The Effect of Perceived Eeriness of Human-AI Models in Fast Fashion Advertisements on Purchase Intention: A Study of Generation Z in Klaten Regency

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Abstract

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have encouraged fast fashion brands to adopt human-AI models in digital advertising. However, visuals that resemble humans yet appear rigid and unnatural may evoke discomfort among audiences and influence purchase decisions, particularly among Generation Z, who are actively exposed to digital content. This study examines the effect of perceived eeriness in fast fashion advertisements featuring human-AI models on the purchase intention of Generation Z in Klaten Regency, Indonesia. A quantitative questionnaire survey was conducted with 97 respondents selected through purposive sampling: Generation Z individuals aged 17–29 years, residing in Klaten Regency, who had viewed a fast fashion advertisement stimulus featuring a human-AI model. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The measurement model met all validity and reliability criteria (outer loadings 0.831–0.931; AVE 0.781 and 0.793; composite reliability > 0.96). The structural model showed that perceived eeriness had a negative and significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = -0.771$; $t = 15.174$; $p < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.595 and an effect size (f^2) of 1.470. Greater eeriness toward the AI model was associated with lower purchase intention, consistent with the uncanny valley effect. Fast fashion brands are advised to improve the realism of AI models or adopt a hybrid approach that retains real human models.

Keywords: *Fast Fashion, Generation Z, Human-AI Model, Perceived Eeriness, Purchase Intention.*

A. INTRODUCTION

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) to generate marketing content, known as AI-generated content (AIGC), is changing how companies create and deliver advertisements. The technology allows companies to produce marketing communication materials faster, more flexibly, and in larger volumes than conventional production. However, the use of AI in advertising not only benefits companies but also creates a different experience for consumers. Gu et al. (2024) showed that AI-generated advertisements can evoke particular perceptions in consumers, including perceived intelligence of the technology as well as a sense of strangeness or discomfort (perceived eeriness). Consumer acceptance of AI-based advertising is therefore shaped not only by the capability of the technology, but also by how consumers feel about and evaluate the appearance of the advertisement.

These developments are taking place in an Indonesian digital environment that increasingly supports digital media as a marketing communication channel.

DataReportal (2025) reported about 212 million internet users in Indonesia in early 2025, a penetration rate of 74.6% of the population, and about 108 million TikTok users aged 18 and above who can be reached through advertising. Temasek et al. (2025) ranked Indonesia first in Southeast Asia in video-commerce transaction volume and growth, with transaction volume up about 90% year on year and the number of sellers using video up about 75%, while fashion and accessories accounted for about 28% of GMV. This is highly relevant for the fashion industry, because fashion products depend heavily on visual presentation such as design, color, models, and product appearance. Fast fashion is an industry model characterized by accelerated production and consumption and the ability to respond quickly to changing trends (Dzhengiz et al., 2023). Wojdyla and Chi (2024) showed that Generation Z's purchase intention toward fast fashion is influenced by multiple factors, and Damayanti et al. (2025) confirmed that digital fast fashion consumption has become part of Indonesian Generation Z's behavior through the growth of fashion e-commerce.

One important consumer response in this context is purchase intention, namely the tendency of consumers to buy after receiving and evaluating various marketing stimuli. For fast fashion, such stimuli may include the visual appearance of the product, the model used in the advertisement, design appeal, price, and the way the product is communicated. When AI is used to generate visual elements of an advertisement, the visual characteristics displayed become part of consumers' evaluation before purchase intention is formed. Human representations generated or modified by AI do not always look natural, so perceptions of this oddness (perceived eeriness) may influence consumers' evaluation process.

The use of AI in fashion advertising has begun to be studied empirically from several angles. Lou and Copeland (2025) examined female Generation Z consumers' perceptions of AI-generated fashion advertisements using a qualitative approach, but did not test relationships among variables statistically. On the quantitative side, Ma'sum et al. (2026) tested the effect of AI-generated content and perceived personalization on Generation Z's purchase intention, with brand credibility as a mediator, among 168 respondents in Indonesia, while Hardana (2026) examined the quality of AI-generated content in TikTok Shop affiliate promotions in the fashion category through perceived risk and trust. Both studies focus on content characteristics, personalization, risk, and trust, rather than discomfort toward AI-based human representation. Poushneh and Gearhart (2025) tested closer variables, namely semi-human AI characteristics, perceived eeriness, and purchase intention, through a series of experiments, but in text- and voice-based interactions with respondents in the United States, not human models in fast fashion advertising.

