

Beyond Needs: Conformity, Social Comparison, and Irrational Consumption among High School Students in the Age of TikTok

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ABSTRACT: The rapid spread of the TikTok application among teenagers has triggered a consumerist tendency driven by the desire to compete with peers. This study investigates the relationship between conformity and the consumptive behavior of teenagers using the TikTok application at SMA Negeri 1 Gunung Megang. The correlational quantitative method was used in this study. 160 students from grades X and XI were selected using the probability random sampling technique from a population of 558 students. There are two scales used in the research. The 1-4 Likert Scale Model is used to collect data. The first is the consumptive behavior scale, which is based on elements of lifestyle, social influence, and social recognition (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010), and the second is the conformity scale, which is based on elements of compactness, agreement, and obedience (Sears et al., 1991). Data were analyzed using a simple linear regression test with SPSS version 24. The results of the assumption test showed that the data had a linear relationship and were normally distributed. The results of the regression analysis show that there is a very significant relationship between conformity and consumptive behavior among teenagers using the TikTok application at SMA Negeri 1 Gunung Megang. The correlation coefficient is $r = 0.936$ and the significance value is $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.01$). Conformity contributes 87.6% to consumptive behavior, and other factors outside this study contribute 12.4%. These results confirm the theory that the more committed teenagers are to their peer groups, the more likely they are to engage in consumptive behavior.

KEYWORDS: conformity, social comparison, irrational consumption, TikTok, Indonesian high school students

I. INTRODUCTION

The increasing complexity of Indonesian society along with its national progress. Actually, the desire to shop and purchasing power have increased as a result of this progress. This condition brings increasingly luxurious and excessive habits and lifestyles. Although to varying degrees, this consumption pattern is found in almost all layers of society. Almost no social group is exempt from this. With the emergence of supermarkets or malls, this condition can be observed. This results in a consumer or consumptive culture. A consumptive culture encourages someone to behave consumptively, including during their teenage years. Adolescence is a complex transitional phase in the human life span where individuals undergo significant changes from childhood to adulthood. Middle adolescence, which lasts from ages fifteen to eighteen, is an important phase in human life characterized by various biological, psychological, cognitive, and social changes occurring simultaneously. Because teenagers have to face various challenges, this phase becomes one of the most difficult stages of development.

With the increasing complexity of societal life, including the shift in consumption patterns toward a more luxurious and excessive lifestyle, Indonesia's economic growth is accelerating. Furthermore, this situation has led to a consumerist culture, where people tend to buy too many goods or services to achieve satisfaction rather than to meet their needs (Laowo et al., 2023). This phenomenon often occurs in adolescents, who are psychologically in the midst of an identity search process and are very sensitive to their surrounding social environment (Sulhan, 2024).

Middle adolescence (15-18 years) is a developmental period where biological, cognitive, and psychosocial changes occur simultaneously. According to Erikson's psychosocial theory, achieving ego identity and avoiding role confusion, which are greatly influenced by peer groups, are the main tasks of adolescents (Wirdad, 2025). Adolescents in this context tend to be very sensitive to judgment and social comparison, including the ownership of material goods, as explained thru the concept of the imaginary audience and personal narratives (Hamdanah & Surawan, 2022).

Conformity, which is the change in an individual's behavior or beliefs as a result of group pressure, whether real or imagined, is

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the tendency of adolescents to adjust to the norms and expectations of reference groups (Myers, 2018). Conformity is crucial for the formation of identity and social behavior in adolescents, including their consumption choices (Baron & Byrne, in Rachmanto, 2021). Group acceptance becomes very important for the psychological well-being and self-esteem of adolescents as they begin to reduce their emotional dependence on parents and spend more time with peers (Hurlock, 1999).

