International Journal of Economics, Business and Innovation Research
https://e-journal.citakonsultindo.or.id/index.php/IJEBIR
E-ISSN : 2964-0865
IJEBIR

The Effect Of Digital Marketing, E-Wom, Product Innovation, And Country Of Origin On The Purchase Intention Of International Gamers In Indie Games In Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of Digital Marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM), Product Innovation, and Country of Origin (COO) on Purchase Intention of international gamers in Indonesian indie games. This study addresses the problem of information asymmetry in digital products by utilizing Signaling Theory and Cue Utilization Theory. This study uses a quantitative design with a sample of 131 international gamer respondents obtained through a purposive sampling technique. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with R software (seminR package). The results show that Digital Marketing, e-WOM, and Product Innovation have a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention. In contrast, Country of Origin was shown to have no significant effect. These findings indicate that international gamers' purchase intention is more influenced by intrinsic cues (gameplay/innovation) and credible extrinsic cues (reviews/e-WOM) than the developer's country of origin identity. Strategic implications for developers are to focus on gameplay transparency and community reviews.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, e-WOM, Product Innovation, Country of Origin, Purchase Intention

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INTRODUCTION

International trade has undergone a fundamental transformation in the past two decades. Cross-border exchanges are no longer limited to physical goods passing through ports and customs. Digitalization is transforming the way goods are produced, distributed, and consumed globally (WTO, 2023). The concept of digital trade encompasses transactions of goods and services ordered, produced, or delivered electronically (Azmeh et al., 2020). The video game industry is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the digital economy, with total global gaming market revenue projected to reach USD 201.6 billion by 2025 (Newzoo, 2025).

Amidst the dominance of large, highly capitalized studios, indie games have consistently shown market share growth. Game engine technology significantly lowers technical and financial barriers (Costa, 2026). VG Insights (2024) noted that indie games generated nearly USD 4 billion in gross revenue from full game sales on the Steam platform from January 1 to September 30, 2024. Indonesia holds a strategic position in the global indie game ecosystem by leveraging its rich local culture as a source of creativity, indicating a comparative advantage in creative human resources (Heckscher & Ohlin, 1991).

The main problem in digital product trading is information asymmetry (Akerlof, 1970). Video games are experience goods, where product quality can only be assessed after consumption (Nelson, 1970). International gamers rely on external cues due to the inability to fully test the gaming experience before purchasing. Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) explains how producers send signals to consumers to reduce uncertainty. In this context, digital marketing, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), country of origin (COO), and product innovation act as signals.

Based on Cue Utilization Theory (Olson & Jacoby, 1972), consumers process intrinsic cues (product innovation) and extrinsic cues (marketing, country of origin, and e-WOM) to form purchase intentions. Several previous studies have examined the determinants of digital purchase intentions. Mkedder et al. (2024) examined purchase intentions for virtual goods. Adismar and Musa (2024) focused on product innovation. Putra and Fenitra (2024) examined negative e-WOM, while Sinukaban and Dewanti (2024) examined digital marketing, and Camacho et al. (2026) explored COO signals. However, no research has yet integrated these four variables into a single structural model in the context of exported indie games.

This study aims to empirically test and analyze the influence of digital marketing, e-WOM, product innovation, and COO on the purchase intention of international gamers.

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Figure 1. Global Games Market Revenue 2025
Souce : Newzoo (2025)

LITERATURE REVIEW

International Trade Theory

The international trade theory proposed by Smith (1776) and Ricardo (1817) initially explained the exchange of tangible goods. In the digital economy era, competitive advantage in the digital creative industry is determined by innovation capacity and cultural richness (Howkins, 2013). This is reinforced by the Resource-Based View (RBV), which states that competitive advantage stems from unique, difficult-to-imitate resources (Barney, 1991). These digital commodities are traded as pure digital goods (Stojkoski et al., 2024) without physical logistical barriers (UNCTAD, 2022).

