

UNDERSTANDING GENERATION Z CONSUMER BEHAVIOR TOWARD ILLEGAL SPOTIFY PREMIUM SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

In the era of rapid technological advancement, digital entertainment such as music and podcasts has become an essential aspect of modern life, accompanied by a growing trend in the illegal sale of Spotify Premium accounts. This study aims to analyze the consumer behavior of Generation Z in making decisions to purchase Spotify Premium illegally. Using a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis, the research relies on primary data collected through interviews. The findings reveal that factors such as affordability, equivalent premium access, ease of transaction, limited awareness of legal alternatives, and a lack of understanding of potential risks significantly influence the decision to purchase illegally. Although these unauthorized services provide high user satisfaction, they violate copyright laws and Spotify's service agreements, negatively impacting developers and content creators. Therefore, enhancing digital literacy and legal awareness among Generation Z is essential to promote ethical consumption and support the sustainability of the creative digital industry..

Key words: Spotify, Consumer, Generation Z

INTRODUCTION

The current era is marked by accelerated technological advancement fueled by globalization, digital infrastructure expansion, and continuous innovation in information and communication technology. The integration of the internet into everyday life has transformed how individuals work, communicate, and consume information. Access to digital platforms allows society to fulfill various needs efficiently, from academic tasks to entertainment consumption, as highlighted by Kartika (2023). This digital transformation has reshaped lifestyle patterns, particularly among younger generations who are highly connected and accustomed to instant access to information and services. The increasing penetration of smartphones and affordable internet access further strengthens this shift, embedding digital consumption into daily routines.

As modern life becomes more demanding and fast-paced, entertainment plays an important role in supporting psychological wellbeing and relaxation. Music and podcasts, in particular, have become essential forms of digital leisure. Unlike previous generations who relied primarily on television or radio, contemporary users access entertainment through streaming platforms that offer on-demand and personalized content (Yanti, 2023). Spotify stands out as one of the most influential applications in this domain, widely recognized as a pioneer in global music streaming services (Yollis & Netti, 2016). Its algorithm-based recommendations, curated playlists, and user-friendly interface have made it especially popular among students and young adults who frequently integrate music into study and social activities (Andry & Tjee, 2019). With a 12+ rating and a dominant user base among Generation Z—individuals born between 1995 and 2012 (Hasanah & Huriyah, 2022)—Spotify has become embedded in youth digital culture.

Spotify offers premium subscription models designed to enhance user experience by eliminating advertisements, allowing unlimited song skipping, and enabling offline listening features (Febriani & Tiorida, 2019). However, alongside the growth of legitimate digital services, illegal activities such as application modification and unauthorized account reselling have proliferated (Aditya Rahmad & Hadi, 2022). These illegal Spotify accounts offer similar features at significantly lower prices, attracting price-sensitive consumers. Generation Z, characterized by high digital engagement and sometimes impulsive consumption patterns, may not fully evaluate the legal, ethical, and security consequences of such purchases (Sutarno & Purwanto, 2022). This behavior reflects the classical economic principle of the law of demand, which states that lower prices tend to increase demand (Elvira, 2015).

From a theoretical perspective, this phenomenon can be analyzed through Consumer Behavior Theory. Consumer behavior refers to the processes individuals undergo when searching for, purchasing, using, and evaluating products and services to satisfy their needs (Stiesnu et al., 2018). Purchasing decisions are influenced by cultural norms, social environment, personal characteristics such as age, lifestyle, and economic capacity, as well as psychological factors including motivation, perception, attitudes, and beliefs (Mananeke et al., 2017). In

the context of illegal digital subscriptions, these factors interact dynamically, shaping Generation Z's purchasing choices within the broader digital economy landscape.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach utilizing a descriptive analysis technique. Qualitative research is This study was conducted in a natural setting, positioning the researcher as the primary research instrument, consistent with qualitative research principles that emphasize contextual understanding, narrative description, and the interpretation of meaning rather than statistical generalization (Hadi, 2014). The qualitative descriptive method was employed to analyze, describe, and synthesize various conditions emerging from the field. This approach enables the researcher to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and motivations in depth, particularly regarding the factors influencing Generation Z's interest in purchasing illegal Spotify Premium subscriptions. Rather than measuring behavior numerically, the study seeks to understand the underlying reasoning processes, value considerations, and contextual influences shaping decision-making.

