

NORMATIVE VISIBILITY AND REFERENCE PRICE SIGNALS IN TIKTOK LIVE PAY-WHAT-YOU-WANT GIFTING

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ABSTRACT: Live-streaming platforms increasingly rely on Pay-What-You-Want (PWYW) gifting, yet voluntary payments remain weakly coordinated when prices are not fixed. This study examines whether platform-displayed reference price signals increase PWYW gifting propensity and whether this effect depends on Subjective Norms. Drawing on a digital distribution-channel coordination perspective, the study treats reference prices as interface-based price signals and Subjective Norms as informal social governance. Using survey data from 200 Indonesian Gen Z TikTok Live users and Hayes' PROCESS Model 1, the findings show that reference price signals do not directly increase gifting propensity. Instead, their effect becomes positive and significant only when Subjective Norms are high. The study demonstrates that price anchors in live-streaming platforms are not behaviorally sufficient on their own; they gain force when embedded in visible social expectations that coordinate discretionary contribution.

Keywords: Pay-What-You-Want Gifting; Reference Price Signals; Subjective Norms; Normative Visibility; TikTok Live

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INTRODUCTION

Digital live-streaming platforms increasingly rely on Pay-What-You-Want (PWYW) gifting mechanisms as a core monetization strategy, transforming voluntary user contributions into an important revenue stream. PWYW gives consumers substantial discretion over the price or contribution they provide, yet prior research consistently shows that voluntary payments are difficult to predict and often depend on contextual cues beyond product value alone (Kim et al., 2009; Gerpott, 2017). This challenge is especially salient in live-streaming, where users send virtual gifts under time pressure, emotional stimulation, and public visibility (Lin et al., 2021). Existing PWYW studies have explained payment variance through motives such as self-signaling, fairness, identity, and gendered communal orientation (Gneezy et al., 2012; Santana & Morwitz, 2021). These explanations are useful, but they remain incomplete for understanding how digital platforms coordinate discretionary payments across many users when no enforceable price exists.

This study adopts a digital distribution-channel coordination perspective. In this context, distribution science is understood as the study of how platform interfaces, pricing signals, and social governance mechanisms align exchange behavior between creators, viewers, and platform operators. Reference price cues are central to this coordination problem because consumers evaluate prices relative to internal and external standards rather than in isolation (Mazumdar et al., 2005; Hamilton, 2024). In live-stream channels, such cues may appear as suggested gift amounts, common low-value gifts, average contribution displays, or visible contribution benchmarks. These cues resemble external reference prices, but their effect is not purely mechanical: prior research shows that advertised or displayed reference prices influence behavior through price perception, deal evaluation, and social interpretation (Kan et al., 2014; Roy et al., 2016b).

A second unresolved issue concerns the relationship between reference price signals and social norms in PWYW systems. Prior PWYW research shows that external reference prices and social visibility can interact in complex ways, and that social desirability or contextual visibility may alter how users respond to voluntary pricing cues (Roy et al., 2016b; Rabbanee et al., 2022). Social norm theory further suggests that behavior is shaped not only by private attitudes but also by perceived collective expectations, descriptive norms, injunctive norms, and the visibility of social approval (Cialdini et al., 1990; Rimal & Lapinski, 2015). This study therefore treats Subjective Norms not merely as a direct predictor of gifting, but as an informal governance mechanism that can make reference price cues socially actionable.

Indonesia provides a theoretically meaningful boundary condition for examining this interaction. Collectivist contexts tend to heighten sensitivity to group expectations, social harmony, and face-saving concerns, making visible norms more behaviorally consequential (Ariyanto et al., 2006; Liu & Lapinski, 2024). These tendencies are reinforced by Indonesian gotong royong values, which emphasize mutual support and collective participation in social life (Murtadlo et al., 2024). Within TikTok Live, such cultural tendencies are intensified by public gift animations, rankings, streamer acknowledgements, and visible audience reactions. Indonesian Gen Z viewers therefore operate in an environment where voluntary gifting can function simultaneously as payment, social participation, and symbolic recognition.

