

THE INFLUENCE OF PUSH AND PULL MOTIVATION ON CONVERSION INTENTION OF CANVA PRO THROUGH PERCEIVED VALUE (A STUDY ON GEN Z IN DENPASAR)

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Abstract

The freemium business model remains a cornerstone of the software as a service (SaaS) industry, yet consistently low free-to-paid conversion rates, estimated globally at just 2 to 5 percent, pose a persistent challenge to sustainable monetization. This study investigates how push motivation (dissatisfaction with free-tier limitations) and pull motivation (the attractiveness of premium features) influence users' conversion intention toward Canva Pro, with perceived value serving as a mediating variable. Drawing on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework and integrating Push-Pull Motivation Theory, Perceived Value Theory, and Expectation–Confirmation Theory, a quantitative survey was conducted among 126 Generation Z Canva users in Denpasar City, a digitally advanced urban center with an internet penetration rate of 90.59%. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Results indicate that push motivation directly and significantly affects both conversion intention and perceived value. Pull motivation, while not exerting a significant direct effect on conversion intention, strongly predicts perceived value, which in turn drives conversion intention. Perceived value operates as a complementary partial mediator between push motivation and conversion intention, and as a full mediator in the pull motivation to conversion intention pathway. These findings carry both theoretical and practical implications for freemium service providers seeking to optimize user upgrade strategies.

Keywords: push motivation, pull motivation, conversion intention, perceived value, freemium, SOR model, Generation Z, Canva Pro.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital consumption patterns has fundamentally reshaped how software services are monetized. Among the strategies that have gained widespread adoption, the freemium model stands out as a particularly nuanced approach: it leverages mass user acquisition through free-tier access while depending on a relatively small proportion of paying subscribers to generate revenue (Shang et al., 2024). Platforms like Spotify, Dropbox, and Canva have each built enormous user bases through this model, yet across the industry, the proportion of free users who ultimately convert to paid plans remains stubbornly low, hovering globally between 2% and 5% (Kannan et al., 2023). Understanding what drives, or fails to drive, that conversion decision is therefore a critical concern for SaaS developers and marketing practitioners alike.

Canva is an instructive case. Launched in 2013 with the stated ambition of democratizing visual design, the platform has grown to more than 220 million monthly active users as of late 2024 (Backlinko, 2024). Despite this scale, only approximately 11% of users have subscribed to Canva Pro or any paid plan (Backlinko, 2024). This gap points to the fact that user acquisition alone does not translate into monetization, there exists a substantial psychological and evaluative distance between free-tier engagement and the decision to pay. Canva's free version is intentionally constrained: storage is capped at 5 GB, AI-powered features carry usage limits, and premium design elements are watermarked. These constraints are not incidental; they are designed to create what the push-pull literature terms push motivation, the discomfort arising from perceived inadequacy of the current service (Phan Trong & Vo Thi Ngoc, 2024).

At the same time, Canva Pro is positioned as a comprehensive creative suite offering 1 TB of cloud storage, a Brand Kit for consistent visual identity management, AI-powered background removal, unlimited asset access, and multi-platform content scheduling (Canva Help Center, 2025). These exclusive capabilities constitute a pull motivation, external incentives that draw users toward an upgraded experience (Phan Trong & Vo Thi Ngoc, 2024). However, neither push nor pull forces automatically translate into a subscription decision. Between stimulus and response, users engage in a cognitive and affective evaluation of whether the premium offer delivers sufficient value relative to its cost, a process captured by the concept of perceived value (Zeithaml, 1988).

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model provides an apt theoretical lens for this mechanism. Introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), the SOR framework posits that external stimuli (S) trigger internal evaluative states in the individual (O), which in turn produce observable behavioral responses (R). In the freemium context, push and pull motivations function as stimuli, perceived value as the internal organism state, and conversion intention as the behavioral response (Widiastuti et al., 2024).

Complementing this framework, Expectation–Confirmation Theory (ECT) suggests that conversion inclination intensifies when users perceive premium features to exceed the benchmark set by their free-tier experience (Bhattacharjee, 2001).

