2020; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Consequently, understanding e-service quality requires moving beyond measurement-oriented frameworks toward an interpretive exploration of how users experience and assign meaning to digital service encounters.

Further compounding the issue, Gen Z users engage with digital platforms not only as buyers, but as content creators, reviewers and community participants. Their service expectations and experiential frames differ from earlier generations: they demand instant gratification, sleek usability, socially validated interactions and personalization (Jalantina & Minarsih, 2024). Current measurement models inadequately reflect these shifting patterns. The research gap therefore lies in moving beyond “what” e-service quality dimensions are present, to “how” Gen Z users experience, interpret and make sense of e-service quality within a social-commerce marketplace environment.

State of the Art and Novelty

Recent literature underscores a paradigm shift in e-service quality research: from transactional and functional quality toward experiential, relational and digital trust dimensions (Nguyen et al., 2023). For example, studies now examine how gamification, peer reviews, community features and immersive interface design shape user engagement and perceptions of digital service quality (Widodo & Kurniawan, 2025). Meanwhile, the incorporation of personalization, social connectivity, and digital entertainment into marketplace services has introduced novel quality experiences that traditional measurement instruments struggle to capture (Hasanah et al., 2024).

In this evolving landscape, there are at least three emerging issues that point to the novelty of this study. First, the personalization paradox: Gen Z users want tailored experiences, yet remain wary of intrusive data practices and loss of autonomy. Second, the gamified-engagement effect: platforms like Shopee integrate game-like features (points, badges, challenges) which influence not just functional efficiency but experiential enjoyment and loyalty (Hasanah et al., 2024). Third, the social-validation factor: Gen Z places high value on peer-generated content and social proof, meaning that their service quality judgements are shaped by community interactions and review ecosystems rather than isolated transactions (Ayuni et al., 2023). These issues signal that studying e-service quality purely through established quantitative scales may no longer be sufficient.

This research therefore contributes a novel dimension by adopting a phenomenological, interpretive approach to explore Gen Z users’ lived experiences of e-service quality strategies in Shopee. Through this lens, the study aims to reveal deeper meanings, emotions and sense-making processes that underlie service interactions, offering both theoretical and practical insights for digital service design and loyalty strategy.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

The foundation of service quality theory originates in offline service contexts (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988), and subsequent extensions sought to adapt these frameworks to online settings—such as the E-S-QUAL model introduced by

Zeithaml et al. (2002). While seminal, these models are now considered limited in their ability to capture digital-first user experiences. More recent empirical work proposes extended frameworks for e-service quality, identifying dimensions such as website appearance, ease of use, personalization, fulfillment, reliability, security and responsiveness (Ighomereho et al., 2022) and exploring the relationships between e-service quality and e-satisfaction, e-loyalty among Gen Z (Ayuni et al., 2023).

In the Indonesian context, studies such as Wulandary et al. (2023) have found significant relationships between e-service quality and customer satisfaction within e-commerce platforms, yet still operate primarily through quantitative survey methods. Meanwhile, the behaviour of Gen Z consumers in digital settings has been described in qualitative and descriptive studies as distinctive in their consumption of online applications, their high digital literacy and their demand for experiential service (Jalantina & Minarsih, 2024). Moreover, literature on gamification in e-commerce has identified gamified features as increasing engagement, repurchase intention and perceived enjoyment among Gen Z users (Hasanah et al., 2024; Trendo et al., 2023). Despite this, little qualitative research investigates how Gen Z users experience e-service quality in a gamified marketplace, leading to a gap in understanding the temporal, interpretive and emotional dynamics of that service quality encounter.

Drawing on phenomenological theory (Moustakas, 1994), this study foregrounds the “lived experience” of Gen Z users interacting with Shopee’s e-service features rather than solely relying on predetermined scales. Through bracketing, intentional analysis and textual-structural descriptions, this research will unpack the essence of e-service quality as lived, felt and meaning-making rather than simply measured. The aim is to extend theoretical understanding beyond measurement to interpretation, and to provide practical insights for marketplace service designers seeking to optimize experiential value for Gen Z.

Research Objectives

In light of the identified gaps, this study aims to explore and interpret Gen Z users’ lived experiences of e-service quality strategies in the Shopee marketplace through a phenomenological lens. Specifically, it seeks to:

Describe how Gen Z users articulate their experiences when interacting with Shopee’s e-service features.

Interpret the underlying meanings, emotions and perceptions that Gen Z users associate with e-service quality strategies in a gamified marketplace environment.