The research gap is therefore not that the relationship between AI and consumer behavior has never been studied, but that few studies combine the context of AI-based fast fashion advertising, perceived eeriness toward human-model representations, and the purchase intention of Indonesian Generation Z in a single quantitative model. This study also focuses on Generation Z in Klaten Regency, providing a picture of digital consumers in a more specific region than prior studies

that used U.S. respondents or broader Indonesian coverage. The research question is: does perceived eeriness in human-AI-based fast fashion advertisements affect the purchase intention of Generation Z in Klaten Regency? The objective is to analyze this effect. Theoretically, the results enrich the study of consumer behavior and digital marketing; practically, they inform fast fashion businesses, digital marketers, content creators, and future researchers in designing and evaluating AI-based advertisements.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

1. Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) Theory

The S-O-R theory developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) explains that external stimuli shape an individual's internal state through cognitive and/or affective processes, which then produce a behavioral response. A stimulus does not always produce a response directly, because individuals first assess, perceive, or react internally to it. The framework is still widely used in consumer behavior research to explain the relationship among external stimuli, consumers' internal processes, and behavioral responses (Kiymaliglu et al., 2024). In this study, a fast fashion advertisement featuring a human-AI model is the stimulus (S), perceived eeriness is the organism process (O), and purchase intention is the response (R). The theory serves as a foundation for explaining the psychological process, not for adding more variables.

2. Perceived Eeriness

Perceived eeriness is an individual's perception of an object as strange, odd, unnatural, or discomforting, particularly for human-like representations that still display elements inconsistent with expectations. The concept is rooted in the uncanny valley proposed by Masahiro Mori (Mori et al., 2012): the relationship between human likeness and familiarity is not linear. Increasing human likeness initially increases familiarity, but at a certain point, near-perfect yet imperfect likeness triggers discomfort. Wu and Wen (2021) showed that perceived eeriness is an important psychological aspect of consumer responses to AI-created advertisements. Gu et al. (2024) found that perceived eeriness negatively affects acceptance of AI-generated advertisements, and Poushneh and Gearhart (2025) showed that human-like AI characteristics can trigger perceived eeriness, which is related to behavioral responses including purchase intention.

Following Gu et al. (2024), perceived eeriness is measured through four dimensions: creepy (an uncomfortable sensation, for example due to an empty gaze or unnatural facial expression), weird (a mismatch with normal expectations, for example body proportions or skin texture that feel "off"), unnatural (the impression that the figure is clearly not a real human, creating psychological distance), and bizarre (the most intense discomfort, arising when several visual errors occur together).

3. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is a consumer's tendency or willingness to buy a product after obtaining and evaluating information; it does not necessarily mean a transaction will occur immediately (Liliyan, 2024). Dodds et al. (1991) operationalized it through the likelihood of buying, consideration of buying, probability of buying, and willingness to buy. Permatasari et al. (2026) found that attractiveness, credibility, and trust in AI-based advertising significantly affect purchase intention, whereas authenticity does not. In this study, purchase intention is defined as consumers' tendency or willingness to buy the fast fashion product after viewing an advertisement featuring a human-AI model.

4. Prior Studies and Hypothesis

Prior studies show that perceived eeriness has been examined in various AI contexts. Gu et al. (2024), with 1,147 respondents, found a negative effect of perceived eeriness on acceptance of AI advertisements. Song and Shin (2024) found that human likeness in chatbot avatars increases eeriness, which lowers trust and subsequently affects purchase intention. Abeden et al. (2026) showed that more cartoon-like chatbots can increase purchase intention by reducing eeriness, while Liu and Chen (2026), in a livestream commerce context, found that hyper-realistic human likeness reduces perceived eeriness, which then increases purchase intention. However, no study has specifically tested the effect of perceived eeriness on purchase intention in fast fashion advertisements featuring human-AI models.