This study situates its investigation within Denpasar City, the capital of Bali, Indonesia, a context notable for its high concentration of digitally active Generation Z users and an internet penetration rate of 90.59% (APJII, 2025), well above the national average (Fariah, 2025). Generation Z, broadly defined as those born between 1997 and 2012, represents the dominant digital-native demographic in Indonesia's emerging creative economy. A preliminary survey of 30 Generation Z Canva users in Denpasar revealed that 73% had never subscribed to Canva Pro, underscoring the relevance of this population to the conversion intention problem.

While prior research has examined push and pull dynamics in e-wallet switching (Yunita & Munandar, 2023) and over-the-top media services (Phan Trong & Vo Thi Ngoc, 2024), the role of perceived value as a mediating mechanism in freemium creative tool contexts, particularly among Generation Z in urban Indonesian settings, has received limited empirical attention. This study addresses that gap by testing a model that integrates push motivation, pull motivation, and perceived value as predictors of conversion intention, grounded in the SOR framework.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant theoretical foundations. Section 3 develops the hypotheses. Section 4 describes the research methodology. Section 5 presents results and analysis. Section 6 discusses the findings, and Section 7 offers conclusions, limitations, and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Theory

The SOR model, originally formulated by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) in the context of environmental psychology, offers a structural account of how external cues shape internal states that ultimately generate behavioral responses. The model distinguishes three sequential components: the stimulus, referring to any environmental input encountered by the individual; the organism, representing the intervening cognitive and affective processes through which the stimulus is interpreted; and the response, denoting the resulting behavior or behavioral inclination. Applied to digital consumer behavior, the model has been widely used to explain how platform characteristics elicit user responses ranging from purchase intent to engagement and loyalty (Hochreiter et al., 2023).

In the freemium context, push motivation (arising from free-tier constraints) and pull motivation (arising from premium feature attractiveness) function as stimuli that activate internal evaluative processes, most notably, perceived value assessments, before culminating in a conversion response (Armawan et al., 2022). This structure aligns

well with the SOR logic and justifies positioning perceived value as the organism component in the present model.

Push-Pull Motivation Theory

Push–pull motivation theory, rooted in Lee's (1966) migration model, explains behavioral transitions through two complementary forces. Push factors refer to negative conditions or deficiencies in the current state that impel individuals to seek alternatives, in the digital context, these include service limitations, dissatisfaction, and perceived inadequacy. Pull factors refer to the attractive attributes of an alternative offering that draw users toward it (Bansal et al., 2005). The Push-Pull-Mooring (PPM) framework extended this logic to switching behavior in digital services, acknowledging that both disengagement from the current option and attraction to the alternative jointly determine the likelihood of transition (Bhattacharjee et al., 2012).

For Canva, push motivation manifests as perceived usage limitations (e.g., restricted templates, watermarked assets, storage caps) and intrusive upgrade prompts, while pull motivation encompasses the trialability of premium features, the perceived superiority of Canva Pro's functionality, ease of use, and social validation from peers who use the premium version (Phan Trong & Vo Thi Ngoc, 2024; Hu et al., 2025).

Perceived Value

Perceived value is defined as consumers' overall evaluation of a product or service based on their perception of what is received relative to what is sacrificed (Zeithaml, 1988). Sweeney and Soutar (2001) decomposed this construct into functional value (quality and performance), emotional value (affective pleasure or satisfaction), and social value (status and identity implications). Blut et al.'s (2024) meta-analysis confirmed that perceived value is a robust predictor of satisfaction, repurchase intention, and service continuance across diverse contexts. In freemium settings, perceived value occupies a strategic position because users have a direct experiential reference point, the free version, against which they benchmark the premium offering, making the cost–benefit calculus particularly explicit (Widiastuti et al., 2024).

Conversion Intention

Conversion intention in freemium contexts refers to the deliberate inclination of a user to transition from free-tier to paid-tier service access (Phan Trong & Vo Thi Ngoc, 2024). Operationally, this construct encompasses four dimensions: conversion desire (the strength of the upgrade wish following value evaluation), high likelihood (subjective confidence that the transition will occur), conversion planning (concrete intent to subscribe in the near term), and behavioral readiness (willingness to adopt the premium version as a primary tool) (Duffett et al., 2020; Wu & Kim, 2022; Tsai, 2023).