Information Asymmetry and Signaling Theory

Information asymmetry theory (Akerlof, 1970) distorts market efficiency because buyers lack information about product quality. To address this, manufacturers use signals to communicate product quality (Spence, 1973). In video games (experience goods), surrogate cues are necessary before a purchase decision can be made (Nelson, 1970).

Cue Utilization Theory

Olson and Jacoby (1972) divided product evaluation cues into intrinsic cues (physical/functional attributes) and extrinsic cues (price, brand, country of origin). Consumers process both of these cues to judge quality.

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Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is a marketing effort that utilizes online media to interact with consumers (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). In the gaming industry, these tactics include trailers, discounts, and demo availability, which serve as initial extrinsic cues for gamers.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM)

E-WOM is positive/negative statements by potential or actual consumers spread via the internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Platforms such as Reddit, Discord, and Steam Review have become the main credible channels for E-WOM in the gaming industry.

Product Innovation

Innovation includes the development of product attributes that provide novelty value (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Based on the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 2003), unique game mechanics, visual style, and local cultural integration are determinants of relative advantage.

Country of Origin (COO)

COO is a product's image or reputation based on its country of origin (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). While it has a strong influence on manufactured products, a recent study (Bao et al., 2022) indicates that the COO effect may be weaker for intangible digital products.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is a consumer's probabilistic likelihood to purchase a product in the future (Dodds et al., 1991), which is a major predictor of actual purchasing behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

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Previous Research

Table 1. Summary of Previous Research

Researcher (Year)	Research Variables	Results and Findings
Mkedder et al. (2024)	Functional/Emotional/Social Values, Purchase Intention.	Functional, emotional, and social values influence purchase intentions of virtual goods.
Adismar & Musa (2024)	Product Innovation, Customer Loyalty.	Digital product innovation has a strong influence on player loyalty.
Putra, Nuzula, & Hidayat (2024)	Game Addiction, Loyalty, Negative e-WOM, Purchase Intention.	Game addiction and negative e-WOM influence consumer purchase intention.
Sinukaban & Dewanti (2024)	Digital Marketing, Purchase Interest.	Optimizing digital marketing increases consumer purchasing interest.
Camacho et al. (2026)	Country of Origin, Trustworthiness, Online Purchase Intention.	COO acts as a predictor of cross-border purchase intentions of consumers in developing countries.
Putra & Fenitra (2024)	Game Addiction, Negative e-WOM, Perceived Risk, In-App Purchase.	Mobile game addiction and in-app purchase intention effectively.
Metasurya & Berlianto (2022)	Game Addiction, Loyalty, Negative e-WOM, Purchase Intention.	Game addiction drives continued in-app purchases despite exposure to negative reviews.
Yulianto et al. (2024)	E-WOM, Brand Image, Trust, Online Purchase Intention.	E-WOM and product brand image stimulate online purchasing interest mediated by consumer trust.

Source: Processed from various previous studies

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Based on a literature review and previous research, this study proposes four hypotheses which are formulated as follows:

H1: Digital Marketing has a positive and significant effect on the Purchase Intention of international gamers.

H2: Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention of international gamers.

H3: Product Innovation has a positive and significant effect on the Purchase Intention of international gamers.

H4: Country of Origin (COO) has a positive and significant effect on the Purchase Intention of international gamers.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

The population consisted of non-Indonesian international gamers who actively play digital video games. Purposive sampling was used. An online questionnaire was distributed to the global community via Discord, Reddit, and direct messages. After screening the data using attention check items (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009), a valid sample of 131 respondents was obtained. This number exceeds the minimum limit of the ten-times rule (Hair et al., 2019).

Operationalization of Variables

The instrument is structured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) with a total of 30 research indicators.

