

## Ergo-Iconic Value and Local Products as Media of Generation Z Consumption Identity

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### ABSTRACT

This article develops a conceptual framework for understanding ergo-iconic value in local products as a mechanism for transmitting Generation Z consumption identity. Using an integrative literature review and theory synthesis, the study connects product value theory, symbolic consumption, consumption identity, digital consumer experience, and ergo-iconic value. The framework proposes that local products become meaningful when functional usefulness, symbolic recognition, and digital communicability are interconnected. Ergo value provides functional legitimacy through usefulness, reliability, accessibility, and everyday relevance, while iconic value provides identity legitimacy through distinctiveness, authenticity, symbolic meaning, and identity expression. Digital articulation enables these values to circulate through social media, marketplaces, electronic word of mouth, user-generated content, and online communities. The framework comprises four interrelated components: local product base, ergo value, iconic value, and digital articulation, generating functional internalization, symbolic recognition, and digital articulation. The study positions local products as value-bearing media integrating function, identity, and digital experience.

**Keywords:** Ergo-Iconic Value; Local Products; Generation Z; Consumption Identity; Digital Articulation; Symbolic Consumption

## **INTRODUCTION**

The expansion of the digital economy has transformed the ways in which local products are produced, marketed, consumed, and interpreted by younger consumers. Local products no longer compete only through price, material quality, or geographical proximity; they also compete through their ability to communicate function, identity, visual distinctiveness, cultural meaning, and digital experience. In Indonesia, this transformation is visible in the growing institutionalization of e-commerce, the expansion of digital payment systems, and the increasing role of social media as a space where consumers discover, evaluate, and articulate product experiences. The Statistics of E-Commerce 2024 published by Statistics Indonesia reports business profiles, worker characteristics, business activities, and transaction values of e-commerce at the provincial level, indicating that digital commerce has become an important part of the national business landscape (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). Similarly, Bank Indonesia reported that by the first semester of 2025, QRIS had reached 57 million users and 39.3 million merchants, 93.16% of whom were MSMEs (Bank Indonesia, 2025). DataReportal also reported that Indonesia had 212 million internet users and 143 million social media user identities in January 2025 (DataReportal, 2025). These developments suggest that local products increasingly operate within a digital consumption ecosystem in which product value is shaped not only by material quality but also by visibility, recognizability, trust, and communicability.

This changing consumption environment makes Generation Z a strategically important consumer group. Generation Z has grown up in a media environment shaped by social media platforms, marketplaces, short-form videos, user reviews, algorithmic recommendations, and digital payment infrastructures. Product recognition is therefore no longer formed primarily through conventional advertising or physical distribution channels, but through visual content, peer recommendations, creator narratives, platform-based reviews, and real-time digital interactions. In this context, local products should not be understood merely as economic goods. They are also objects of consumption that carry function, symbolic meaning, identity, and experience. To be relevant to Generation Z, local products must be useful, accessible, visually attractive, narratively meaningful, and digitally shareable.

The marketing literature has long conceptualized product value as consumers' perception of what is received relative to what is given (Zeithaml, 1988). Product value has also been understood as multidimensional, involving functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional dimensions (Sheth et al., 1991), and later developed into constructs that include quality, price, emotional value, and social value (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). However, in the context of local products and digital consumption, product value cannot be fully explained through utilitarian or rational evaluation alone. Products also function as carriers of meaning, resources for self-representation, markers of identity, and media of social participation (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Belk, 1988; Holt, 2004). This indicates the need for a conceptual framework that can connect the functional and symbolic dimensions of local product value.