The dynamics of conformity are further reinforced by advancements in digital technology, particularly social media sites like TikTok. TikTok promotes FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) with engaging promotional content, lifestyle trends, and shopping trends (Jannah et al., 2025). Teenagers exposed to such content are more likely to make purchases due to the desire to follow trends, gain social recognition, or avoid feeling left out from their peer group rather than out of necessity (James et al., 1995). Consumptive behavior includes the purchase of goods or services without considering reasons that are more influenced by emotions, social pressures, and lifestyle (Kotler, 2021).

Previous studies have shown a positive relationship between conformity and consumptive behavior in various subject groups. Durandt and Wibowo (2021) found a significant positive correlation between conformity and the consumptive behavior of late adolescents' clothing ($r = 0.629$). Susanto and Savira (2021) found a significant correlation between e-commerce market users ($r = 0.433$) and high school students (r calculated = 0.646). The contribution of conformity to consumptive behavior reaches 91.2%, according to the study by Ramadhan and Tama (2024) on the car community. In the international realm, Gommans (2017) shows that the level of conformity is influenced by the popularity status of peers. On the other hand, Roberts et al. (2008) state that the normative role of peers is more important than the informative influence of parents in developing materialism and compulsive buying among adolescents.

Despite the fact that several studies have investigated the relationship between conformity and consumer behavior, no research has specifically linked these two factors to teenagers using the TikTok application in high school, particularly in the environment of SMA Negeri 1 Gunung Megang. The importance of this research lies in its focus on the location, subjects, and this social media platform. According to the explanation, the purpose of this research is to empirically test the relationship between conformity and consumer behavior among teenagers using the TikTok application at SMA Negeri 1 Gunung Megang. The research hypothesis is that there is a positive and significant relationship between the two variables.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Consumptive Behavior

Buying goods or services without considering the reasons is called consumptive behavior (Kotler, 2021). Consumer behavior is influenced by emotions, social impulses, and lifestyle more than by actual needs. Salomon (2020) emphasizes the symbolic drive behind this behavior, namely the desire to feel accepted, be considered modern, or imitate social groups. On the other hand, Schiffman and Kanuk (2010) emphasize that this behavior is driven by pleasure, emotions, and experiences rather than purely functional needs.

The three elements proposed by Schiffman and Kanuk (2010) are used to measure consumer behavior in this study. The aspects are (1) lifestyle, which shows the extent to which lifestyle and personal taste influence decisions about what is consumed; (2) social influence, which relates to how much interaction and people's expectations about the social environment affect their consumption behavior; and (3) social recognition, which is the desire to consume items that generate

B. Conformity

Conformity is defined as a change in a person's behavior or beliefs as a result of group pressure; this pressure can be real or imagined (Myers, 2018). Conformity is defined by Sarwono (2022) as an individual's effort to always align with the standards expected by the reference group. Conformity is measured using the framework of aspects proposed by Sears, Freedman, and Peplau (1991), which consists of: (1) cohesiveness, which is the strength of emotional bonds that encourage someone to remain a member of the group; (2) agreement, which is the pressure of group opinion that encourages someone to adjust their opinion, influenced by the level of trust and consensus among members; and (3) obedience, which is the willingness of someone to do whatever they.

Conformity affects various aspects of adolescent life, such as choices regarding school or social activities to participate in, appearance, language used, attitudes, and values held. Conformity in adolescents generally consists of the desire to be involved in the peer world, such as dressing like friends and the desire to spend time with their members (Wardani & Anggadita, 2021). According to Hurlock (1999), because teenagers spend more time outside the home with their peers as a group, it can be understood that the influence of peers on attitudes, speech, interests, appearance, and behavior is sometimes greater than the influence of family. For example, most teenagers know that if they wear the same style of clothing as the members of a popular group, their chances of being accepted by the group increase.

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III. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design and Variables

According to Sugiyono (2019), this study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational design. The purpose of this approach is to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. Conformity is the independent variable in this study, and consumptive behavior is the dependent variable.

3.2 Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

A total of 558 students from SMA Negeri 1 Gunung Megang participated in this study. A total of 210 students were divided into 160 students as the main research sample and 50 students as instrument test subjects, with a 5% error margin. The sample size was determined using the Issac and Michael table. Each member of the population has an equal chance of being randomly selected in the sampling method (Sugiyono, 2019). (1) male and female students; (2) aged between fifteen and fifteen years; and (3) active TikTok users who have made online purchases.

