

THE EFFECT OF STORYTELLING AS A DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY ON WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR VALORANT SKINS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effect of storytelling as a digital marketing strategy on players' willingness to pay (WTP) for cosmetic items in the game *Valorant*. In the free-to-play model, revenue depends on microtransactions, making it crucial to understand how narrative elements influence player purchasing behavior. A quantitative survey approach was used involving 31 active *Valorant* players in Indonesia aged 18–30, selected through purposive sampling. The instruments consisted of validated storytelling and WTP scales. Data were collected via an online questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The results indicate that storytelling has a significant positive effect on WTP ($\beta = 0.523$, $p < 0.01$), explaining 27.4% of its variance. This finding suggests that emotional engagement through storytelling enhances perceived value and motivates players to purchase digital items for symbolic and emotional satisfaction rather than utility. Theoretically, this study extends the Narrative Transportation Theory to digital consumption contexts, while practically, it highlights storytelling's potential as a strategic tool to strengthen player attachment and monetization. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples or experimental designs to validate causal relationships more robustly.

Keywords: storytelling; digital marketing; willingness to pay; online games; Valorant

INTRODUCTION

Willingness to pay (WTP) has become a critical measure in understanding player monetization behavior within the digital gaming industry. In free-to-play ecosystems such as *Valorant*, developed by Riot Games, revenue generation relies not on gameplay advantages but on cosmetic purchases driven by aesthetic appeal, exclusivity, and storytelling. This shift reflects how digital marketing strategies—especially narrative-based ones—shape economic behavior and spending patterns among players in the creative economy.

Storytelling, as a persuasive marketing approach, creates emotional connections that enhance consumer engagement and purchase responses. Teraiya, Namboodiri, and Jayswal (2023) showed that storytelling advertising significantly improves brand experience and equity, while Kaur (2024) demonstrated its influence on brand image and purchase intention in digital environments. In gaming, Hussain (2024) found that narrative immersion positively affects players' attitudes toward in-game purchases, linking emotional experience to economic action. Similarly, Oliveira Júnior, Limongi, and Lim (2023) highlighted through a systematic review that storytelling consistently drives consumer purchasing behavior across industries. Within Indonesia, Andhini and Andanawarih (2023) confirmed storytelling's power to enhance brand perception and intention among Gen Z, and Mavilinda, Putri, and Nazaruddin (2023) emphasized its role in fostering engagement and influencing purchase decisions on social media platforms.

However, despite extensive research on storytelling's role in marketing, few studies have directly explored its influence on willingness to pay, especially within digital goods and gaming contexts. Prior works have focused more on variables such as engagement, motivation, or purchase intention (Çam, 2025), leaving a gap in understanding how storytelling affects players' economic decisions in cosmetic-based, free-to-play models like *Valorant*. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of storytelling as a digital marketing strategy on players' willingness to pay for in-game cosmetic items in *Valorant*, particularly among Indonesian players. This research contributes theoretically by extending narrative transportation theory to digital consumption and provides practical implications for game publishers seeking to design narrative-driven monetization strategies.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative survey design aimed at testing the effect of storytelling on willingness to pay among Valorant players (Sugiyono, 2019). The population comprised all active Valorant players in Indonesia, with an estimated 1.2 million monthly users based on data from *Active Player (2024)*. The sample consisted of 31 active players, selected using purposive sampling with inclusion criteria: aged 18–30 years, had played Valorant within the last 30 days, and voluntarily agreed to participate. Demographic data collected included age, gender, frequency of play, and prior purchase experience (Azwar, 2007). Data were gathered through an online questionnaire distributed via Discord communities, campus esports groups, and social media platforms. Two instruments were used: a storytelling scale (5 items from the Narrative Transportation Scale) and a willingness to pay (WTP) scale (3 Likert items and 1 open-ended question). A pilot test with 30 respondents assessed validity

using *Pearson's product-moment correlation* and reliability using *Cronbach's alpha* (≥ 0.70). Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4 to test the direct effect of storytelling on WTP.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion illustrate the scientific outcomes of this mini research, which examined the impact of storytelling on players' willingness to pay (WTP) for Valorant skins. Data were collected from 31 active Valorant players in Indonesia and examined through descriptive, correlation, and regression techniques.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male / Female	61 / 39
Age Group	18-21 / 22-25 / 26-30	48 / 29 / 23
Frequency of Play	1-2x / 3-5x / >5x per week	23 / 52 / 25
Purchase Experience	Ever bought / Never bought	65 / 35