The concept of ergo-iconic value has its conceptual origin in Andriyansyah's doctoral dissertation, which developed positional advantage of ergo-iconic product value as a marketing construct linked to distinctive product attributes, functional comfort, artistic comfort, pleasure value, and marketing performance (Andriyansyah, 2018). The concept was later extended in studies on hotel marketing performance, MSME competitiveness, platform-based green MSMEs, social media content virality, product values in the digital era, and ergo-iconic agricultural products (Andriyansah et al., 2020; Andriyansah et al., 2023; Andriyansah, 2025; Andriyansah & Saputra, 2025; Andriyansah et al., 2026;

Sukendri et al., 2025). Across these studies, ergo-iconic value is not limited to practical utility. It also refers to the integration of functional, aesthetic, symbolic, representational, and competitive attributes that enable a product, service, or content to be useful, recognizable, meaningful, and socially communicable. This conceptual trajectory makes ergo-iconic value particularly relevant for explaining how local products may become vehicles for transmitting consumption identity to Generation Z in a digital environment. In this article, ergo value refers to the practical dimensions of a product, including usability, comfort, quality, efficiency, accessibility, and functional benefits. These dimensions are important because Generation Z consumers can easily compare products, prices, reviews, quality claims, and user experiences through digital platforms. Iconic value, by contrast, refers to visual distinctiveness, local identity, cultural narratives, community symbols, authenticity, and the capacity of a product to represent social meaning. Local products that possess functional value without symbolic strength may fail to stand out in crowded and highly visual digital markets. Conversely, products that rely only on local symbols without reliable quality and practical usefulness may struggle to build trust, repeat purchase, and long-term consumer attachment.

The central issue is how the value of local products can be transmitted to Generation Z when consumption identity is increasingly mediated by digital spaces. Identity transmission can no longer be understood as a linear process in which older generations pass down local values to younger consumers through tradition alone. Generation Z does not merely inherit local values passively. Rather, young consumers select, reinterpret, modify, and rearticulate these values through everyday consumption practices. In digital society, consumption becomes a symbolic practice through which individuals present themselves, construct taste, and participate in social conversations (Belk, 1988; Schau & Gilly, 2003). Therefore, the value of local products must be translated into consumption experiences that are functional, visual, emotional, credible, and shareable through social media, marketplaces, reviews, and digital communities.

Existing studies on local products, MSMEs, digital marketing, and consumer behavior have grown considerably, yet a conceptual gap remains. Marketing studies often emphasize usefulness, quality, satisfaction, loyalty, and purchase intention, whereas cultural studies tend to emphasize identity, symbolism, representation, and heritage. This separation risks treating local products either as economic commodities or as cultural symbols, without adequately explaining how the two dimensions interact in digital consumption. This article addresses that gap by proposing ergo-iconic value as a framework for understanding local products as consumption objects that simultaneously carry use value, identity value, and digital articulability. Through this framework, local products are not merely goods produced and sold in the market; they are also media through which consumption identity may be inherited, negotiated, and re-expressed by younger generations.

Accordingly, this article aims to develop a conceptual framework of ergo-iconic value in local products as a basis for the transmission of Generation Z consumption identity. The guiding question is: how can ergo-iconic value explain the relationship between local products, consumption identity, and the digital experiences of Generation Z? This article argues that the transmission of consumption identity through local products occurs through three interrelated processes: functional internalization, symbolic recognition, and digital articulation. Functional internalization occurs when local products are accepted because of their usability, quality, comfort, and accessibility. Symbolic recognition occurs when consumers understand the narratives, identity markers, distinctiveness, and social meanings embedded in the products. Digital articulation occurs when Generation Z displays, shares, reviews, and negotiates the value of local products through social media, marketplaces, user-generated content, and online communities. Through these

processes, ergo-iconic value can serve as a strategic conceptual framework for strengthening the relevance of local products in the consumption ecosystem of the digital generation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Product Value and the Shift toward Digital Consumption

Product value is a central concept in marketing and consumer behavior because it explains how consumers evaluate a product in relation to the benefits they receive and the sacrifices they make. Zeithaml (1988) conceptualized perceived value as consumers' overall assessment of product utility based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. This view was later expanded by Sheth et al. (1991), who argued that consumer choice is shaped by multiple consumption values, including functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional values. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) further developed the PERVAL scale to measure perceived value through quality, price, emotional value, and social value. These perspectives show that product value is not limited to functional utility, but also includes affective, symbolic, social, and contextual dimensions.