Identify the key experiential dimensions that shape Gen Z users’ satisfaction and intention to continue using Shopee.

By doing so, the research provides a human-centred conceptualisation of e-service quality, one that goes beyond measurement to meaning, offering both theoretical advancement and actionable insights for digital marketplace strategy.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Gen Z users regarding e-service quality strategies in the Shopee marketplace. Phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of experience, that is, how individuals perceive, interpret, and assign meaning to a specific phenomenon in their everyday life (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2024). In this context, the phenomenon under investigation is how Gen Z users experience, evaluate, and emotionally engage with Shopee’s electronic service quality (e-service quality).

The qualitative design allows for a deep, contextual understanding of users’ subjective experiences rather than an assessment of predefined variables. This study

follows a transcendental phenomenological orientation, emphasizing bracketing (epoche) to suspend researcher biases, intentionality to capture how participants direct their consciousness toward digital experiences, and essence description to identify the universal structures of meaning underlying those experiences.

The implicit assumption guiding this study is that the quality of digital service, as experienced by Gen Z users, is shaped not only by functional and technological attributes (e.g., reliability, efficiency, or system responsiveness) but also by experiential, emotional, and social factors emerging from interaction with the platform's features, such as personalization, gamification, and community engagement.

Research Objectives and Conceptual Focus

The main objective of this study is to explore and interpret how Gen-Z users experience and give meaning to e-service quality strategies in Shopee.

Specific objectives include:

1. To describe how Gen Z users articulate their subjective experiences with Shopee's digital service features.
2. To interpret how emotional, contextual, and social aspects influence their sense of e-service quality.
3. To identify the essential themes or structures that constitute their lived experience of e-service quality.

Although qualitative research does not use variables in the positivist sense, the conceptual focus of this study draws on the core components of e-service quality commonly identified in recent literature (Nguyen et al., 2023; Ighomereho et al., 2022). These components include:

Efficiency (ease and speed of use);

Fulfillment (accuracy and timeliness of order completion);

Responsiveness (prompt assistance and communication);

Privacy and Trust (perceived safety and data protection);

Aesthetic & Emotional Experience (interface appeal, enjoyment, gamification); and

Social Validation (reviews, community interactions).

However, rather than testing these dimensions quantitatively, the study seeks to explore how Gen Z users experience and interpret them within their real interactions in Shopee.

Research Targets

Population and Sampling

Thematic Analysis The target population consists of Gen Z users (born 1997–2012) residing in the Greater Jakarta area (Jabodetabek) who actively use Shopee for online shopping. This location was selected because it represents Indonesia's most digitally connected region with a high density of Gen Z consumers and marketplace transactions (Ayuni et al., 2023).

Sampling follows a purposive sampling technique, selecting participants based on the following inclusion criteria:

1. Belonging to the Gen-Z age cohort (18–28 years old at the time of study).
2. Having used Shopee actively for at least one year.
3. Having completed at least five transactions within the past six months.
4. Willing to share personal experiences and reflections about their interactions with Shopee's services.

The targeted sample size of 12–15 participants is consistent with phenomenological research traditions that prioritize depth of understanding rather than statistical representation. According to Creswell and Poth (2024), phenomenological studies commonly involve between 5 and 25 participants, depending on the richness of

experiential narratives and the achievement of data saturation. Similarly, Moustakas (1994) emphasizes that the adequacy of phenomenological samples is determined by the emergence of recurring experiential meanings rather than numerical considerations. In this study, saturation was achieved after the twelfth interview, while two additional interviews were conducted to confirm thematic stability.

Data Collection Techniques

Primary data will be collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face or online (via Zoom/Google Meet), depending on participants' availability. The interviews will be guided by open-ended questions encouraging reflection on users' experiences with Shopee's digital service quality, for example:

"Can you describe a memorable experience you had while using Shopee?"

"What makes you feel that Shopee's service is good or disappointing?"

"How do Shopee's features (e.g., Shopee Pay, Shopee Live, or rewards) affect your shopping experience?"

"In what ways do you feel connected to other users or the Shopee community?"

Each interview will last approximately 45–60 minutes and be audio-recorded with the participant's consent. Field notes will capture non-verbal expressions and contextual observations.

To complement interviews, digital ethnographic observations may be conducted by examining Shopee's platform environment (interface, reviews, promotions, chat systems) to triangulate user narratives with platform realities (Rahmadhan et al., 2023).