The data used in this research consist of primary data, defined as information obtained directly from research subjects or original sources without intermediary interpretation (Suhono & Al Fatta, n.d.). Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 60 Generation Z respondents who currently use or have previously used illegal Spotify Premium accounts. The selection of respondents aimed to capture diverse perspectives regarding purchasing motives, awareness of legal implications, perceived risks, and economic considerations. The researcher functioned as the central instrument, supported by auxiliary tools including audio recordings, video recordings, and structured interview notes to ensure accuracy and completeness of data documentation (Yusup, 2018).

Data processing followed a systematic qualitative procedure beginning with data reduction. This stage involved organizing, selecting, and simplifying raw interview data to identify relevant patterns and recurring themes. Irrelevant or repetitive information was filtered, while significant statements were coded and categorized. The reduced data were then systematically arranged to facilitate interpretation, enabling the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the behavioral, economic, social, and psychological factors influencing Generation Z's engagement with illegal digital subscription services.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The widespread circulation of illegal Spotify Premium sales on social media has caused Gen Z to prefer the illegal option. Gen Z is highly dependent on the internet because they are accustomed to life related to technology (Nurin Nabila et al., 2023) and often conduct activities on social media (Putra & Fitriani, 2019). Information about illegal sales, especially when obtained from close relationships like friends (who are sometimes the sellers), was considered trustworthy, increasing curiosity and motivation to purchase.

Relatively Cheap Price

Price emerges as one of the most decisive factors influencing Generation Z's preference for illegal Spotify Premium subscriptions. Across respondents, cost considerations consistently outweighed concerns about legality, service stability, or ethical implications. Illegal Spotify Premium accounts circulated through social media platforms are typically offered at significantly lower prices compared to official subscriptions. Yanti (2023) notes that premium accounts sold informally online are priced far below those available on the official Spotify platform, creating a substantial price gap that directly affects purchasing behavior.

For many members of Generation Z—particularly students who rely on limited allowances or irregular income—the official subscription fee is perceived as financially burdensome. As a generation that is highly responsive to price incentives and digital promotions, Gen Z tends to compare alternatives and select options that maximize perceived utility while minimizing expenditure. Consistent with the principle of the law of demand, lower prices stimulate higher demand, especially when substitute products provide similar functionality. In this context, illegal subscriptions are viewed not as inferior alternatives but as economically rational solutions that deliver comparable listening satisfaction at a reduced cost.

Respondents frequently expressed that purchasing illegal premium accounts felt like a “smart saving strategy,” particularly when sellers offered additional discounts or promotional packages. The perception of financial efficiency strengthens purchase intention, even when users are aware of potential risks. This finding is supported by Kadeari et al. (2021), who reported that illegal Spotify Premium accounts are often sold at extremely low prices or even distributed free of charge under certain promotional schemes. The substantial price differential thus becomes a primary motivator, positioning affordability as a central driver in Generation Z's decision to engage in illegal digital consumption.

Similar Premium Access

Gen Another finding is that Gen Z purchases illegally because the features offered are not significantly different from the legal premium. They feel that the price of legal premium is not commensurate with the value they receive.

The features obtained include: 1) No advertisements, 2) Offline download access, 3) Unlimited song skipping, and 4) The ability to adjust the time slider on songs.

The absence of ads provides satisfaction and comfort, allowing users to focus entirely on the content without unwanted interruptions or pauses. Advertisements are heavily avoided, especially horror-themed podcast ads. The proliferation of horror podcast ads exists because ghost story experiences are very engaging when featured on the Spotify platform (Aulia Nastiti et al., 2023). Most respondents find the ads quite frightening, especially since they explicitly mention ghost names, coupled with a chilling atmosphere. Without ads, users gain more focus and control over their listening experience, as ads typically play after 4 to 5 songs (Febriani & Tiorida, n.d.).

The offline download access feature allows users to download as many songs as possible without the applied limitations. This is a major advantage of illegal Spotify as users can listen without an internet connection (Wenzano, n.d.), which is crucial during travel or in areas with limited internet access.

The unlimited song skipping feature refers to the ability to skip songs without limitations or interruptions. This aligns with (Febriani & Tiorida, n.d.), who noted that users can skip songs freely and are not limited to 6 skips. This feature is attractive to users seeking an unrestricted listening experience.

The time slider control allows users to move the playback cursor to specific parts of a song (intro, chorus, bridge). On Spotify's non-premium music service, the time slider cannot be used, forcing users to listen to the song in its entirety. However, this feature works on illegal premium.