The expansion of digital consumption has changed how product value is formed, evaluated, and communicated. Consumers no longer depend only on information provided by producers, retailers, or conventional advertising. They increasingly rely on user reviews, marketplace ratings, creator-generated content, social media narratives, peer recommendations, online communities, and platform-based visibility.

Consequently, product value becomes more relational and interactive. It is formed not only during product use, but also before purchase through digital exposure and after purchase through reviewing, sharing, and recommending product experiences. In the context of local products, product value becomes more complex because local products often carry geographical, cultural, historical, communal, and symbolic attributes. They do not only perform practical functions, but also communicate origin, craftsmanship, local knowledge, community identity, and cultural pride. A local product may therefore be valued not only because it is useful or affordable, but also because it represents place, authenticity, belonging, and social meaning. For this reason, local product value cannot be adequately understood through a narrow functional approach. It requires a broader perspective that explains how usefulness, authenticity, identity, and digital visibility interact in shaping consumer meaning.

This broader perspective is particularly important in digital marketplaces where local products and MSMEs can reach wider audiences beyond their immediate geographical markets. However, digital visibility also intensifies competition. Local products must be functional and accessible, but they must also be recognizable, visually distinctive, narratively meaningful, and socially shareable. This shift provides the basis for examining local product value through an ergo-iconic lens.

### The Concept of Ergo-Iconic Value

Ergo-iconic value refers to the integration of functional and symbolic product attributes. The term "ergo" emphasizes usability, comfort, quality, efficiency, accessibility, and practical benefits. It concerns whether a product works well, is easy to use, provides comfort, and fits consumers' everyday needs. In local products, ergo value may appear in material quality, product durability, ergonomic design, ease of access, affordability, and suitability for practical use.

The term "iconic" refers to the symbolic and representational dimensions of a product. Iconic value includes visual distinctiveness, local identity, cultural narratives, aesthetic appeal, community symbols, authenticity, and the ability of a product to represent social

meaning. A local product becomes iconic when consumers do not merely recognize its function, but also associate it with a particular place, story, identity, community, or cultural meaning.

The conceptual foundation of ergo-iconic value can be traced to Andriyansyah's doctoral dissertation, which developed the positional advantage of ergo-iconic product value as a marketing construct linked to distinctive product attributes, functional comfort, artistic comfort, pleasure value, and marketing performance (Andriyansyah, 2018). The concept was later extended in studies on hotel marketing performance, SME competitiveness, platform-based green MSMEs, product values in the digital era, social media content virality, and ergo-iconic agricultural products (Andriyansah et al., 2020; Andriyansah et al., 2023; Andriyansah, 2025; Andriyansah & Saputra, 2025; Andriyansah et al., 2026; Sukendri et al., 2025). Taken together, these studies show that ergo-iconic value is not merely a synonym for product quality, attractiveness, or symbolic appeal. It is a relational value structure in which usefulness, comfort, aesthetic form, symbolic meaning, and market distinctiveness reinforce one another.

This distinction is important for the present article. General product value studies often examine whether a product is useful, affordable, emotionally satisfying, or socially valued. Ergo-iconic value goes further by asking how a product becomes simultaneously usable and recognizable, functional and meaningful, practical and symbolic. In this framework, function and symbol are not separate layers. Functional value provides practical legitimacy, while iconic value provides identity legitimacy. A strong local product is therefore not merely one that satisfies practical needs, but one that also offers meanings that can be recognized, accepted, and communicated by consumers.

In digital markets, this dual logic becomes increasingly important. Products must perform materially, but they must also be visible, interpretable, and shareable in digital spaces. A product with strong ergo value but weak iconic value may be useful but socially invisible. Conversely, a product with strong iconic claims but weak functional value may attract attention but fail to sustain trust and repeat consumption. Ergo-iconic value therefore provides a conceptual bridge for understanding how local products may become both reliable goods and meaningful identity markers.