TikTok Live offers an especially suitable context for investigating pricing coordination under these conditions. Live streaming allows viewers to send virtual gifts and interact through likes and chats in real time, making payment-like actions visible to broadcasters and other viewers (Lin et al., 2021). Studies on virtual gifting show that gifting behavior is shaped by perceived enjoyment, interaction with streamers, group interaction, support for streamers, and social recognition (Xu et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2024). TikTok charity live-streaming research similarly shows that online donation behavior is embedded in platform affordances and social influence processes (Shi & Wu, 2023). These features position TikTok Live as a high-velocity distribution channel in which pricing coordination depends on the interaction between numeric price cues and informal social governance.

These gaps motivate two integrated research questions. First, do perceived platform-displayed reference price signals shape PWYW gifting propensity within real-time live-stream distribution channels? Second, does normative visibility strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of these pricing signals under non-contractual conditions? To address these questions, this study

analyzes a cross-sectional self-reported survey of Indonesian Gen Z TikTok Live users who have sent virtual gifts. By focusing on the interaction between perceived reference price signals and Subjective Norms, this study clarifies the conditions under which price anchors remain effective in participative pricing, refines the role of norms as informal governance in digital platforms, and identifies actionable design levers such as calibrated reference-price displays, peer contribution indicators, and streamer acknowledgement cues that may stabilize voluntary gifting without eliminating user autonomy.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Pay-What-You-Want Pricing and the Persistence of Unexplained Variance

Pay-What-You-Want (PWYW) pricing allows buyers to decide how much they pay, including the possibility of paying very little, while the seller accepts the chosen amount (Kim et al., 2009). This mechanism can generate positive revenue and participation, yet empirical reviews show that PWYW outcomes remain highly context-dependent and difficult to predict (Gerpott, 2017; Vizuete-Luciano et al., 2022). Such instability is not merely statistical noise. It reflects a coordination challenge inherent to non-contractual pricing systems: users must infer acceptable contribution levels without a binding price rule.

Prior studies have attributed this variability to individual-level motives such as self-image, identity signaling, fairness, altruism, and payment timing (Gneezy et al., 2012; Viglia et al., 2019). Gender and social-role orientations also shape PWYW behavior, with communal or agentic orientations affecting how consumers interpret voluntary payment situations (Santana & Morwitz, 2021). In addition, PWYW outcomes differ across public and private settings because visibility changes the social meaning of payment (Roy et al., 2016b; Rabbanee et al., 2022). These findings imply that PWYW cannot be explained only by internal valuation; it also depends on the social and informational environment in which payment occurs.

From a distribution-channel coordination perspective, the persistence of unexplained variance points to the need for system-level explanations. Digital platforms do not merely host transactions; they design the informational and social cues through which users infer what constitutes an acceptable contribution. Reference price displays, public gift signals, and streamer acknowledgements can therefore be understood as coordination devices that organize voluntary payment expectations in the absence of enforceable prices (Roy et al., 2016a; Roy et al., 2016b).

External Reference Price as a Pricing Signal in Digital Distribution

Reference price research shows that consumers evaluate price information relative to comparison standards rather than as isolated numbers. These standards may be internal, derived from memory and prior experience, or external, derived from prices displayed in the immediate environment (Niedrich et al., 2001; Mazumdar et al., 2005). Recent consumer price research further emphasizes that price evaluation depends on the accessibility and diagnosticity of internal references, external references, and broader price images (Hamilton, 2024). Consequently, an external reference price should be understood not only as a displayed number, but also as a signal that becomes meaningful through consumer interpretation.

This distinction is important for the present study because the empirical construct captures users' perceptions of platform-displayed price cues rather than direct experimental exposure to a manipulated reference price. Such an operationalization is defensible when framed as reference-price signal interpretation. Price perception research shows that deal value, price consciousness, value consciousness, and perceived price-quality meaning can predict marketplace behavior (Lichtenstein et al., 1993). Price fairness research similarly argues that reference comparisons shape judgments of whether a price is acceptable or justified (Xia et al., 2004). Perceived value research also treats price value as a core evaluative dimension through which consumers assess exchange worthiness (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).