Research Model and Development

Unlike quantitative studies that use variable-based models, phenomenological research employs a conceptual framework of lived experience. The development of this framework in this study follows Moustakas's (1994) and Colaizzi's (1978) analytic procedures as refined in recent qualitative studies (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2024). The process involves several developmental stages:

Epoche/Bracketing; The researcher identifies and sets aside pre-existing assumptions about e-service quality to approach participants' experiences with openness.

Phenomenological Reduction – Each transcript is examined for significant statements describing how participants experience Shopee's services.

Imaginative Variation; Analysis seeks to uncover underlying structures or conditions that shape those experiences (e.g., trust, gamification, personalization).

Synthesis of Meanings and Essences; The researcher integrates the textural (what is experienced) and structural (how it is experienced) descriptions to produce a composite account of the phenomenon.

This iterative and reflective process constitutes the research model; a flow from raw experience → meaning units → emergent themes → essence of experience. The result is an interpretive representation of Gen Z users' experiential understanding of e-service quality.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis will follow Moustakas's modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2024) integrated with Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic analysis framework to ensure rigor and transparency. The steps are as follows: Transcription and Familiarization – Audio recordings are transcribed verbatim, and the researcher repeatedly reads transcripts to become immersed in the data.

Thematic analysis was employed as an analytical technique within the broader phenomenological framework. While phenomenology guided the philosophical orientation and interpretation of lived experiences, thematic

analysis provided a systematic procedure for identifying recurring experiential meanings across participants' narratives.

Horizontalization; Each significant statement related to e-service quality is identified and given equal value. Clustering into Themes; Statements are grouped into thematic clusters (e.g., trust, convenience, enjoyment, frustration, community belonging).

Textural Description; The researcher constructs rich descriptions of what participants experienced.

Structural Description; The researcher interprets how participants experienced it, including contextual and emotional conditions.

Composite Essence; Both descriptions are integrated into a holistic account revealing the essential structure of Gen Z users' experience of e-service quality in Shopee.

To ensure trustworthiness and validity, the study employs:

Triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, field notes).

Member checking, where participants review and confirm the accuracy of the interpreted themes.

Peer debriefing with fellow researchers to enhance analytic credibility.

Audit trail documenting analytic decisions and reflections.

Thick description to enhance transferability.

The coding process was conducted manually by the researchers through iterative reading and re-reading of interview transcripts. Coding followed three stages: initial coding, focused coding, and thematic clustering. No qualitative software such as NVivo or Atlas.ti was employed, as the relatively small dataset enabled close engagement with participants' narratives and facilitated phenomenological immersion.

Digital ethnographic observations were not treated as a primary source of data but rather as a supplementary strategy for contextual triangulation. Observations focused on Shopee's interface design, review systems, live-commerce features, reward mechanisms, and customer interaction environments. These observations were used to enrich interpretation and verify contextual consistency with participants' descriptions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be obtained from the university's Research Ethics Committee. All participants will provide informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any stage. Anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly maintained by assigning pseudonyms to participants and securely storing data. Interview recordings and transcripts will be used solely for research purposes.

Research Assumption

This study is guided by the assumption that Gen Z users construct perceptions of e-service quality through interconnected experiences involving functional performance, emotional engagement, social interaction, and trust formation within Shopee's digital ecosystem.

Summary

In summary, this research employs a qualitative phenomenological design to explore how Gen Z users in Indonesia experience e-service quality within the Shopee marketplace. Using purposive sampling and in-depth interviews, data will be analyzed through thematic phenomenological procedures to identify essential experiential structures. The study contributes both methodologically by applying a rigorous interpretive approach and substantively by deepening understanding of e-service quality from a human-centred perspective.

RESULT

Data were collected from 14 Gen Z Shopee users aged between 19 and 27 years old who reside in the Greater Jakarta area. All participants had used Shopee for more than one year and had completed at least five transactions within the last six months. Interviews generated a total of 560 minutes of recorded conversation and over 180 pages of transcribed text. Community-generated information functions as an important source of trust formation and quality evaluation among Gen Z users. Through phenomenological reduction and thematic analysis, six major themes emerged that represent the essence of Gen Z users' lived experiences with Shopee's e-service quality.