Based on the uncanny valley concept, AIGC visual stimuli that approach human likeness but remain unnatural tend to trigger negative emotional responses of oddness or eeriness, which in digital marketing are expected to erode consumers' trust in the advertisement and the product offered. Based on the S-O-R framework (Figure 1) and prior findings, the following hypothesis is proposed.

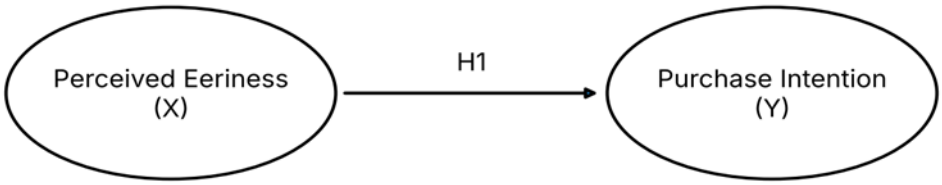


Figure 1. Research Framework

H1: perceived eeriness in fast fashion advertisements featuring human-ai models has a negative and significant effect on the purchase intention of generation z in klaten regency.

C. METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method, which suits obtaining empirical evidence in numerical form on the effects among variables (sugiyono, 2023; zulfikar et al., 2024). The objects of the study are perceived eeriness (independent variable, x) and purchase intention (dependent variable, y). Primary data were obtained directly from respondents through a questionnaire after they

viewed a stimulus in the form of a fast fashion advertisement featuring a human-ai model; secondary data came from books, scientific articles, and prior journal studies.

The population is generation z residing in klaten regency who are potential fast fashion consumers and use digital media. The sample was drawn with non-probability purposive sampling using the following criteria: (1) residing in klaten regency; (2) belonging to generation z aged 17–29 years; (3) actively using social media or digital platforms; (4) having seen fashion product advertisements on digital media; (5) willing to view the fast fashion advertisement stimulus featuring a human-ai model; and (6) willing to complete all questionnaire items. Because the population size is unknown, the sample size was calculated with the lemeshow formula, $n = z^2 \cdot p(1-p)/d^2$, where $z = 1.96$ (95% confidence level), $p = 0.5$, and $d = 0.10$, giving $n = 96.04$, rounded up to 97 respondents.

Variables were measured on a five-point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) (sugiyono, 2019), as shown in table 1. Operational definitions and indicators are presented in table 2; the perceived eeriness indicators were adapted from gu et al. (2024) and the purchase intention indicators from dodds et al. (1991).

Table 1. Likert Scale Weights

No	Response	Score
1	Strongly Disagree	1
2	Disagree	2
3	Neutral	3
4	Agree	4
5	Strongly Agree	5

Source: Sugiyono (2019).

Table 2. Operational Definitions of Variables

Variable	Definition	Indicators	Example item
Perceived Eeriness (X)	Consumers' perception of strangeness, unnaturalness, oddness, or discomfort when viewing advertisements featuring human-AI models.	Creepy; Weird; Unnatural; Bizarre	"The human-AI model in the fast fashion advertisement looks unnatural."
Purchase Intention (Y)	Consumers' tendency or willingness to consider and purchase the products shown in the advertisement.	Likelihood of purchasing; Consideration to buy; Consideration at the offered price; Probability of considering purchase; Willingness to buy	"I am willing to buy the fast fashion product shown in the advertisement."

Source: Author's Compilation, Adapted from Gu Et Al. (2024) and Dodds et al. (1991).

Data were analyzed with PLS-SEM using SmartPLS 4 (hair et al., 2021) in two stages. The first is evaluation of the measurement (outer) model, covering convergent validity (outer loading ≥ 0.70 and average variance extracted/ave ≥ 0.50), discriminant validity using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (htmt < 0.85) (henseler et al., 2015), and construct reliability through cronbach's alpha and composite reliability > 0.70. The

second is evaluation of the structural (inner) model, covering the coefficient of determination (r^2; 0.75 strong, 0.50 moderate, 0.25 weak), effect size (f^2; 0.02 small, 0.15 medium, 0.35 large), multicollinearity (vif < 5, ideally < 3), and the path coefficient. Hypothesis testing used one-tailed bootstrapping at the 5% significance level, so a hypothesis is supported when t > 1.65 and p < 0.05 with a path coefficient in the hypothesized direction.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Respondent Characteristics

The respondents were 97 generation z individuals in klaten regency. As shown in table 3, most respondents were female (64; 66%) and 33 were male (34%). By age, the largest group was 21–25 years (54; 55.7%), followed by 17–20 years (29; 29.9%) and 26–29 years (14; 14.4%). The predominance of female respondents is relevant to fashion advertising because this group tends to be more responsive to visual stimulation and aesthetic detail, while the predominance of the 21–25 age group indicates respondents of productive age with high digital adaptability.