The majority of participants were male (61%), within the age range of 18–24 years (77%), and played Valorant 3–5 times weekly (52%). Approximately 65% had bought at least one skin bundle. This suggests that the participants constitute a youthful, engaged gaming demographic versed in digital transactions, ideal for examining storytelling's influence on economic actions.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Storytelling	31	1.666666667	5	3.994623656	0.8813750526
Willingness To pay	31	1.5	5	3.8065	0.95243
Valid N (listwise)	31				

The average score for Storytelling ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.88$) suggests that participants typically view Valorant's storytelling components—like character backstories, animated cutscenes, and world development—as interesting and fairly robust. At the same time, the Willingness to Pay ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.95$) indicates that players demonstrate a moderately strong desire to invest in digital cosmetics.

The proximity of these averages suggests that a favorable view of storytelling is strongly linked to the motivation to buy. This discovery reinforces the notion that narrative immersion can emotionally anchor consumers, resulting in an increased perceived value of the product (Green & Brock, 2000). This emotional connection frequently leads to increased hedonic motivation—players purchase skins not for their function, but to convey identity and foster a sense of belonging within the gaming community.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix Between Storytelling and Willingness to Pay

Variable	1	2
Storytelling	1	
Willingness to Pay (WTP)	0.523 ^{<sup>*</sup>}	1

Table 3 reveals a moderate positive and statistically significant correlation between storytelling and WTP ($r = 0.523$, $p = 0.003 < 0.01$). This suggests that when players perceive a game's storytelling as more immersive and emotionally resonant, they are more inclined to invest financially in related in-game content. This correlation empirically supports the Narrative Transportation Theory, which argues that emotional absorption into a story enhances persuasive outcomes (Green & Brock, 2000).

The result also aligns with Teraiya et al. (2023) and Oliveira Júnior et al. (2023), who found that storytelling in digital campaigns builds emotional resonance, leading to higher purchase intent. In the context of gaming, this reflects how *Valorant's narrative continuity*—from cinematic episodes to agent lore—creates psychological engagement that encourages spending as a form of symbolic participation in the game's universe.

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression Analysis Between Storytelling and Willingness to Pay

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95,0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.462	.519		.891	.380	-.598	1.523
	Storytelling	.837	.127	.775	6.597	.000	.578	1.097

a. Dependent Variable: Willingness to Pay

The regression model indicates that storytelling has a significant positive influence on WTP ($\beta = 0.523$, $p = 0.003 < 0.01$). The R^2 value of 0.274 means that storytelling explains 27.4% of the variance in players' willingness to pay. This highlights that nearly one-third of players' spending intentions can be predicted through narrative strength and emotional engagement, while other factors—such as skin aesthetics, rarity, sound design, or influencer marketing—may account for the remaining variation. This finding reinforces the theoretical argument that storytelling functions as an emotional value enhancer, not merely an informational marketing tool (Kaur, 2024). When players relate to a narrative emotionally, the perceived exclusivity and symbolic meaning of the product intensifies, increasing their motivation to make a purchase.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that storytelling as a digital marketing strategy has a significant positive effect on players' willingness to pay for Valorant skins. The findings confirm that narrative-driven content fosters emotional immersion, which transforms digital items into symbols of identity and belonging, thereby increasing their perceived value and purchase motivation. These results validate the proposed hypothesis and extend the application of narrative transportation theory to virtual consumption, demonstrating that storytelling not only enhances engagement but also drives economic behavior in free-to-play ecosystems. Scientifically, this study contributes to understanding how emotional and symbolic factors shape digital spending decisions. While the moderate effect size and limited sample ($n = 31$) restrict broad generalization, the evidence provides a foundation for future research using larger samples or experimental designs to further explore causal mechanisms and the comparative effectiveness of narrative versus non-narrative marketing in the gaming industry.

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