### **Local Products as Media of Consumption Identity**

Local products can function as media of consumption identity because they connect consumers with place, community, history, and cultural narratives. In many cases, consumers purchase local products not only because of their practical benefits, but also because of the identity values attached to them. Local products may allow consumers to express attachment to a region, support for MSMEs, concern for sustainability, appreciation of craftsmanship, or preference for products perceived as authentic.

Consumption identity is formed when product choices become part of how individuals define themselves and present themselves to others. Belk (1988) argued that possessions can become part of the extended self, while consumer culture theory emphasizes that consumption practices are deeply connected to identity, meaning, and social life (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Holt (2004) further showed that products and brands may become culturally meaningful when they embody narratives that consumers can use to negotiate identity. In this sense, local products are not only commercial objects. They are symbolic resources through which consumers may express values, belonging, distinction, lifestyle, and social affiliation.

In digital society, consumption identity is increasingly articulated through social media posts, short videos, marketplace reviews, recommendations, hashtags, and participation in online trends. Products with strong visual features and compelling stories are more likely to enter the identity practices of younger consumers. For Generation Z, the

consumption of local products may involve not only buying and using, but also displaying, narrating, reviewing, and sharing products as part of self-presentation and social participation.

However, consumption identity cannot be built through claims of locality alone. Locality must be supported by product quality, credible storytelling, visual coherence, and meaningful consumer experience. If a product claims cultural authenticity but fails to deliver practical value, consumers may reject it as superficial. Conversely, if a product is functional but lacks symbolic distinctiveness, it may struggle to become part of identity-based consumption. Therefore, local products must balance authenticity, quality, design, symbolic meaning, and digital relevance.

This balance is central to the argument of this article. Local products become media of consumption identity when they successfully connect use value and identity value. Use value makes the product acceptable in everyday life, while identity value makes the product meaningful in social and cultural terms. In digital consumption, these values must also be articulated through visual, narrative, and interactive forms that consumers can recognize and share.

### **Generation Z and Digital Experience-Based Consumption**

Generation Z has grown up alongside the internet, social media, short-form video platforms, marketplaces, digital payment systems, and platform-based recommendation systems. Studies on Generation Z consumers show that digital and smart technologies shape how this group expects to interact with retail environments, including expectations for autonomy, speed, convenience, and technology-mediated experiences (Priporas et al., 2017). Social media also plays an important role in product discovery and purchase-related responses among Generation Z consumers, as shown in studies of Instagram-mediated impulse purchasing in fashion consumption (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

For Generation Z, consumption often begins before the purchase itself. Product discovery may occur through social media content, marketplace recommendations, influencer communication, peer reviews, live commerce, or viral trends. Product evaluation is also increasingly social, as consumers compare reviews, observe user-generated content, and assess whether a product fits their lifestyle, values, and digital self-presentation. This makes consumption a sequence of digital experiences rather than a single purchase act.

In this process, product value is continuously produced and reproduced. A product may gain value because it is useful, but it may also gain value because it is visually appealing, narratively meaningful, socially endorsed, and easy to share. For local products, this shift creates both opportunity and pressure. Digital platforms allow local products to reach younger consumers beyond their immediate geographical area. At the same time, local products must compete with national and global brands that often have stronger visual branding, digital campaigns, platform visibility, and consumer communities.

Digital experience also changes the process through which local values are transmitted. The value of local products is no longer inherited only through family, tradition, local communities, or physical markets. It is also transmitted through digital content, brand narratives, online communities, testimonials, reviews, lifestyle visualization, and consumer-generated storytelling. Thus, the transmission of consumption identity occurs through the interaction between local culture and digital infrastructure.