Tabel Tema

Table 1. Emergent Themes of Gen Z Experiences in Shopee

Theme	Subthemes	Interpretive Meaning
Digital Convenience and Efficiency	Speed of search, Ease of payment	Participants experienced convenience as a sense of autonomy and effortless control over shopping activities.
Emotional Engagement through Gamification	Rewards, Shopee Live	Gamification generated enjoyment and emotional attachment beyond transactional value.
Trust and Security in Transactions	Privacy, Credibility	Trust emerged through transparency, protection mechanisms, and positive recovery experiences.
Social Influence and Community Validation	Reviews, Recommendations	Participants relied heavily on collective experiences and peer-generated information.
Aesthetic and Personalized Experience	Interface Design, Personalized Feeds	Visual attractiveness and personalization fostered comfort and engagement.
Frustration and Service Recovery	Delayed Responses, Refund Issues	Negative experiences became acceptable when recovery processes were perceived as fair and responsive.

Illustrative Quotes from Participants

Profil informan

P3 (female, 22 years old):

"I always use ShopeePay because it's quick and I get cashback instantly. It feels effortless, and that's why I keep coming back."

P6 (male, 25 years old):

"The games and rewards make it fun. It doesn't feel like shopping, it feels like playing, and suddenly I've bought something."

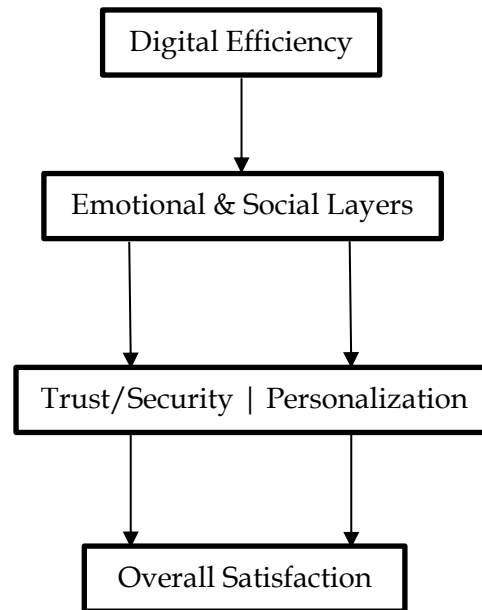
P9 (female, 21 years old):

"Sometimes I get worried about fake sellers, but when I see many good reviews and badges, I feel safe to buy."

P11 (male, 24 years old):

"When something goes wrong, like late delivery, the customer service is fast to respond, most of the time. That makes me trust them more."

Figure 1. Thematic Relationship of Gen-Z Experience of e-Service Quality



This diagram illustrates that **digital efficiency** serves as the foundation of Gen Z users' experience. However, the emotional and social dimensions, such as gamification, peer validation, and trust, are decisive in shaping satisfaction and loyalty.

Results Analysis per Research Question

RQ1: How do Gen Z users describe their experiences with Shopee's digital service features?

Participants overwhelmingly described Shopee as a highly convenient platform where the integration of features like "ShopeePay," "Free Shipping," and "Shopee Coins" significantly enhanced their shopping experiences. Efficiency and ease of navigation were mentioned in almost every interview.

The theme *Digital Convenience* revealed that Gen Z values speed and autonomy in completing transactions. They perceive Shopee not merely as an online store but as a personal ecosystem where purchasing, paying, and tracking are unified in one interface. These findings extend previous quantitative work (Mitriani et al., 2024; Putri & Thaib, 2023), emphasizing that for Gen Z, *convenience* is not just a utilitarian factor but also an *emotional trigger* that contributes to habitual use and engagement.

RQ2: How do emotional and social factors shape Gen Z's perception of e-service quality?

A strong emotional bond emerged through Shopee's **gamification system**, such as Shopee Coins, flash sales, and mini-games. Participants experienced feelings of excitement, accomplishment, and belonging when engaging with these features.

P7 (female, 20 years old):

"When I collect coins or join a live stream, it's fun! I feel part of something, not just buying but joining a vibe."

This emotional engagement aligns with the hedonic consumption perspective, indicating that *pleasure and playfulness* now define quality perceptions among young digital consumers (Widodo & Kurniawan, 2025).

Social validation also played a critical role: reviews, ratings, and community comments strongly influenced decision-making. For Gen Z, *collective trust replaces*

institutional trust—they believe more in other users' experiences than in corporate communication.

This result parallels the findings of Hasanah et al. (2025) and Setiawan et al. (2023), confirming that social interactivity functions as a new dimension of perceived quality in digital marketplaces.