Table 2. Operationalization of Variables

Variables	Code	Indicator
Digital Marketing	X1_1	*Trailers and promotional videos of Indonesian indie games provide me with enough information to decide if the game suits my taste.*
	X1_2	*Store pages (eg, Steam, Epic) or social media of Indonesian indie games clearly display what the actual gameplay looks like.*

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	X1_3	*When I come across Indonesian indie game content on TikTok, Instagram, or Steam, it gives me a useful first impression of the game.*
	X1_4	*Sponsored promotions or endorsements by big streamers/content creators influence my decision to look into an Indonesian indie game.*
	X1_5	*The availability of a free demo or trial makes me more willing to try an Indonesian indie game I am not sure about.*
	X1_6	*Discount campaigns or limited-time sales on digital platforms make Indonesian indie games more appealing to me.*
E-WOM	*X2_1*	*Recommendations and discussions on Reddit, Discord or gaming forums are my primary source of trust when evaluating an unknown game.*
	X2_2	*Seeing other gamers organically post about an Indonesian indie game makes me more curious about it.*
	X2_3	*Player-generated content such as community guides and fan discussions makes an Indonesian indie game feel more credible to me.*
	X2_4	*I trust reviews from experienced gamers with hundreds of hours of playtime more than official marketing.*
	X2_5	*I feel more confident in my purchase decision when I read positive reviews from other players.*
	X2_6	*If I find that negative reviews of an Indonesian indie game are minor or forgivable, it does not significantly change my overall impression of a game.*
Product Innovation	*X3_1*	*Indonesian indie games introduce gameplay ideas I haven't seen in other games.*
	X3_2	*The art style and visual design of Indonesian indie games feel original and creative.*
	X3_3	*I appreciate how Indonesian indie games incorporate local cultural elements such as folklore, mythology, or settings to create fresh experiences.*

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	X3_4	Indonesian indie developers show genuine creativity in their game mechanics or narrative approaches.
	X3_5	Indonesian indie games often combine genres or mechanics in unexpected ways
	X3_6	Overall, I find the design of Indonesian indie games to be innovative
Country of Origin	X4_1	Based on what I've seen, I believe Indonesian developers have solid creative skills in game development.
	X4_2	Knowing that a game is made in Indonesia has an effect on whether I decide to look into it.
	X4_3	I have a generally positive impression of digital creative products such as games that come from Indonesia.
	X4_4	I see the Indonesian gaming industry as growing and beginning to compete on a global level.
	X4_5	The country of origin of a game influences my initial judgment of its potential quality before I try it.
	X4_6	I feel that a game originating from Indonesia is likely to be of lower quality than games from other countries.
Purchase Intention	Y_1	I intend to purchase at least one Indonesian indie game in the near future.
	Y_2	I am likely to add Indonesian indie games to my Steam or Google Play wishlist.
	Y_3	I am willing to pay full price for an Indonesian indie game.
	Y_4	I would consider choosing an Indonesian indie game over a similarly priced game from another country if the gameplay quality is comparable.
	Y_5	I am open to purchasing more than one Indonesian indie game in the coming months.
	Y_6	I do not feel motivated to purchase Indonesian indie games at this point in time.

Source: Processed by researchers (2026)

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Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) with R (seminR package) (Ray et al., 2022). The stages consisted of evaluating the outer model (convergent validity, discriminant validity, internal consistency reliability) and the inner model (VIF, R^2, f^2 tests, and hypothesis testing using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

From a total of 131 valid samples, the demographic and behavioral profiles of respondents are summarized in the following table.

Table 3. Respondent Characteristics

Respondent Characteristics / Variables		Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
A. Demographic Characteristics			
Age Group	18-24 Years	41	31.3%
	25-34 Years	67	51.1%
	35-44 Years	23	17.6%
	45+ Years	1	0.8%
Region of Origin	North America	46	35.1%
	Europe	40	30.5%
	Asia	26	19.8%
	South America	7	5.3%
	Australia & Oceania	7	5.3%
	Africa	5	3.8%
B. Gaming Behavior			
Playing Duration	< 5 Hours	28	21.4%
	5-10 Hours	34	26.0%
	11-20 Hours	46	35.1%
	> 20 Hours	23	17.6%
Device	PC	49	37.4%
	Console	37	28.2%
	Mobile	31	23.7%
	Multiple Devices	15	11.5%