Within participative pricing contexts, reference price signals frequently appear as suggested amounts, average-paid cues, common gift prices, or visible contribution benchmarks. These cues coexist with price autonomy but can still guide payment by reducing ambiguity and offering a socially recognizable starting point (Roy et al., 2016a; Gerpott, 2017; Yen et al., 2024). In live-stream gifting, the same logic applies: a low-cost gift such as Rose may function less as a

fixed price and more as a symbolic reference point that helps viewers infer acceptable participation levels. Because gifting is socially visible, the effect of this reference point should depend on the normative environment surrounding it.

Anchoring-and-Adjustment in PWYW Environments

Anchoring-and-adjustment theory proposes that salient numeric cues operate as cognitive starting points from which individuals adjust, often insufficiently (Adaval & Wyer, 2011; Frederick et al., 2010). In PWYW settings, a reference price cue can therefore narrow the range of plausible contributions even when users formally retain full discretion. Field and experimental evidence indicates that suggested prices and reference amounts can raise voluntary payments by making a particular amount cognitively accessible (Jung et al., 2016; Yen et al., 2024).

However, anchoring in PWYW is not purely cognitive. Voluntary payment also communicates identity, generosity, and social alignment when the payment is visible to others (Gneezy et al., 2012; Roy et al., 2021). In public or socially evaluable settings, users may treat a reference price as a signal of what others expect rather than merely as a private valuation cue. This logic leads to the first hypothesis construction.

H1: Higher perceived salience and favorability of platform-displayed reference price signals will increase PWYW gifting propensity.

Subjective Norms as Informal Governance Mechanisms

Within the Theory of Planned Behavior, Subjective Norms describe perceived social pressure from important others to perform or avoid a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Norm research further distinguishes descriptive norms, which concern what others do, from injunctive norms, which concern what others approve or disapprove (Cialdini et al., 1990; Jacobson et al., 2011). These two forms of norm can reinforce one another, and their influence becomes stronger when people perceive the norm as relevant, visible, and socially diagnostic (Eriksson et al., 2015; Rimal & Lapinski, 2015).

In digital settings, normative influence is intensified by public observability and rapid social feedback. Social influence research shows that individuals conform not only because they want accurate information, but also because they seek affiliation and social approval (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Cross-cultural evidence indicates that norm appeals can operate differently across cultural environments, with collectivist and norm-sensitive contexts strengthening the behavioral consequences of perceived social expectations (Liu & Lapinski, 2024). In Indonesia, group-directed communication and gotong royong values further support the interpretation of norms as mechanisms of collective coordination rather than only personal attitudes (Ariyanto et al., 2006; Murtadlo et al., 2024).

In live-stream platforms, chat feeds, public gift displays, and streamer acknowledgements combine descriptive and injunctive cues into a synchronous normative environment (Lin et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022). Digital live-streaming communities also involve social exchange processes in which virtual gifts, emotional support, and recognition circulate between streamers and audiences (Chen, 2022). Recent research on social live-streaming services shows that price fairness, enjoyment, and status-seeking can shape gifting intention and behavior through users' awareness of the need to gift (Tang et al., 2024). These findings imply that reference price cues should become more effective when users perceive strong norms around gifting.

H2: Perceived Subjective Norms will positively moderate the reference price signal-PWYW relationship, such that reference price effects strengthen under high normative visibility.

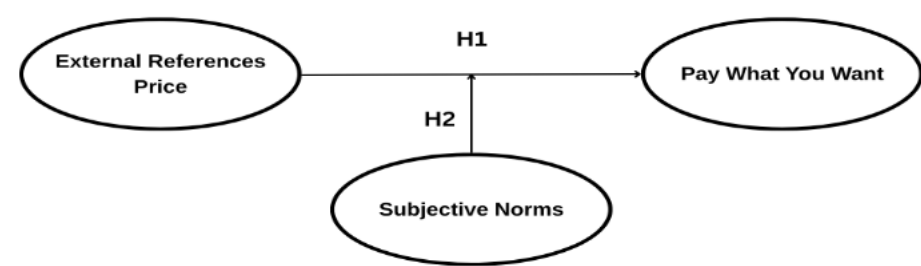


Figure 1. Investigated Model

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine pricing coordination mechanisms in live-stream distribution channels operating under non-contractual pricing conditions. Specifically, the study investigated how perceived platform-displayed reference price signals relate to PWYW gifting propensity and whether this relationship depends on Subjective Norms as a form of normative visibility. The design does not claim to observe actual platform transaction records; rather, it captures self-reported perceptions and gifting propensity among users with direct TikTok Live gifting experience.