Research Hypothesis

Based on the theoretical arguments presented above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Push motivation has a positive and significant effect on conversion intention toward Canva Pro among Generation Z users in Denpasar City.

H2: Pull motivation has a positive and significant effect on conversion intention toward Canva Pro among Generation Z users in Denpasar City.

H3: Push motivation has a positive and significant effect on perceived value of Canva Pro among Generation Z users in Denpasar City.

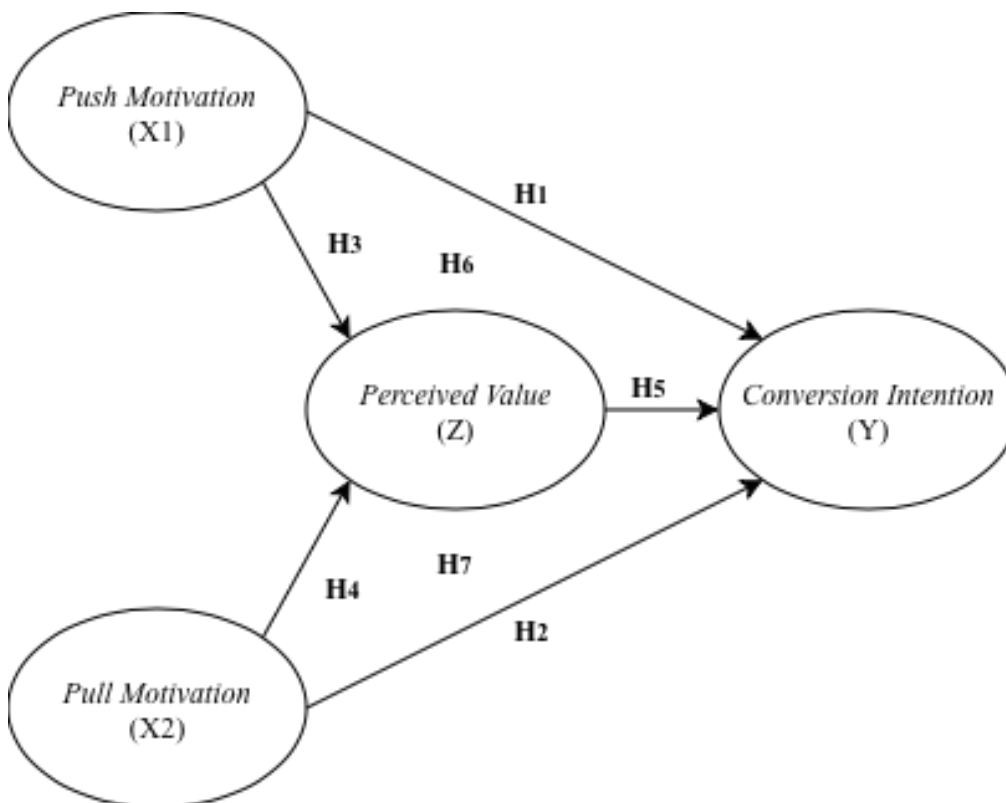
H4: Pull motivation has a positive and significant effect on perceived value of Canva Pro among Generation Z users in Denpasar City.

H5: Perceived value has a positive and significant effect on conversion intention toward Canva Pro among Generation Z users in Denpasar City.

H6: Perceived value mediates the relationship between push motivation and conversion intention toward Canva Pro among Generation Z users in Denpasar City.

H7: Perceived value mediates the relationship between pull motivation and conversion intention toward Canva Pro among Generation Z users in Denpasar City.