RQ3: What underlying meanings define Gen Z users' trust and satisfaction with Shopee's services?

Trust and satisfaction were experienced as interconnected emotional states rather than separate outcomes. Participants frequently used affective terms (*secure*), *nyaman* (*comfortable*), *seru* (*fun*), to describe their confidence in Shopee.

P4 (male, 26 years old):

"I trust Shopee because every time I report an issue, they act fast. Even when I'm angry, they fix it quickly."

The analysis revealed that trust was constructed through three interrelated processes:

1. System Reliability; smooth transactions and prompt updates;
2. Transparency; honest information and visible tracking;
3. Recovery Experience; responsive problem-solving.

This indicates that service recovery plays a more powerful role than initial performance in forming emotional satisfaction, supporting Rahmayanti & Oetarjo (2024) who argued that perceived fairness and empathy in digital complaint handling redefine e-service quality standards.

DISCUSSION

1. Interpretasi Tema

1.1 Reinterpreting e-Service Quality as an Experiential Construct

The findings indicate that hedonic experiences complement utilitarian benefits in shaping Gen Z perceptions of e-service quality.

Rather than evaluating Shopee solely on performance metrics like reliability or responsiveness, Gen Z constructs meanings through moment-to-moment interactions, gamified experiences, and emotional resonances.

This supports the experiential quality theory proposed in recent literature (Ighomereho et al., 2022), which calls for a holistic understanding of digital service experience combining functional fluency, emotional engagement, and social identity.

1.2. Emotional Gamification as the Core of Loyalty Formation

Gamification emerged as a *psychological bridge* linking functional satisfaction and emotional loyalty. Shopee's gamified environment (daily missions, flash rewards) transforms routine transactions into affective experiences. For Gen Z, The findings indicate that hedonic experiences complement utilitarian benefits in shaping Gen Z perceptions of e-service quality.

This aligns with Rahmadhan et al. (2023) who showed that gamification elements increase engagement and cognitive absorption in e-commerce contexts. The implication is that e-service quality frameworks should include *hedonic and motivational dimensions* beyond traditional utilitarian measures.

2. Interpretasi Tema 2

2.1 Trust, Recovery, and the Emotional Logic of Satisfaction

Another key discovery is that trust is continuously negotiated, not given. When a delivery is delayed or a refund issue occurs, Gen Z evaluates Shopee's integrity through

the *speed and empathy* of its response. Satisfaction, therefore, is dynamic, it can increase even after a failure if recovery is handled emotionally well. This reinforces the argument by Setiawan et al. (2023) that *affective justice*, users feeling heard and respected, has become central in digital service quality assessment.

3. Interpretasi Tema 3

3.1 Social Influence as the New Source of Perceived Quality

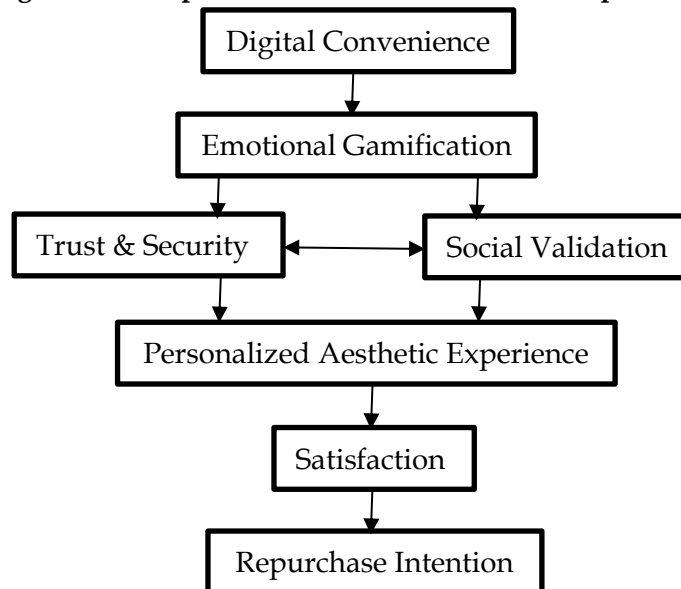
Community-generated information functions as an important source of trust formation and quality evaluation among Gen Z users.

In this sense, Shopee's success lies not only in its technical infrastructure but in facilitating collective meaning-making, which aligns with Hasanah et al. (2025) emphasizing the role of gamified social engagement in repurchase intentions among digital natives.