TikTok Live was selected as the empirical context because its interface makes both price cues and social feedback visible. Viewers can send virtual gifts and interact with broadcasters in real time, while other viewers can observe gifting signals, comments, and acknowledgements (Lin et al., 2021). Prior studies show that virtual gifting is shaped by interaction with streamers, group interaction, support motives, and social recognition (Xu et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2024). These features make TikTok Live theoretically appropriate for examining how reference price signals and normative visibility jointly coordinate discretionary gifting.

Data were collected using purposive sampling targeting Indonesian TikTok Live users aged 17 years or older who had sent virtual gifts within the past six months. This criterion ensured that respondents possessed direct experience with participative pricing and platform-mediated gifting. The online questionnaire was distributed through TikTok-related communities, Discord and Telegram groups, and direct outreach to active users. A total of 200 valid responses were obtained. This sample size satisfies statistical power requirements for moderated regression analysis involving interaction effects (Faul et al., 2009) and is consistent with the use of Hayes' PROCESS macro for conditional process analysis (Hayes, 2018). All constructs were measured using five-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), a format widely used in behavioral and management research due to its clarity and suitability for multi-item construct measurement (Hair et al., 2010).

Reference price signal perception was operationalized as users' evaluation of platform-displayed price cues embedded in TikTok Live's virtual gift system. This operationalization deliberately treats the construct as a perceived price signal rather than as direct experimental exposure to a manipulated reference price. The measurement therefore captures how users interpret visible gift prices in terms of reasonableness, deal value, and affordability. This approach follows reference price and price perception research showing that external price cues become behaviorally meaningful through perceived deal value, fairness, and price-value judgments (Lichtenstein et al., 1993; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Xia et al., 2004; Mazumdar et al., 2005; Hamilton, 2024). To evaluate price reasonableness, participants responded to the item "*Harga hadiah Rose (1 koin) terasa wajar bagi saya*" ("The price of the Rose gift [1 coin] feels fair to me") (RPS1), "*Menurut saya, harga hadiah Rose sepadan dengan manfaat yang saya dapat*" ("In my opinion, the price of the Rose gift is proportionate to the benefit I receive") (RPS2), and "*Harga hadiah Rose masuk akal dibanding harga gift virtual lain*" ("The price of the Rose gift is reasonable compared to other virtual gifts") (RPS3). The perceived deal value dimension was measured using "*Harga hadiah Rose lebih murah dari yang saya perkirakan*" ("The Rose gift is cheaper than I expected") (RPS4), "*Dengan 1 koin, saya merasa mendapat penawaran bagus untuk hadiah Rose*" ("With 1 coin, I feel I got a good deal for the Rose gift") (RPS5), and "*Hadiah Rose berharga sangat ekonomis dibanding gift lain seperti Galaxy atau Lion*" ("The Rose gift is very economical compared to other gifts such as Galaxy or Lion") (RPS6). Overall perceived affordability was assessed using "*Harga gift virtual di TikTok Live secara umum terjangkau*" ("Virtual gifts on TikTok Live are generally affordable") (RPS7), "*Struktur harga TikTok Live saya anggap ekonomis*" ("The pricing structure on TikTok Live is economical") (RPS8), and "*Secara keseluruhan, TikTok Live menawarkan gift virtual dengan harga rendah*" ("Overall, TikTok Live offers virtual gifts at low prices") (RPS9).