Research Model



Source: Author's calculation (2026)

Figure 1. Conceptual Research Model

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed. This approach is appropriate for testing theoretically grounded hypotheses regarding the structural relationships among constructs, enabling the examination of both direct and mediated effects simultaneously

Population and Sample

The target population comprised Generation Z individuals (born 1997–2012) residing in Denpasar City who were currently using the free version of Canva and were familiar with the Canva Pro subscription. Denpasar was selected due to its status as a creative economy hub with among the highest internet penetration rates in Indonesia (90.59%), virtually eliminating digital access as a confounding barrier to conversion (Fariah, 2025).

A purposive non-probability sampling technique was adopted. The minimum sample size was determined by applying the 5-to-10 observations-per-indicator rule (Hair et al., 2021): with 18 observed indicators across four constructs, the required minimum was $18 \times 7 = 126$ respondents. Accordingly, data were collected from 126 valid respondents.

Research Instruments

A structured, self-administered questionnaire was developed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Conversion intention was measured using four items adapted from Duffett et al. (2020), Wu and Kim (2022), Tsai (2023), and Phan Trong and Vo Thi Ngoc (2024), capturing conversion desire, high likelihood, conversion planning, and behavioral readiness. Push motivation was operationalized through five indicators, low satisfaction, low service quality, low trust, perceived usage limitations, and perceived advertising intrusiveness, drawing on Yunita and Munandar (2023) and Phan Trong and Vo Thi Ngoc (2024). Pull motivation was assessed via five items: trialability, alternative attractiveness, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and social influence, following Phan Trong and Vo Thi Ngoc (2024) and Hu et al. (2025). Perceived value was captured by four indicators, performance/quality, emotional value, social value, and perceived sacrifice, adapted from Sweeney and Soutar (2001) and Blut et al. (2024).

Data Collection

Data were collected through both online (Google Form) and in-person questionnaire distribution from December 2025 to March 2026. Screening questions ensured that respondents met the study's inclusion criteria: confirmed Generation Z membership, Denpasar residency, active use of the Canva free version, and non-subscription to any paid Canva plan.

Data Analysis

PLS-SEM was employed for data analysis using SmartPLS software, following the two-step evaluation procedure recommended by Hair et al. (2021). In the first step, the measurement model (outer model) was evaluated through convergent validity (outer loadings > 0.70 and AVE > 0.50), discriminant validity (cross-loading analysis and HTMT ratio < 0.90), and construct reliability (composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha > 0.70). In the second step, the structural model (inner model) was assessed through the path coefficients, R-squared values, Q-squared predictive relevance, and bootstrapping-based significance tests (5,000 sub-samples). Mediation analysis followed the procedure outlined by Hair et al. (2022).

Results and Analysis

Of the 126 respondents, 67.5% were female and 32.5% were male. The majority (61.1%) fell in the 21–23 age bracket, followed by respondents aged 24–25 (18.3%), 18–20 (11.1%), and 26–29 (9.5%). In terms of usage frequency, 47.6% used Canva between one and three times per week, 37.3% used it more than three times weekly, and 15.1% did so less than once a week. The primary use case was academic tasks (53.2%), followed by creative or professional work (37.3%) and other purposes (9.5%). The dominance of female respondents and academic users aligns with the broader profile of Generation Z Canva users engaged in education and digital content creation in urban Bali

Respondent Profile

Measurement Model Evaluation

All 18 items loaded significantly onto their respective constructs with outer loading values exceeding 0.70 (range: 0.713–0.905), confirming acceptable convergent validity at the indicator level. Average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded the 0.50 threshold for all four constructs, and composite reliability (CR) values were uniformly above 0.80, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.81. Discriminant validity was confirmed through the HTMT criterion; all pairwise HTMT ratios fell below the conservative 0.90 threshold, ranging from 0.599 to 0.770. These results, summarized in Table 1, collectively affirm the soundness of the measurement model.