3.3 Research Instrument

Data collection methods play a crucial role in determining the relevance and quality of research (Sugiyono, 2019). Quantitative research uses measurable instruments to ensure data accuracy (Azwar, 2021). The Likert scale is used in this study to measure respondents' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions toward social phenomena. This study uses a 1-4 Likert Scale Model in the form of a checklist with four response options: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument consists of favorable and unfavorable statements. Positive responses to favorable statements are given high scores (SS = 4, S = 3), while negative responses receive lower scores (TS = 2, STS = 1).

The scale used to measure the variable of consumptive behavior is based on the aspects of consumptive behavior according to Schiffman & Kanuk (2010), namely lifestyle (lifestyle and personal taste, not functional needs), social influence (interaction and social expectations), and social recognition (recognition and positive image from others). This scale consists of 60 statements, divided into 30 favorable and 30 unfavorable statements.

The scale used to measure the conformity variable based on aspects according to Sears (1991) explicitly states that adolescent conformity is characterized by three things: cohesiveness (self-adjustment, attention to the group), agreement (trust, consensus, and deviation from the group's opinion), and obedience (pressure due to rewards, threats, or punishment, and the expectations of others). This scale consists of 60 statements, divided into 30 favorable and 30 unfavorable statements.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis methods are used by researchers after testing the research instruments for validity and reliability. The scale of consumptive behavior and the conformity scale were tested to ensure that the Likert scale, the measuring tool, has adequate validity and consistency. Item validity was tested using the item-total correlation coefficient with a minimum threshold of 0.30 (Azwar, 2021), while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

Before hypothesis testing, assumption tests were conducted, including normality tests using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test and linearity tests using the F-test. Hypothesis testing was performed using simple linear regression analysis to determine the strength of the relationship and the contribution of the conformity variable to consumptive behavior, with the assistance of SPSS version 24 for Windows.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Respondent Characteristics

The subjects of this research numbered 160 individuals who are students of SMA Negeri 1 Gunung Megang, Class X and XI. Of this number, 160 respondents returned the questionnaire, all students returned the questionnaire.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Respondents

No	Characteristics	Category	Frekuensi	Persentase (%)
1	Class	X	77	48,1
		XI	83	51,9
		amount	160	100
2	gender	Man	69	43,1
		Women	91	56,9
		amount	160	100

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3	age	15 year	41	25,6
		16 year	73	45,6
		17 year	46	28,8
		amount	160	100

This study involved 160 students from the 10th and 11th grades of SMA Negeri 1 Gunung Megang. The majority of the respondents were from the 11th grade, with 83 students (51.9%), and from the 10th grade, with 77 students (48.1%). The majority of the respondents were from the 16-year age group, with 73 students (45.6%), followed by the 17-year age group, with 77 students (48.1%). The characteristics of the respondents indicate that the research is dominated by students in the mid-adolescent age range, who are in a phase of dynamic social, emotional, and psychological development. In this phase, students tend to be more active in building relationships with peers, adjusting to the school environment, and forming social attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, these characteristics are relevant to research on consumer behavior and consumption in schools.

4.2. Research Data Description

Research data analysis, statistical description is used to determine the tendency of respondents' levels of consumptive behavior and conformity, whether they fall into the high or low category. Classification is done by comparing the empirical scores with the mean value.