Subjective Norms were operationalized as normative visibility within the live-stream environment, reflecting perceived expectations and observed behaviors of relevant others. The construct is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior and social norm theory, which distinguish perceived social pressure, descriptive norms, and injunctive norms (Ajzen, 1991; Cialdini et al., 1990; Rimal & Lapinski, 2015). In the context of TikTok Live, these items capture informal governance pressures that accompany visible price cues rather than standalone social attitudes.

The injunctive norms dimension included items such as "*Penonton lain yang penting bagi saya berpikir saya sebaiknya mengirim hadiah Rose saat live-streaming*" ("Other viewers who are important to me believe I should send a Rose gift during live streaming") (SN1), "*Teman-teman dekat saya di TikTok mengharapkan saya mengikuti harga rekomendasi ketika memberi giff*" ("My close TikTok friends expect me to follow the suggested price when giving gifts") (SN2), "*Streamer yang saya tonton mendorong saya untuk mengirim gift kepada mereka*" ("The streamers I watch encourage me to send them gifts") (SN3), and "*Di komunitas TikTok, memberi gift kepada streamer dianggap wajar dan dianjurkan*" ("In the TikTok community, giving gifts to streamers is considered normal and encouraged") (SN4). The descriptive norms component was reflected in items such as "*Sebagian besar penonton yang saya lihat biasanya mengirim gift selama live-streaming*" ("Most viewers I observe usually send gifts during live streaming") (SN5), "*Teman-teman TikTok saya sering mengirim hadiah Rose setidaknya sekali setiap siaran*" ("My TikTok friends often send Rose gifts at least once in every stream") (SN6), "*Saat menonton live, saya melihat penonton lain menyesuaikan jumlah gift mereka dengan harga rekomendasi*" ("When watching a live stream, I see other viewers adjust their gift amounts to the suggested price") (SN7), and "*Penonton yang saya kagumi di TikTok sering memberi gift lebih dari satu koin*" ("Viewers I admire on TikTok often send more than one coin as a gift") (SN8).

PWYW was operationalized as voluntary gifting propensity under discretionary pricing, rather than as observed transaction amount. The items therefore capture respondents' self-reported tendency, willingness, and evaluative disposition to send gifts in TikTok Live. This framing is consistent with studies of virtual gifting and live-stream engagement that use self-reported intentions or behavioral propensities to capture gifting-related behavior when platform transaction records are unavailable (Lin et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2024). Respondents evaluated the following: "*Saya senang memberikan gift secara sukarela kepada kreator TikTok Live yang menurut saya layak untuk didukung*" ("I enjoy voluntarily giving gifts to TikTok Live creators whom I believe deserve support") (PWYW1), "*Saya percaya bahwa kreator yang saya beri gift benar-benar pantas menerimanya berdasarkan kualitas konten mereka*" ("I believe that the creators I give gifts to truly deserve them based on their content quality") (PWYW2), "*Saya merasa TikTok Live memberikan ruang yang transparan bagi saya untuk menilai konten sebelum memutuskan memberi gift*" ("I feel TikTok Live provides a transparent space to evaluate content before deciding to give gifts") (PWYW3), "*Ketika kreator menyampaikan kebutuhannya secara jujur selama live, saya menjadi lebih bersedia memberi gift*" ("When creators honestly share their needs during the stream, I become more willing to give") (PWYW4), and "*Saya bersedia memberikan gift lebih sering melalui TikTok Live di masa depan*" ("I am willing to give gifts more frequently through TikTok Live in the future") (PWYW5). All survey items were administered in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure semantic clarity and cultural relevance. English translations were prepared exclusively for academic reporting purposes.

Analytical Strategy

To examine whether perceived platform-displayed price cues relate to voluntary gifting propensity in live-stream distribution channels, and whether such effects depend on normative visibility, this study employed moderated regression analysis. Hayes' PROCESS Model 1 was used to test the interaction between reference price signal perception and Subjective Norms on PWYW gifting propensity (Hayes, 2018). Moderation analysis is theoretically appropriate because the research focuses on conditional pricing effectiveness rather than on direct or mediating causal pathways. From a distribution-channel perspective, reference price signals are conceptualized as interface-based coordination cues, while Subjective Norms function as informal governance mechanisms that may strengthen or weaken the influence of such cues.