Construct	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Conversion Intention	0.776	0.904	0.903
Push Motivation	0.614	0.853	0.843
Pull Motivation	0.684	0.888	0.884
Perceived Value	0.643	0.817	0.814

Source: Author's calculation (2026)

Table 1. Reliability and Validity Assessment

Discriminant validity was further assessed using the HTMT criterion. All HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating that the constructs were empirically distinct. These findings confirm that the measurement model met the required criteria for reliability and validity.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model explained 44.8% of the variance in perceived value ($R^2 = 0.448$) and 50.3% of the variance in conversion intention ($R^2 = 0.503$), indicating moderate-to-substantial explanatory power. The Q-squared predictive relevance value, computed as $Q^2 = 1 - (1 - 0.448)(1 - 0.503) = 0.728$, confirms strong predictive accuracy for the endogenous constructs. Hypothesis testing results, based on bootstrapping with 5,000 replications, are reported in Table 2.

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	P-Value	Result
H1	Push Motivation → Conversion Intention	0.371	0.000	Supported
H2	Pull Motivation → Conversion Intention	0.161	0.097	Not Supported
H3	Push Motivation → Perceived Value	0.184	0.024	Supported
H4	Pull Motivation → Perceived Value	0.540	0.000	Supported
H5	Perceived Value → Conversion Intention	0.297	0.002	Supported
H6	Push → PV → Conversion Intention	0.055	0.042	Supported (Partial)
H7	Pull → PV → Conversion Intention	0.160	0.022	Supported (Full)

Source: Author's data processing (2026)

Table 2. Structural Model Results

The findings indicate that five of the seven hypotheses were fully supported. Push motivation exerted a positive and significant direct effect on both conversion intention ($\beta = 0.371$, $p < 0.001$) and perceived value ($\beta = 0.184$, $p = 0.024$), supporting H1 and H3. Pull motivation showed a strong and significant effect on perceived value ($\beta = 0.540$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4, but its direct path to conversion intention was statistically non-significant ($\beta = 0.161$, $p = 0.097$), leading to the rejection of H2. Perceived value positively and significantly predicted conversion intention ($\beta = 0.297$, $p = 0.002$), supporting H5. Regarding mediation, perceived value significantly mediated both push motivation

(indirect effect = 0.055, $p = 0.042$) and pull motivation (indirect effect = 0.160, $p = 0.022$) in their respective relationships with conversion intention, supporting H6 and H7.

Further mediation analysis confirmed that perceived value functions as a complementary partial mediator in the push motivation–conversion intention path (since both direct and indirect effects are significant), and as a full mediator (indirect-only) in the pull motivation–conversion intention path (since only the indirect effect is significant). This distinction highlights a meaningful difference in the psychological mechanisms underlying push versus pull dynamics in freemium conversion behavior.

Discussion

Push Motivation and Conversion Intention

The finding that push motivation directly and significantly predicts conversion intention is consistent with the push-pull theoretical tradition and with recent empirical findings in freemium OTT service contexts (Phan Trong & Vo Thi Ngoc, 2024). Among Generation Z Canva users in Denpasar, free-tier constraints, particularly feature access barriers, watermarked premium elements, and storage limitations, appear to function as genuine psychological discomforts rather than mere inconveniences. This cohort, socialized to expect seamlessly capable digital tools, responds to felt inadequacy with upgraded adoption intent.

Interestingly, this result diverges from Yunita and Munandar's (2023) finding that push motivation was not a significant predictor of switching intention among Generation Z e-wallet users in Jakarta. This discrepancy is contextually informative: Canva is a creative production tool with highly visible quality differentials between free and paid tiers, whereas e-wallets tend to be utility-driven services where functional differences between plans are less salient. The design-oriented nature of Canva amplifies users' awareness of premium feature gaps, making push motivation a more potent conversion driver in this specific context.

Pull Motivation and Conversion Intention

The non-significant direct path from pull motivation to conversion intention represents one of the more theoretically interesting findings of this study. While Canva Pro's premium features such as background removal, Brand Kit, and unlimited templates are rated highly attractive by respondents (mean pull motivation score = 4.08), their attractiveness alone does not translate into a direct subscription inclination. To develop conversion intent, users appear to require an intervening step: evaluating whether those features offer commensurate value for the subscription cost.

Qualitative follow-up interviews conducted with three respondents illuminate this pattern. All of them consistently indicated that premium features were aesthetically appealing but not functionally indispensable for their current usage patterns. They mutually noted that the decision to subscribe hinged on a frequency-of-use calculation, whether premium tools would be used often enough to justify the recurring cost. Only

when participants were engaged in high-output design work (e.g., project-based academic assignments or creative freelancing) did pull motivation directly activate upgrade consideration.