Table 2. Statistical Description of Research Data

Variable	Score (Empirik)				Score (Hipotetik)			
	Mean	SD	XMin	XMax	Mean	SD	XMin	XMax
Consumptive behavior (Y)	109,11	24,07	63	191	135,00	27,00	54	216
Conformity (X)	120,14	24,55	73	194	137,50	27,50	55	220

Variable of consumptive behavior, the average (mean) value obtained is 109.11, the standard deviation value is 24.07, the lowest score (Xmin) is 63, and the highest score (Xmax) is 191. Meanwhile, on the variable of conformity, the average (mean) value obtained is 120.14, the standard deviation value is 24.55, the lowest score (Xmin) is 73, and the highest score (Xmax) is 194. The hypothetical score is the score obtained based on theoretical calculations according to the number of valid items and the score range on the research scale. On the behavioral variable. The consumptive variable obtained a hypothetical mean value of 135.00, a standard deviation of 27.00, a minimum score of 54, and a maximum score of 216. Meanwhile, the conformity variable obtained a hypothetical mean value of 137.50, a standard deviation of 27.50, a minimum score of 55, and a maximum score of 220. The average (mean) value for consumptive behavior was 109.11, with a standard deviation of 24.07, a minimum score (Xmin) of 63, and a maximum score (Xmax) of 191. Meanwhile, for the conformity variable, the average (mean) value was 120.14, with a standard deviation of 24.55, a minimum score (Xmin) of 73, and a maximum score (Xmax) of 194. The hypothetical score is the score obtained based on theoretical calculations according to the number of valid items and the score range on the research scale. On the behavioral variable

4.3 Description and Categorization of Data Descriptive

Classification is carried out by comparing the empirical score with the mean value. Respondents who score $X \geq M$ are categorized as having a high level of consumptive behavior or conformity, while respondents who score $X < M$ are categorized as having a low level of consumptive behavior or conformity. This grouping aims to place individuals into specific categories according to the characteristics of the measured variables, thereby facilitating the interpretation of research results (Sugiyono, 2019).

In this study, respondents are grouped into specific categories with the aim of placing them within the measured attribute groups. Out of 160 surveyed students, 113 (or 70.63 percent) fall into the high consumer behavior category. This shows that the majority of respondents have a tendency to buy or use goods and services not only to meet their needs but also due to desires, trends, lifestyles, and the desire to keep up with fashion or social environments. Out of 160 students who responded, 97 (60.63%) fall into the high conformity category. This indicates that the majority of respondents have a high tendency to adjust their attitudes, opinions, and behaviors to align with their peer group. This can be seen from the students' tendency to follow group norms, adapt to friends' habits, accept group opinions, and act to gain acceptance and avoid rejection from their social environment. However, 63 students (39.38% of the total students) fall into the low conformity category. The opinions and personal decisions of these

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respondents tend to be stronger; they are not easily influenced by group pressure, and they are more independent in determining their attitudes and behaviors according to their beliefs.

4.4 Assumption Test and Hypothesis

To ensure that the data in this study has a normal distribution, normality tests, linearity tests, and hypothesis tests are conducted using simple linear regression. The linearity test is also performed to determine whether there is a significant linear relationship between the two variables being studied. After both assumptions are met, the analysis continues with hypothesis testing using simple linear regression. This method hypothesizes the relationship between the independent variable (one independent variable) and the dependent variable (one dependent variable).

Table 3. Normality Tests

Variabel	Asymp. Sig. (2-Tailed)	Keterangan
Consumptive behavior (Y)	0,059	Normal
Conformity (X)	0,063	Normal

In this study, the variable of consumptive behavior is considered to have a normal data distribution. The results of the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test show a significance of 0.059 ($p > 0.05$) for the consumptive behavior variable and 0.063 ($p > 0.05$) for the conformity variable. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data for both the consumptive behavior and conformity variables have a normal data distribution.

Tabel 4. Linierity Test

Variabel	F	P	Information
Conformity Consumptive (Y) behavior (X)	1117.057	0,000	Linier

The results of the linearity test yielded an F value of 781.584, indicating a relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable with a significant value (p) of 0.000. With a p value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is a linear relationship between conformity and consumptive behavior.

4.4 Hypothesis Test

The hypothesis test of this research aims to identify the relationship between the conformity variable and consumer behavior. The analysis in this study is conducted using simple linear regression.