All continuous variables were mean-centered prior to analysis to reduce multicollinearity and facilitate interpretation of interaction effects. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was applied to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals, providing robust inference for moderation effects under non-normality assumptions. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS with the PROCESS macro.

RESULTS

To describe the empirical context and assess the suitability of the sample for examining pricing coordination in live-stream distribution channels, a descriptive analysis of respondent characteristics was conducted. The analysis summarizes demographic attributes and platform-related behaviors relevant to participation in PWYW gifting on TikTok Live. Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents across key categories.

Table 1. Respondent Demographic and Behavioral Characteristics

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (n)	%
Gender	Female	102	51.00%
	Male	98	49.00%
Education Level	Bachelor's degree (S1)	119	59.50%
	High school (SMA)	62	31.00%
	Master's degree (S2)	19	9.50%
Monthly Income	Under IDR 3 million	80	40.00%
	IDR 3–7 million	90	45.00%
	Above IDR 7 million	30	15.00%
TikTok Live Viewing Frequency	Less than 9 times/month	65	32.50%
	9–14 times/month	110	55.00%
	More than 14 times/month	25	12.50%
Preferred Live Content Genre	Education	24	12.00%
	Beauty	29	14.50%
	Gaming	53	26.50%
	Lifestyle	29	14.50%
	Others	17	8.50%
	Music	48	24.00%
Most Frequently Sent Gift Type	Rose	72	36.00%
	Kiss	31	15.50%
	Cowboy Hat	53	26.50%
	Bicycle	21	10.50%
	Ice Cream	23	11.50%
Age Group	25–29 years	105	52.50%
	21–24 years	92	46.00%
	17–20 years	3	1.50%
Primary Motivation for Gifting	Supporting the creator	99	49.50%
	Community involvement	29	14.50%
	Gaining visibility	52	26.00%
	Reciprocity	20	10.00%

A total of 200 respondents participated in the study. All respondents were verified Indonesian TikTok Live users who had sent virtual gifts within the past six months. In terms of gender, the sample was nearly balanced, with 51.0% female ($n = 102$) and 49.0% male ($n = 98$). Educational attainment was predominantly at the undergraduate level, with 59.5% holding a bachelor's degree, followed by high school graduates (31.0%) and postgraduate degree holders (9.5%). Monthly income levels were concentrated in low-to-middle categories: 40.0% earned under IDR 3 million and 45.0% earned between IDR 3-7 million. This profile is relevant to the study because TikTok Live gifting often involves low-value virtual gifts, making discretionary micro-payment behavior observable among users with varied but generally moderate-income levels. Regarding platform engagement, most respondents reported watching TikTok Live between 9 and 14 times per month (55.0%), while 32.5% viewed fewer than 9 times per month and 12.5% viewed more than 14 times per month. This pattern indicates that the sample had sufficient exposure to live-stream interface cues and social gifting displays.

Preferred live-stream content varied across genres, with gaming (26.5%) and music (24.0%) as the most frequently reported categories, followed by beauty (14.5%), lifestyle (14.5%), education (12.0%), and other content types (8.5%). These categories are highly compatible with real-time audience interaction and creator-viewer engagement, strengthening the contextual relevance of the sample for examining socially visible gifting. With respect to virtual gifting behavior, the most frequently sent gift type was Rose (36.0%), followed by Cowboy Hat (26.5%), Kiss (15.5%), Ice Cream (11.5%), and Bicycle (10.5%). The dominance of Rose is analytically important because the reference price signal items were anchored around the Rose gift as a common low-value price cue in TikTok Live. Respondents also reported diverse primary motivations for sending gifts: 49.5% indicated supporting the creator, 26.0% reported gaining visibility, 14.5% cited community involvement, and 10.0% identified reciprocity as their main motivation. These motivations indicate that gifting is not merely a private payment decision but also a socially visible act, supporting the relevance of Subjective Norms as a moderator. The age distribution showed that 52.5% of respondents were aged 25-29 years, 46.0% were aged 21-24 years, and 1.5% were aged 17-20 years.