This article therefore positions ergo-iconic value as a conceptual bridge for understanding how local products may remain functionally relevant, symbolically

meaningful, and digitally communicable for Generation Z. The framework does not assume that Generation Z automatically values local products. Rather, it argues that local products become relevant to this generation when their functional qualities, symbolic meanings, and digital expressions are mutually connected.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This article adopts a conceptual research design based on an integrative literature review and theory synthesis. The design is appropriate because the purpose of the article is not to test empirical relationships among variables, but to develop a conceptual framework that explains ergo-iconic value in local products as a mechanism for transmitting Generation Z consumption identity. Following Jaakkola's (2020) typology of conceptual articles, this study is positioned as a theory synthesis article leading to a conceptual framework. It integrates several related but conceptually dispersed bodies of literature to clarify constructs, connect theoretical perspectives, and formulate a framework for future empirical research.

An integrative literature review was selected because it enables the synthesis of diverse theoretical streams into a more comprehensive conceptual understanding. Integrative reviews are particularly useful when the objective is to generate new knowledge by synthesizing fragmented literature rather than merely summarizing prior findings (Torraco, 2005). Unlike a systematic review, which primarily aims to identify, appraise, and summarize a defined body of empirical evidence, an integrative review is more appropriate when the objective is to develop conceptual insight across related fields. Literature review can function as a research methodology when its purpose, scope, selection logic, and analytical procedure are made explicit (Snyder, 2019). Therefore, this article does not claim to provide an exhaustive bibliometric or systematic review. Instead, it uses theoretically relevant sources to build a conceptual argument about how local products may function as media of consumption identity for Generation Z in digital environments.

The literature was identified through academic databases and scholarly search platforms, supported by institutional and statistical sources for contextual grounding. The search focused on combinations of conceptual keywords, including "product value," "perceived value," "consumption value," "symbolic consumption," "consumption identity," "local products," "MSMEs," "digital consumption," "digital consumer experience," "Generation Z consumers," and "ergo-iconic value." In addition, publications by Andriyansah and colleagues were included because they constitute the core body of literature in which ergo-iconic value has been introduced, developed, and applied.

The selection of literature followed three criteria. First, sources were included when they defined or developed one of the core constructs used in the article, such as product value, consumption identity, digital experience, or ergo-iconic value. Second, sources were included when they helped explain the relationship between function, symbolism, identity, and consumption. Third, sources were included when they supported the development of a conceptual framework rather than merely providing descriptive background. Sources were excluded when they were only tangentially related to the topic, lacked conceptual relevance, or did not contribute to the synthesis of function, identity, and digital experience.

The selected literature was organized into five clusters. The first cluster concerns product value and consumer behavior, including perceived value, consumption values, emotional value, social value, and symbolic value. The second cluster concerns consumption identity and symbolic consumption, particularly how products and brands become

resources for self-presentation, belonging, distinction, and cultural meaning. The third cluster concerns local products, MSMEs, authenticity, craftsmanship, and locality-based marketing. The fourth cluster concerns digital marketing and digital consumer experience, including social media, marketplaces, user reviews, platform visibility, and consumer-generated content. The fifth cluster concerns Generation Z and technology-mediated consumption, especially studies that discuss how younger consumers interact with retail technologies, social media, and digital purchase environments.

In addition to academic literature, this article uses contextual data from statistical reports and institutional sources to establish the empirical relevance of the phenomenon. These sources include data on e-commerce development, digital payment systems, and social media use in Indonesia. The contextual data are not used for hypothesis testing, causal inference, or empirical generalization. Rather, they provide contextual grounding for why an ergo-iconic framework is timely and relevant in the study of local products, MSMEs, and digital consumption among younger consumers.

The analysis was conducted through four stages of conceptual synthesis. The first stage was concept identification, in which the key constructs were identified: product value, functional value, symbolic value, consumption identity, local products, digital experience, and Generation Z. The second stage was construct comparison, in which similarities and differences between general product value and ergo-iconic value were examined. The third stage was theoretical integration, in which product value theory, consumption identity, and digital experience were connected with the emerging literature on ergo-iconic value. The fourth stage was framework articulation, in which the article formulated three interrelated processes through which local products may transmit consumption identity to Generation Z: functional internalization, symbolic recognition, and digital articulation.