Table 5 Analysis simple linear regression

Variable	r	R ²	P	Information
Conformity (X) Consumptive behavior (Y)	0,936	0,876	0,000	Very Significant

The results of the simple linear regression analysis show a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.936$ with a coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.876$ and a significance value of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.01$). These values indicate a very strong and significant relationship between conformity and consumptive behavior, thus the research hypothesis stating a positive relationship between conformity and consumptive behavior among teenagers using the TikTok application at SMA Negeri 1 Gunung Megang is accepted. The R^2 value = 0.876 indicates that the conformity variable contributes 87.6% to the variation in consumptive behavior, while the remaining 12.4% is explained by other factors not examined in this study, such as self-control, financial literacy, or family socioeconomic status.

V. DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm that conformity has a positive and highly significant relationship with the consumptive behavior of teenagers using the TikTok application. These findings are consistent with the research results of Lestari and Indrawati (2022),

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which show that peer conformity is positively and significantly related to the consumptive behavior of teenagers, and in line with Durandt and Wibowo (2021), Putri and Erianjoni (2025), and Josraini (2023), who consistently found a positive relationship between these two variables across various subject groups and different research contexts.

The strength of the relationship in this study ($r = 0.936$) is higher compared to most previous studies, such as Susanto and Savira (2021) on e-commerce users ($r = 0.433$) or Josraini (2023) on teenage girls using skincare products ($r = 0.325$). The higher strength of the relationship in this study is likely related to the characteristics of the TikTok platform, which typically combines elements of entertainment, personalized recommendation algorithms, and shopping content (TikTok Shop) within a single ecosystem, resulting in simultaneous and intensive conformity pressure and exposure to consumptive stimuli among its active teenage users (Jannah et al., 2025).

This finding can be explained thru Asch's conformity theory (1951), which states that individuals tend to change their attitudes, opinions, and behaviors to align with group norms or pressures. In adolescents, this tendency arises from the psychological need to be accepted and recognized as part of their social group (Baron & Byrne, 2006). When the need for social acceptance is connected to social media content showcasing shopping trends and lifestyles, teenagers become more vulnerable to making purchases not out of necessity, but as a strategy to conform to their reference group (Solomon, 2020). This is also in line with the Symbolic Consumption Theory, which views the consumption of goods as a means to demonstrate status and gain social acceptance (Hamdanah, 2022).

The high proportion of adolescents with high conformity (60.63%) and high consumptive behavior (70.63%) in this study reinforces the notion that teenagers in high school environments still heavily rely on peer groups as a reference in determining their attitudes and consumption patterns (Santrock, 2019). This condition has important practical implications, considering that adolescents generally do not have their own income and depend on funds from their parents, so uncontrolled consumer behavior has the potential to cause wastefulness and difficulties in personal financial management in the future (Tambunan, 2021).

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that need to be considered in the interpretation of the results. First, the correlational design of the study cannot conclude a causal relationship between conformity and consumptive behavior. Second, this study was conducted in only one school, so generalizing the results to a broader population of adolescents needs to be done with caution. Third, the measurement using a self-report scale has the potential to introduce social desirability bias.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that there is a positive and highly significant relationship between conformity and consumptive behavior among teenagers using the TikTok application at SMA Negeri 1 Gunung Megang, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.936$ and a determination coefficient of $r^2 = 0.876$ ($p = 0.000$). The higher the level of conformity of adolescents to their peer groups, the higher the tendency for consumer behavior they exhibit, and vice versa. Conformity has proven to be a very strong predictor of consumptive behavior, with a contribution of 87.6%, while the remaining 12.4% is influenced by other factors outside this study.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the school develop financial literacy and digital literacy programs to help students recognize the difference between needs and wants and manage their spending more wisely. Teachers and school counselors can play a role in building students' self-confidence so that they are not easily influenced by peer pressure or promotional content on social media. Further research is recommended to expand the sample scope, use longitudinal or mixed methods designs, and add other variables such as self-control, financial literacy, and social media usage intensity to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of adolescent consumer behavior in the digital era.

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