

From Anime, Comics, and Games to Reality: Understanding Generation Z's Buying Behaviours Towards Brand Collaborations in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the buying behaviour of Anime, Comics, and Games (ACG)-related brand collaborations among Generation Z in Malaysia, a digitally dominant group influenced by pop culture and trends. It investigates the level of awareness of Generation Z about ACG works and their brand collaborations, examines how advertising strategies influence their motivation, and analyses the psychological factors impacting their purchasing decisions. The study uses the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to evaluate the motivations and insights behind their consumer behaviour. A quantitative research method involving an online survey targeting Malaysian Generation Z (aged 18-27) was employed. Findings highlight emotional connection, practicality, and uniqueness as key motivators for purchasing ACG-related products. Advertising strategies leveraging familiar ACG elements enhance brand engagement and purchase motivation. This research offers valuable insights for marketers aiming to connect with this demographic through ACG-related campaigns.

Keywords: Anime Comic Games (ACG), Brand Collaboration, Generation Z, Buyer Psychology, Advertising Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of global media and pop culture has significantly reshaped consumer behaviour. Among these shifts, the Generation Z demographic, often termed as "digital natives," has emerged as a pivotal consumer group with unique preferences. In Malaysia, the rise of Anime, Comics, and Games (ACG) subculture underscores this trend. This subculture—once niche—has transitioned into a mainstream phenomenon. Consequently, brands are increasingly engaging in ACG-related collaborations to captivate Generation Z.

Research Problem

Despite the growing prevalence of ACG-related collaborations, brands face challenges in resonating with Generation Z. This demographic prioritizes innovation, authenticity, and personalization in their purchasing decisions. Moreover, limited research exists on the interplay between ACG subculture and consumer behaviour in Malaysia.

Objectives

1. To explore the awareness of ACG works and brand collaborations among Malaysian Generation Z.
2. To investigate the influence of advertising strategies on Generation Z's motivation towards ACG-related collaborations.
3. To analyze the psychological factors shaping their purchasing decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Japanese Pop Culture and Global Influence

Japanese pop culture, particularly ACG, has had a profound influence on global audiences through its unique artistic styles, engaging storytelling, and technological advancements. The impact is particularly notable in countries such as the United States and China, where Japanese media has been integrated into local industries. In the U.S., Japanese anime and manga have reshaped the animation industry, introducing complex narratives and artistic techniques that were previously uncommon. Shows like "Avatar: The Last Airbender" reflect this fusion, borrowing heavily from Japanese aesthetics.

In China, the rise of "Donghua" (Chinese animation) mirrors the influence of Japanese anime, adopting similar art styles and storytelling techniques. The popularity of titles such as "The Legend of Hei" and "Mo Dao Zu Shi" highlights how Chinese creators have adapted and innovated upon Japanese-inspired formats. Globally, the adoption of Japanese video game design principles—such as engaging mechanics and rich narratives—has also transformed the gaming industry, with franchises like "Pokémon" and "Final Fantasy" achieving iconic status.

B. ACG Subculture in Malaysia

The ACG subculture in Malaysia has grown from a niche interest to a significant cultural phenomenon. Since the early 2000s, Japanese anime, comics, and games have gained immense popularity among Malaysian youth. Events such as Comic Fiesta, Animangaki, and other conventions have created vibrant platforms for fans to express their creativity and connect with like-minded individuals. The subculture is further enriched by Malaysian influencers and content creators who promote ACG culture through platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Figures such as Hakken, a well-known cosplayer, and gaming streamers like Laowu have played pivotal roles in shaping and popularizing this subculture locally.

In addition to fan-driven activities, the integration of ACG elements into marketing and branding strategies by Malaysian businesses has further legitimized its mainstream appeal. For instance, local brands have collaborated with popular anime franchises to launch limited-edition merchandise, thereby fostering a deeper connection with Generation Z consumers.

C. Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT): This theory provides a framework for understanding how Generation Z consumes ACG content. UGT posits that individuals actively seek media that satisfies their psychological and social needs. In the context of ACG, these needs may include entertainment, identity formation, and social interaction. By engaging with ACG content, Generation Z finds a sense of belonging and self-expression.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM): ELM offers insights into how advertising strategies influence consumer attitudes and behaviours. The model suggests that individuals process persuasive messages through two routes: the central route, which involves thoughtful consideration, and the peripheral route, which relies on superficial cues. ACG-related advertising often capitalizes on the peripheral route by leveraging visually appealing designs, familiar characters, and emotionally resonant themes to capture Generation Z's attention.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach was employed to gather data. Structured questionnaires were distributed via digital platforms to Generation Z respondents in Malaysia. The focus was to capture insights on ACG awareness, advertising engagement, and psychological motivations.

The research targeted Malaysian Generation Z, recognized for their engagement with digital and social platforms. Convenience sampling was adopted, leveraging online channels for wide reach and accessibility. The survey, structured with clear and concise questions, was shared through social media groups, forums, and targeted advertisements to ensure participation. This method facilitated the collection of diverse perspectives

within the specified demographic. Responses were carefully analyzed to discern patterns, enabling a comprehensive understanding of awareness, advertising strategies, and buyer psychology linked to ACG-related brand collaborations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Awareness of ACG Works

Survey results indicate high awareness levels of ACG works, with respondents citing familiarity with popular franchises such as "Demon Slayer" and "Genshin Impact." Respondents emphasized the importance of quality storytelling and cultural elements in ACG. Many also acknowledged the role of social media in increasing exposure to ACG works, which often influences their consumption preferences.

B. Advertising Strategies

Respondents highlighted the importance of visually appealing and emotionally resonant advertising in influencing their engagement with ACG-related collaborations. Campaigns that used vibrant designs, interactive features, and culturally relevant content were particularly effective in capturing attention. Moreover, advertisements that incorporated familiar ACG characters or themes generated a stronger sense of relatability and emotional connection. Respondents also valued advertisements with exclusive offers or collectibles, as these added perceived value to the products being promoted.

C. Buyer Psychology

Key motivators included emotional connection, perceived authenticity, and practicality. Emotional engagement often outweighed practical considerations like pricing. Respondents expressed a strong preference for products that align with their personal identity and hobbies, which makes ACG-related collaborations particularly appealing. Additionally, the influence of peer recommendations and online reviews was noted as a significant factor in shaping purchasing decisions. Limited-edition products were also seen as desirable due to their exclusivity, which added to their appeal among collectors and fans.

D. Emerging Trends

An interesting observation from the survey was the growing interest in augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) integrations in advertising. Respondents showed enthusiasm for immersive experiences that allowed them to interact with ACG characters or participate in virtual events. These technologies were perceived as innovative ways to enhance brand engagement and foster a deeper connection with the target audience.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the significance of emotional and cultural resonance in targeting Generation Z consumers through ACG-related collaborations. Brands should prioritize innovative advertising strategies that align with Generation Z's values and preferences. Recommendations include leveraging immersive experiences, such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), to deepen consumer engagement. Future research could expand on the long-term impact of such collaborations on brand loyalty and explore similar trends across other consumer demographics.

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