Table 3. Respondent Characteristics (N = 97)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	33	34.0%
Female	64	66.0%
Age (years)		
17–20	29	29.9%
21–25	54	55.7%
26–29	14	14.4%
Total	**97**	**100%**

Source: Primary Data

2. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

All constructs are reflective, so the measurement model was assessed through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability. Table 4 shows that all indicators, both the eight perceived eeriness indicators (X1–X8; 0.841–0.901) and the ten purchase intention indicators (Y1–Y10; 0.831–0.931), have outer loadings above 0.70 (see also Figure 2). The AVE values of the two constructs (0.781 and 0.793; Table 5) exceed 0.50, so convergent validity is satisfied.

Table 4. Outer Loadings

Indicator	Perceived Eeriness	Indicator	Purchase Intention
X1	0.896	Y1	0.831
X2	0.841	Y2	0.931
X3	0.896	Y3	0.886
X4	0.867	Y4	0.877
X5	0.899	Y5	0.900
X6	0.892	Y6	0.899
X7	0.901	Y7	0.915

X8	0.875	Y8	0.901
–	–	Y9	0.841
–	–	Y10	0.920

Source: SmartPLS 4 Output. Threshold: Outer Loading ≥ 0.70; All Indicators Are Valid.

3. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

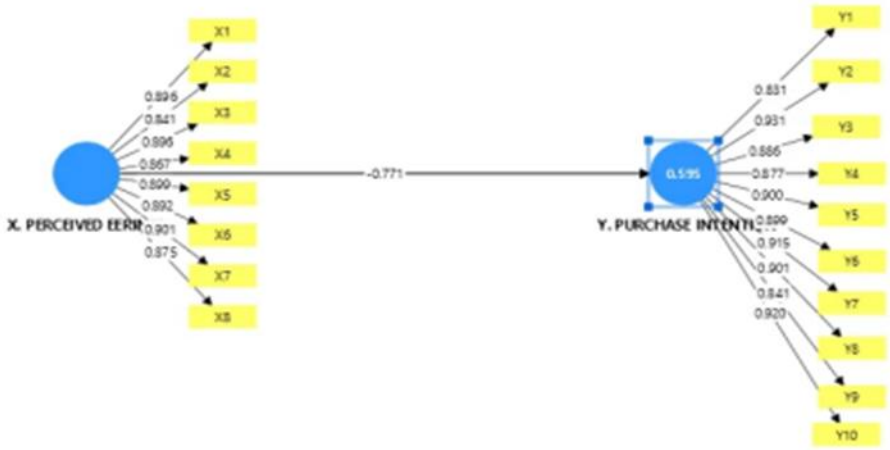


Figure 2. PLS-SEM Path Model with Outer Loadings and Path Coefficient (SmartPLS 4)

Discriminant validity was tested with HTMT. The HTMT value between perceived eeriness and purchase intention is 0.793, below the 0.85 threshold, so the two constructs are empirically distinct. For reliability, Cronbach's alpha (0.960 and 0.971) and composite reliability (0.962–0.975) all exceed 0.70, indicating very good internal consistency of the instrument.

Table 5. Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity, and Construct Reliability

Construct	AVE	Cronbach's α	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	HTMT
Perceived Eeriness	0.781	0.960	0.962	0.966	0.793
Purchase Intention	0.793	0.971	0.962	0.975	0.793
Threshold	≥ 0.50	> 0.70	> 0.70	> 0.70	< 0.85

Source: SmartPLS 4 output. CR = composite reliability; HTMT = Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio.

4. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

The R^2 of purchase intention is 0.595, meaning perceived eeriness explains 59.5% of the variance in purchase intention, while the remaining 40.5% is explained by factors outside the model; this is in the moderate category. The f^2 of 1.470 is far above 0.35, so perceived eeriness has a very large effect on purchase intention. The VIF of 1.000 (< 3.00) indicates no multicollinearity problem. These results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Structural Model Assessment

Measure	Value	Interpretation
R^2 (Purchase Intention)	0.595	Moderate
f^2 (Eeriness → Intention)	1.470	Large effect (> 0.35)

VIF (Eeriness → Intention)	1.000	No multicollinearity (< 3.00)

Source: SmartPLS 4 Output

The hypothesis test results are shown in Table 7. Perceived eeriness has a negative and significant effect on purchase intention, with a path coefficient of −0.771, t = 15.174 (> 1.65), and p < 0.001 (< 0.05). Thus, H1, which states that perceived eeriness has a negative and significant effect on purchase intention, is supported.

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing (Path Coefficient, Bootstrapping)

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	STDEV	t statistics	p values	Result
Perceived Eeriness → Purchase Intention	−0.771	−0.775	0.051	15.174	0.000	Supported (negative, significant)

Source: SmartPLS 4 output. One-tailed test, α = 5% (t > 1.65). STDEV is derived as O/t (0.771/15.174 ≈ 0.051).

The results show that the stronger the perception of oddness or eeriness felt by Generation Z in Klaten toward the human-AI model in fast fashion advertisements, the lower their purchase intention. The path coefficient of −0.771 with t = 15.174 indicates a strong psychological rejection of AI model visuals perceived as odd. This finding supports the uncanny valley concept in digital marketing (Mori et al., 2012; Wu & Wen, 2021). When AI-generated visual content approaches human physical characteristics but still appears rigid and unnatural, audiences tend to respond with rejection. Within the S-O-R framework, the advertisement featuring a human-AI model (stimulus) triggers an internal process of eeriness or oddness (organism), which then lowers the response, namely purchase intention. This discomfort diverts consumers' attention from the fast fashion product offered to the visual oddness of the model, reducing willingness to transact.

The result is consistent with Gu et al. (2024), who found a negative effect of perceived eeriness on acceptance of AI-created advertisements, and with Song and Shin (2024) and Abeden et al. (2026), who showed that eeriness in avatars or chatbots harms purchase-related responses. It is also consistent with Poushneh and Gearhart (2025), who linked human-like AI characteristics to eeriness and purchase intention. This study adds evidence in a context that has received little attention: AI-based human models in fast fashion advertising and Indonesian Generation Z consumers in a non-metropolitan region. Practically, applying AI merely for efficiency without attention to visual naturalness can backfire on digital marketing communication strategies in fashion.

Several limitations should be noted. First, the sample of 97 respondents was obtained through purposive sampling and is limited to Klaten Regency, so generalization should be made with caution. Second, the very high construct reliability (> 0.95) and the tendency of perceived eeriness scores to cluster on the high side suggest possible indicator redundancy, so the measured effect may be overstated.

Third, the study tests a single independent variable; about 40.5% of the variance in purchase intention remains unexplained.

E. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that perceived eeriness in fast fashion advertisements featuring human-AI models has a negative and significant effect on the purchase intention of Generation Z in Klaten Regency ($\beta = -0.771$; $t = 15.174$; $p < 0.001$), with $R^2 = 0.595$ and $f^2 = 1.470$. The higher the eeriness or oddness felt toward the AI model visuals, the lower the purchase intention. This finding is in line with the uncanny valley effect and shows that rigid, unnatural AI models trigger negative emotional responses among Generation Z consumers.

For practitioners, fast fashion brands and advertising creators are advised to: (1) not use AI models merely for cost efficiency, but invest in smoother, more expressive rendering technology with natural posture to avoid triggering the uncanny valley; (2) adopt a hybrid approach that keeps real human models as the main visual and uses AI for backgrounds, lighting, or clothing styling adjustments; and (3) monitor Generation Z's comments and reactions on social media after an advertisement airs and be ready to replace the material if negative responses emerge.

For future researchers, it is recommended to: (1) add mediating or moderating variables such as brand trust and consumer tech-savviness to explain the remaining variance in purchase intention; (2) broaden the region and sample characteristics, for example by comparing metropolitan areas or different generations; and (3) use more varied stimuli and check indicator redundancy so that the measured effect is not exaggerated by data distribution.

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