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C. Knowledge of Indonesian Games			
Do you know Indonesian-made games?	Yes	71	54.2%
	No	62	45.8%
Familiarity Level	Don't Know At All (Nope)	30	22.9%
	Heard of it, Never Played it	58	44.3%
	Have You Played (Played)	44	33.6%

Source: Processed by researchers (2026)

A total of 54.2 percent of respondents stated they were familiar with Indonesian-made games, and 33.6 percent of them had played Indonesian indie games. Of the 61 respondents who stated they were unfamiliar with Indonesian-made games, after being given examples, 32 respondents admitted they had heard of or heard of them. Of those 32 respondents, 6 admitted to having played at least one of the games mentioned as examples.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Dig. Marketing	3.59	0.85	1	5
E-WOM	4.05	0.81	1	5
Product Innovation	4.04	0.74	1	5
Country of Origin	3.07	0.98	1	5
Purchase Intention	3.63	0.88	1	5

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Evaluation of Measurement Model (Outer Model)

Outer loading shows the magnitude of each indicator's contribution to its construct. With Cronbach's Alpha and rhoC values above 0.70, and the AVE values of all constructs above the threshold of 0.50 (ranging from 0.546 to 0.676), which indicates good convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 5. Outer Loading

Indicator	Digital Mktg	E-WOM	Product Innovation	COO	Purch. Int
Item _1	0.849	0.860	0.607	0.873	0.823
Item _2	0.816	0.796	0.831	0.584	0.783
Item _3	0.794	0.818	0.819	0.846	0.773
Item _4	0.571	0.809	0.815	0.661	0.775
Item _5	0.775	0.855	0.822	0.788	0.782
Item _6	0.776	0.795	0.766	0.631	0.760

Source: PLS-SEM Output (2026)

All 30 indicators were retained. Five indicators showed loadings below the threshold. In line with the compensatory logic described by Hair et al. (2019), these five indicators were retained in the model.

Reliability Test and Convergent Validity

All constructs met the reliability threshold (Cronbach's Alpha & rhoC > 0.70) and convergent validity (AVE > 0.50). All constructs met the reliability criteria.

Table 6. Reliability and Convergent Validity Test

Construct	Cronbach's α	rhoA	rhoC	AVE
Digital Marketing	0.858	0.870	0.895	0.591
E-WOM	0.904	0.910	0.926	0.676
Product Innovation	0.869	0.875	0.903	0.609
Country of Origin	0.866	0.777	0.876	0.546

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Purchase Intention	0.874	0.874	0.905	0.613

Source: PLS-SEM Output (2026)

HTMT values for all construct pairs were recorded below the conservative threshold of 0.85. The measurement model was proven to be valid and reliable.

Discriminant Validity

Table 7. Discriminant Validity

Construct	Dig. Mktg	E-WOM	Innovation	COO	Purch. Int.
Digital Mktg	0.769				
E-WOM	0.565	0.822			
Product Innovation	0.606	0.497	0.781		
COO	0.008	0.051	0.017	0.739	
Purchase Intention	0.670	0.655	0.673	0.071	0.783

Source: PLS-SEM Output (2026)

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Table 8. Coefficient of Determination

Endogenous Variables	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Purchase Intention	0.633	0.622

The structural model was evaluated to measure its predictive power. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for Purchase Intention was 0.633 (Adjusted R^2 = 0.622). This indicates that 63.3% of the variance in purchase intention is jointly explained by the four independent variables.

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Table 9. Effect Size

Predictor Construct	Effect Size (f^2)	VIF
Digital Marketing	0.114	1,851
E-WOM	0.184	1,561
Product Innovation	0.186	1,673
Country of Origin	0.006	1,003

Source: PLS-SEM Output (2026)

Product Innovation has the largest effect size (f^2 = 0.186), followed by E-WOM (f^2 = 0.184), and Digital Marketing (f^2 = 0.114), all three of which are in the medium category. Country of Origin has a negligible effect size (f^2 = 0.006). The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test for all variables (1.003 - 1.851) is below 3. The PLSpredict procedure produces good predictive relevance (Q^2).