Table 2. Construct Reliability

Construct	Cronbach Alpha
Reference Price Signal Perception	0.903
Subjective Norms	0.877
Pay-What-You-Want Gifting Propensity	0.873

Internal consistency reliability was assessed for all multi-item constructs using Cronbach's alpha. As shown in Table 2, all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. Reference Price Signal Perception (RPS) demonstrated high internal consistency (alpha = 0.903), followed by Subjective Norms (alpha = 0.877) and Pay-What-You-Want (PWYW) gifting propensity (alpha = 0.873). No items were removed, and all indicators were retained for subsequent analysis.

Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine the distributional properties of the main study variables. As presented in Table 3, mean values ranged from 3.52 to 3.59 on a five-point Likert scale. Skewness and kurtosis values for all variables fell within the acceptable range of -2 to +2, indicating approximate normality (Field, 2022). Pearson correlation analysis showed positive correlations among RPS, Subjective Norms, and PWYW gifting propensity, with coefficients ranging from $r = .19$ to $r = .29$. No correlation exceeded the commonly accepted threshold for multicollinearity concerns ($r = .80$), indicating that the predictors were sufficiently distinct for inclusion in a moderated regression model (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean		Skewness	Kurtosis	RPS	SN	PWYW
Reference Price Signal Perception (RPS)	3.55	0.56	−0.37	−0.42	1	0.25	0.19
Subjective Norms (SN)	3.59	0.63	−0.44	−0.31	0.25	1	0.29
Pay-What-You-Want (PWYW)	3.52	0.58	−0.28	−0.49	0.19	0.29	1

Prior to hypothesis testing, standard regression assumptions were examined. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were 1.066 for RPS and 1.068 for Subjective Norms, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. A Breusch-Pagan test indicated mild heteroskedasticity ($p = .028$). To address this issue, heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors (HC3) were applied in subsequent analyses, following Hayes (2018). Linearity was assessed using curve estimation analysis. Both linear and quadratic models were statistically significant; however, the quadratic model provided only a marginal increase in explained variance. Accordingly, the relationship between RPS and PWYW gifting propensity was treated as linear for the purposes of moderated regression analysis.

Hypotheses were tested using Hayes' PROCESS Model 1 with Reference Price Signal Perception (RPS) as the independent variable, Subjective Norms as the moderator, and Pay-What-You-Want (PWYW) gifting propensity as the dependent variable. All predictor variables

were mean-centered prior to analysis. The model explained a significant proportion of variance in PWYW gifting propensity ($R^2 = .144$, $F(3,196) = 12.81$, $p < .001$).

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing

Predictor	b	SE (HC3)	t	p	95% CI
Constant	3.5405	0.067	52.86	< .001	[3.4084, 3.6726]
RPS (centered)	0.121	0.0733	1.6501	0.1005	[-0.0236, 0.2656]
Subjective Norms (centered)	0.3375	0.0856	3.9445	0.0001	[0.1688, 0.5062]
RPS × SN (interaction)	0.3013	0.0885	3.4064	0.0008	[0.1269, 0.4758]

As shown in Table 4, the main effect of RPS on PWYW gifting propensity was not statistically significant ($b = 0.121$, $p = .101$). Subjective Norms exhibited a significant main effect on PWYW gifting propensity ($b = 0.338$, $p < .001$). The interaction between RPS and Subjective Norms was statistically significant ($b = 0.301$, $p < .001$), indicating that the relationship between RPS and PWYW gifting propensity varied across levels of normative visibility.

Table 5. Conditional Effect of Reference Price Signal Perception at Levels of Subjective Norms

Level of SN	Effect of RPS	SE	t	p	95% CI
Low (-1 SD)	-0.1298	0.1133	-1.146	0.2531	[-0.3532, 0.0935]
Mean (0 SD)	0.121	0.0733	1.65	0.1005	[-0.0236, 0.2656]
High (+1 SD)	0.3718	0.0936	3.971	0.0001	[0.1872, 0.5564]