Push and Pull Motivation as Perceived Value Predictors

Both motivational forces significantly elevated perceived value, though pull motivation's effect was considerably stronger ($\beta = 0.540$ versus $\beta = 0.184$). This asymmetry suggests that the attractive qualities of Canva Pro are more influential in shaping value perceptions than the limitations of the free version, even if pull motivation alone is insufficient to directly trigger conversion intent without the value evaluation bridge.

The strong relationship between pull motivation and perceived value is consistent with findings from Handoyo and Fikriah (2024) in digital logistics services and Hu et al. (2025) in AI-enabled design platforms, both of which found that service attribute richness positively shapes user value perceptions. Descriptive results further indicate that respondents assigned particularly high value scores to Canva Pro's performance superiority (mean = 4.45) and the emotional appeal of accessing premium features (mean = 4.43), with overall perceived value reaching a very high mean of 4.42. This suggests that when Generation Z users mentally benchmark Canva Pro against the free version, their assessments are markedly favorable, but this favorability needs to be mobilized into conversion intent through explicit value communication.

Perceived Value as a Mediator

The mediating role of perceived value is the conceptual centerpiece of this study, and the results clarify an important structural distinction. For push motivation, perceived value acts as a complementary partial mediator, amplifying the total effect of negative free-tier experiences on conversion intent without replacing the direct pathway. This pattern aligns with Zainyah et al.'s (2025) finding that perceived value partially mediated customer motivation and purchase decisions among Generation Z Canva Pro users in Sidoarjo, and with Armawan et al.'s (2022) theoretical application of the SOR model, which positions perceived value as the cognitive–affective organism state bridging stimulus and response.

For pull motivation, perceived value acts as a full mediator, serving as the sole explanatory channel through which premium feature attractiveness ultimately generates conversion intent. This finding implies that premium feature communication, however compelling, requires users to actively internalize the cost–benefit trade-off before behavioral intent crystallizes. The implication for practitioners is direct: showcasing features is necessary but insufficient; what must be communicated is not merely what Canva Pro does, but what it is worth to the user's specific creative workflow.

Conclusion

This study examined how push and pull motivations influence Generation Z users' conversion intention toward Canva Pro through the mediating role of perceived value, grounded in the SOR theoretical framework. Analysis of 126 valid responses from Denpasar City using PLS-SEM yielded several key findings.

Push motivation exerts a direct and significant effect on both conversion intention and perceived value. Pull motivation significantly predicts perceived value but does not directly influence conversion intention, as its effect operates exclusively through the perceived value channel. Perceived value is a robust predictor of conversion intention, serving as a complementary partial mediator for push motivation and a full mediator for pull motivation. The model explains approximately 50.3% of the variance in conversion intention and 44.8% in perceived value.

Theoretically, these findings extend the SOR framework in freemium SaaS contexts by demonstrating that the organism component, namely perceived value, plays distinct mediating roles depending on the stimulus type, partial for negative stimuli (push) and full for positive stimuli (pull). This contributes to a more nuanced understanding of freemium user psychology than is available from studies that treat push and pull as symmetric forces.

Practically, the results suggest that Canva and similar SaaS providers should invest in two complementary strategies: intensifying the salience of free-tier constraints to leverage push-driven urgency, while simultaneously deploying clear, user-specific value propositions that demonstrate how premium features translate into efficiency gains and professional outcomes relevant to Generation Z's daily design workflows. Generic feature lists are unlikely to close the conversion gap; personalized value narratives tied to use-case contexts are a more promising approach.

Several limitations should be noted. The sample was restricted to Denpasar City, which, while contextually distinct, limits generalizability. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference about the temporal sequence of motivational processes. Future research could extend the model to other freemium platforms and geographic settings, incorporate longitudinal designs to track the conversion decision process over time, and explore the moderating role of variables such as income, design proficiency, and platform tenure.

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