Ease of Access

Ease of access represents another significant factor influencing Generation Z's decision to purchase illegal Spotify Premium accounts. Respondents consistently described the illegal subscription process as simple, fast, and convenient. Yanti (2023) supports this observation, explaining that a more straightforward transaction process encourages individuals to opt for illegal subscriptions. In contrast, the official Spotify subscription procedure is perceived as relatively complicated. Users must create or verify an account, select a subscription plan, complete payment authentication, and manage recurring monthly billing. For some respondents, these steps are viewed as time-consuming and administratively burdensome.

Illegal subscriptions, by comparison, require minimal procedural effort. Users typically only need to contact the seller via social media or messaging applications and transfer payment directly to receive account access. There is no need for formal registration, digital verification, or long-term financial commitment. This immediacy reduces perceived effort and increases impulsive purchasing behavior. The absence of recurring payment systems also appeals to users who prefer one-time transactions rather than ongoing financial obligations.

Furthermore, illegal sellers frequently promote attractive discounts and flexible payment options, reinforcing the perception of convenience and affordability. The combination of simplified procedures, rapid activation, and continuous promotional offers makes illegal subscriptions appear more accessible and user-friendly. As a result, ease of access not only lowers practical barriers but also psychologically reduces resistance, increasing Generation Z's likelihood of choosing the illegal option over the official service.

Lack of Information

A significant number of respondents indicated that they were unaware of the various discounts and promotional schemes offered by the official Spotify Premium service. This lack of information plays an important role in shaping purchasing decisions. When consumers do not have access to complete and accurate information, they tend to evaluate alternatives based on visible and easily accessible options, such as the cheaper illegal subscriptions widely promoted on social media.

In reality, Spotify provides multiple legal promotional programs designed to make subscriptions more affordable. These commonly include a free trial for the first month, bundle discounts with selected partners, family packages that allow multiple users under one subscription plan, and seasonal promotional packages offered during specific periods. Kadeari et al. (2021) reported that certain promotions even provide up to three months of free access for new users. Additionally, special discounts during festive seasons, such as Christmas or other annual campaigns, are frequently available.

However, because many Generation Z consumers are not adequately informed about these official offers, the price comparison they make is often incomplete. Without awareness of student discounts, bundled packages, or temporary promotions, the official subscription appears consistently expensive relative to illegal alternatives. Consequently, the illegal option—marketed aggressively and visibly on social media—seems to be the only financially attractive choice. This information gap contributes to distorted perceptions of value and affordability, ultimately reinforcing the appeal of illegal Spotify Premium subscriptions.

Unawareness of Impact

Respondents poorly understood the differences in service, the potential obstacles they might face, and the negative impact on themselves and the creators. Using illegal Spotify Premium risks issues like financial loss,

instability, poor quality, data/account hacking, legal violations, and hindering innovation. Illegal premium is detrimental to the potential of the domestic music industry (Rahmadia et al., n.d.).

Despite using the illegal service, users experience frequent technical obstacles. Users reported that their accounts sometimes automatically log out, requiring them to log in again. Another inconvenience relates to playlist management; playlists that have been created can be lost, forcing users to manually recreate their song lists, which is tedious, especially since playlists help users categorize music by preferred genres (Mayuna & Witanti, 2023). Furthermore, some users reported that their illegal premium accounts were unable to download songs for offline listening. The most frequent technical issue found in the research, however, is the account suddenly reverting to non-premium status before the paid subscription period has expired. This reversion occurs more often with packages lasting longer than one month. If the account cannot be restored to premium status, the seller's final step is to refund the money, calculated based on the purchase price and the remaining unused days; however, this refund is usually subject to an administrative fee, meaning the fund is not returned fully.

Despite these technical hurdles, users reported high satisfaction and relied on the sellers, who were described as responsible and very solution-oriented. However, the purchasing process requires users to provide their email and password to the seller, creating a risk of data theft or account misuse. Although legal Spotify Premium offers more guaranteed service and security, many users deem the legal offering "not worth it". Continued illegal consumption may lead to increased piracy (Putuhena, 2023). Illegal use violates copyright and distribution rights (Yanti, 2023), resulting in a loss of economic rights for developers and hindering innovation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the proliferation of illegal Spotify Premium sales on social media has successfully attracted Generation Z to choose the illegal option. Gen Z tends to favor illegal Spotify Premium because it is perceived as more affordable, offers features similar to the legal version, provides ease of purchase, and is compounded by a lack of information about legal offerings and a lack of awareness regarding potential obstacles. However, it is vital to recognize that using illegal Spotify Premium violates copyright and service agreements, negatively impacting developers. Therefore, it is important to educate oneself to seek accurate information and support products and services legally to respect existing copyrights and foster innovation.

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