Conditional effects of RPS on PWYW gifting propensity were examined at low (-1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD) levels of Subjective Norms. As shown in Table 5, RPS did not exhibit a statistically significant effect on PWYW gifting propensity at low or mean levels of Subjective Norms. At high levels of Subjective Norms, RPS demonstrated a positive and statistically significant effect on PWYW gifting propensity. Based on the moderated regression results, H1 was not supported, as the main effect of RPS on PWYW gifting propensity was not statistically significant. H2 was supported, as the interaction between RPS and Subjective Norms was statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

The results clarify the theoretical role of reference price signals in PWYW gifting. Reference price signal perception did not show a significant direct effect on PWYW gifting propensity, but the interaction with Subjective Norms was positive and significant. This finding suggests that price cues in discretionary live-stream gifting are not universally persuasive anchors. Instead, they become influential when social norms make the cue collectively meaningful. The finding is consistent with PWYW research showing that external reference prices and social visibility interact in shaping payment decisions (Roy et al., 2016b), and with recent evidence that suggested prices can improve PWYW profitability only under favorable contextual conditions (Yen et al., 2024).

From a distribution-channel coordination perspective, the finding suggests that price cues function as coordination signals rather than standalone price information. In fixed-price markets, coordination is achieved through contractual price enforcement. In TikTok Live gifting, coordination must occur through interface cues, social visibility, and informal norms. Reference price signals reduce ambiguity about possible contribution levels, but they remain weak when users do not perceive a shared expectation to comply. Subjective Norms provide that missing governance layer by clarifying whether following the cue is socially appropriate (Cialdini et al., 1990; Rimal & Lapinski, 2015).

The platform context further explains why norms matter. TikTok Live makes gifting visible through gift animations, comment overlays, leaderboards, and streamer acknowledgements.

These features transform gifting from a private payment decision into a socially observable act of participation. Prior live-streaming research shows that gifts, likes, chats, emotion, and interaction operate together in real time, shaping both engagement and monetary support (Lin et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022). Recent evidence from social live-streaming services also indicates that status-seeking, enjoyment, and price fairness shape gifting intention and behavior (Tang et al., 2024). The present study extends this literature by showing that visible norms do not merely increase generosity; they activate the effect of price cues.

The Indonesian Gen Z context provides an important cultural boundary condition. In collectivist and norm-sensitive environments, social expectations are more likely to influence behavior because deviation can threaten harmony, face, or group alignment (Ariyanto et al., 2006; Liu & Lapinski, 2024). Gotong royong values further normalize mutual support and collective participation, making social reinforcement especially salient in digital community settings (Murtadlo et al., 2024). Under these conditions, a low-cost gift cue can become more than a price reference; it becomes a socially legitimate way to participate in the live-stream community.

Managerially, the findings indicate that platforms and creators should not rely on suggested prices or low-value gift anchors in isolation. A displayed price cue is unlikely to coordinate voluntary gifting unless users perceive that other viewers, streamers, and the community treat the cue as a legitimate participation standard. Platforms can therefore improve voluntary revenue coordination by combining reference price displays with real-time peer contribution indicators, visible participation milestones, gift leaderboards, and public acknowledgements.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER STUDY

This study concludes that perceived reference price signals do not independently increase PWYW gifting propensity in TikTok Live but become effective when supported by strong Subjective Norms. These findings position price cues not as universal cognitive anchors, but as socially embedded coordination signals whose behavioral force depends on normative visibility. The study contributes to participative pricing and digital distribution-channel research by showing that informal social governance helps stabilize discretionary gifting where contractual prices are absent.

The study is limited by its reliance on self-reported, cross-sectional data from Indonesian Gen Z TikTok Live users, which restricts causal inference and broader generalization. Future research should use transaction data, experiments, longitudinal designs, and cross-cultural comparisons to test whether normative visibility similarly activates reference price signals across platforms. Practically, platforms and creators should combine reference price displays with visible peer contributions, gift leaderboards, community milestones, and public acknowledgements to coordinate voluntary revenue while preserving user autonomy.

ETHICAL DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted through a voluntary online survey involving Indonesian TikTok Live users belonging to Generation Z. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw from the survey at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to completing the questionnaire. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were processed anonymously and reported only in aggregate form.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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