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing using non-parametric bootstrapping 5,000 resamples:



Figure 2. PLS-SEM (Path Model) Bootstrapping Output
Source: PLS-SEM output (2026)

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Table 10. Hypothesis Test Results (Bootstrapping 5000 Resamples)

Hypothesis	Track	β	SE Boot	T-Stat	CI 2.5%	CI 97.5 %	P-Value	Results
H1	Dig. Marketing → Purchase Int.	0.280	0.075	3,711	0.130	0.425	0.000	Accepted
H2	E-WOM → Purchase Intention	0.325	0.057	5,660	0.206	0.433	0.000	Accepted
H3	Product Innovation → Purchase Int.	0.341	0.065	5,258	0.217	0.469	0.000	Accepted
H4	Country of Origin → Purchase Int.	0.046	0.076	0.607	-0.125	0.160	0.584	Rejected

Source: PLS-SEM Output (2026)

DISCUSSION

1. Influence of Digital Marketing (H1): Digital marketing has a positive and significant effect (β = 0.280; p < 0.001). Consistent with Cue Utilization Theory, marketing elements act as extrinsic cues. The f² effect (0.114) indicates a moderate level of influence. This marketing success is primarily driven by transactional incentives and factual evaluations, such as the availability of free demos and the implementation of price discounts that prioritize objectivity.
2. The Influence of E-WOM (H2): E-WOM has the second largest significant influence (β = 0.325; p < 0.001) with an f² value of 0.184. Referring to the Information Asymmetry framework (Akerlof, 1970), consumers mitigate the risk of experience goods by relying heavily on community reviews. The credibility of the review source, represented by a high playtime history on the reviewer's profile, operates as a proxy for expertise to undermine consumer doubts.
3. The Influence of Product Innovation (H3): Product Innovation is the most dominant and significant predictor (β = 0.341; p < 0.001; f² = 0.186). This finding is in line with the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 2003). The relative advantage of a digital product in the form of novelty of gameplay mechanics, artistic creativity, and narrative uniqueness are absolute intrinsic cues that convert global attention into concrete purchasing decisions.

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4. Country of Origin Influence (H4): COO was found to be statistically insignificant (β = 0.046; p = 0.584). This finding provides a correction to the traditional COO literature. In the digital product industry, where information asymmetry can be instantly eliminated by the presence of open review platforms and the availability of gameplay trailers, global consumers no longer use the developer's "country of origin" identity heuristic as a quality parameter. Purchasing decisions are based purely on the game's substance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the PLS-SEM test on 131 international gamers, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Digital marketing has a positive and significant impact on purchase intention. Marketing transparency, particularly the availability of demos, is effective in shaping purchase intention.
2. E-WOM has a positive and significant impact. Credible reviews from fellow players serve as a foundation for mitigating uncertainty.
3. Product innovation has a positive and significant influence as the strongest predictor. The quality of game mechanics (intrinsic cues) is a fundamental determinant.
4. Country of Origin has no significant impact. The developer's national identity is not a relevant evaluative criterion for the international gamer segment.

This conceptual model proved highly predictive, explaining 63.3% of the variance in purchase intention. In purely digital product commerce, purchase probability relies on technical transparency and community validation (e-WOM), not on the manufacturer's geopolitical reputation.

Suggestion

Indonesian indie game developers targeting a global audience are advised to:

1. Shifting marketing allocation from high-budget cinematic trailers towards providing interactive demos that objectively represent gameplay (trialability).
2. Distribute review copies to veteran curators on distribution platforms (such as Steam) who have a track record of high playtime, in order to build a credible E-WOM ecosystem.
3. Avoid hard-selling the identity of the country of origin. Local cultural identity and mythology are far more persuasive when implicitly embedded in artistic design as an added aesthetic value.

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Limitations of this study include the moderate sample size and cross-sectional design. Further studies are recommended to redesign the COO operational instrument to focus exclusively on the digital economy and apply probability sampling to broaden the scope of generalizability.

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