4. Integrating Themes into a Conceptual Model

Based on the six emergent themes, a conceptual model of Gen Z e-Service Experience is synthesized (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Gen Z e-Service Experience in Shopee



This interpretive model demonstrates how emotional and social experiences mediate the relationship between digital functionality and behavioral loyalty. In contrast to previous models emphasizing rational satisfaction, this study reveals that *emotion, identity, and play* are equally vital components of perceived e-service quality among Gen-Z consumers.

5. Kontribusi Teori

5.1 Implications and Contribution

Theoretical Contribution

The study advances the discourse of e-service quality by expanding it into a phenomenological-experiential construct that integrates emotional, social, and aesthetic dimensions. It complements existing frameworks like E-S-QUAL by adding *affective depth* relevant to Gen Z behavior.

5.2 Practical Contribution

For practitioners, the results suggest that service innovation must address emotional continuity, designing enjoyable, trustworthy, and socially engaging experiences.

1. Incorporating gamified systems and personalized interfaces can sustain engagement.
2. Transparent recovery processes and responsive chat services enhance emotional trust.
3. Community-based features (reviews, Shopee Live) should be prioritized as social capital drivers.

5.3 Policy and Societal Relevance

Given Gen Z's growing economic influence, understanding their experiential expectations helps policymakers and digital platforms foster inclusive, trustworthy, and human-centered marketplaces in Indonesia's digital economy.

5.4 Conclusion of Discussion

Through phenomenological inquiry, this study discovered that Gen Z users' perception of e-service quality in Shopee arises from a synthesis of digital ease, emotional engagement, social validation, and trust-based recovery. The Research Assumption, that their perception of quality is constructed through complex experiential interactions, was supported.

Ultimately, Shopee's e-service quality is lived, not measured, it exists in the feelings, meanings, and social connections Gen Z users form while navigating the platform.

From a phenomenological perspective, e-service quality is not experienced as a collection of isolated service attributes but as an integrated experience that combines technological functionality, emotional resonance, and social interaction. This finding extends Moustakas's notion of lived experience by demonstrating that meanings of service quality emerge through continuous interactions between users and digital environments.

The results also enrich contemporary e-service quality literature by suggesting that trust, personalization, and social validation are not merely service dimensions but experiential mechanisms through which users construct judgments about digital service quality. Therefore, the study contributes to the ongoing shift from attribute-based models toward experience-centered understandings of digital service quality.

CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Generation Z users in perceiving and interpreting e-service quality in the Shopee marketplace in Indonesia. The findings reveal that e-service quality, as understood by Gen Z, is not a static or purely functional concept; rather, it is an *experiential construct* shaped by emotional, social, and technological interactions that occur dynamically throughout the digital service journey.

Through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 14 active Shopee users, six essential themes emerged: digital convenience and efficiency, emotional engagement through gamification, trust and security, social influence and community validation, aesthetic and personalized experience, and frustration and service recovery. These themes collectively represent how Gen Z users *feel, interpret, and give meaning* to their digital encounters.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of e-service quality literature by extending traditional measurement-oriented frameworks toward a phenomenological and experience-centered perspective. The findings demonstrate that emotional engagement, social validation, and service recovery experiences constitute

important dimensions that complement conventional constructs such as efficiency and reliability.

Practically, the study suggests that marketplace managers should design digital services that simultaneously address functional performance and emotional experience. Features that encourage community interaction, transparent service recovery, personalized recommendations, and meaningful gamification may strengthen trust, satisfaction, and long-term engagement among Gen Z users.

The essence of this study lies in understanding that Gen Z evaluates e-service quality through *how the service feels*, not merely *how it performs*. Functional aspects such as system reliability and ease of payment are important but insufficient to define satisfaction. Emotional enjoyment, social belonging, and trust-based empathy now form the psychological foundation of e-service quality perception.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In contrast to previous quantitative studies dominated by measurement models such as E-SERVQUAL or E-S-QUAL, this research demonstrates that e-service quality must be interpreted as an experiential phenomenon, reflecting users' emotions, identities, and social realities in a digital context. For Shopee and similar platforms, this means that quality improvement strategies must transcend technical excellence and embrace the *affective dimensions of digital interaction*.

Ultimately, this study answers the central research problem by revealing that the essence of e-service quality among Gen Z users in Indonesia is a synthesis of digital fluency, emotional pleasure, trust continuity, and social validation. These components co-create satisfaction and loyalty within the experiential ecosystem of Shopee's digital marketplace.

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