This methodological design has two boundaries. First, the article does not provide empirical testing of the proposed framework. The framework should therefore be read as a conceptual contribution that requires further empirical examination. Second, the article does not claim to represent all possible forms of Generation Z consumption. Rather, it focuses on the conceptual conditions under which local products may become functionally relevant, symbolically meaningful, and digitally communicable for younger consumers. Through this design, the article develops ergo-iconic value as a conceptual lens for understanding local products not only as functional goods, but also as symbolic and digitally communicable media of consumption identity.

## **RESULTS**

The integrative literature review and theory synthesis identified four interrelated mechanisms through which ergo-iconic value may transmit Generation Z consumption identity in the context of local products: functional legitimacy through ergo value, identity legitimacy through iconic value, ergo-iconic integration, and digital articulation. These mechanisms indicate that local products become meaningful when functional usefulness, symbolic recognition, and digital communicability are mutually connected.

### **Functional Legitimacy through Ergo Value**

The synthesis identifies functional legitimacy as the first mechanism underlying the role of local products in Generation Z consumption identity. Functional legitimacy refers to the extent to which local products are perceived as useful, reliable, accessible, affordable, comfortable, and relevant to everyday consumption.

The analysis indicates that locality, cultural identity, and regional narratives may generate initial interest, but these characteristics are insufficient when products fail to

meet practical expectations. Product quality, usability, accessibility, price fairness, and everyday suitability therefore constitute the functional foundation upon which other meanings can develop.

In digital consumption environments, functional characteristics also become increasingly visible and comparable. Reviews, ratings, marketplace information, product demonstrations, and user-generated evaluations allow consumers to assess product performance before and after purchase. Consequently, functional weaknesses are not limited to individual experiences but may become publicly visible and socially evaluated.

Within the proposed framework, ergo value therefore provides functional legitimacy. Before local products can represent identity, authenticity, belonging, or cultural pride, they must first be accepted as products that perform effectively in everyday consumption.

#### **Identity Legitimacy through Iconic Value**

The second mechanism is identity legitimacy through iconic value. Identity legitimacy refers to the extent to which local products are recognized as distinctive, meaningful, authentic, and capable of representing personal, social, or cultural identity.

The synthesis indicates that local products possess potential identity resources through locality, craftsmanship, community histories, cultural narratives, regional symbols, visual distinctiveness, and authenticity. These characteristics enable consumers to interpret products not merely as functional objects but as representations of belonging, cultural recognition, lifestyle, ethical preference, and social distinction.

However, identity legitimacy does not emerge automatically from a product's local origin. Local meanings need to be recognizable, credible, and communicable. Cultural symbols that are disconnected from coherent product narratives, design, consumer experience, or functional performance may remain decorative rather than identity-bearing.

For Generation Z, identity legitimacy also involves compatibility with contemporary lifestyles and digital self-presentation. Iconic value therefore provides the symbolic infrastructure through which local products can move from being merely useful commodities to recognizable and communicable identity-bearing objects.

#### **Ergo-Iconic Integration**

The third mechanism concerns the integration between ergo and iconic value. The conceptual synthesis indicates that functional and symbolic dimensions reinforce one another rather than operate independently.

Ergo value provides practical credibility, while iconic value provides identity relevance. Functional qualities encourage consumers to use and trust local products, whereas symbolic qualities enable consumers to recognize, remember, discuss, display, and identify with them. When these dimensions are aligned, local products become simultaneously useful and meaningful.

The synthesis also identifies potential consequences of imbalance. Strong functionality without distinctive symbolic meaning may produce useful but interchangeable products. Conversely, strong symbolic positioning without sufficient functional performance may attract attention but fail to sustain consumer trust and long-term relevance.

Ergo-iconic integration therefore represents the central value mechanism through which local products may become vehicles of consumption identity. Identity transmission is

strengthened when functional performance and symbolic meaning operate coherently rather than separately.

### **Digital Articulation**

The fourth mechanism is digital articulation, defined as the process through which ergo-iconic value becomes visible, interpretable, negotiable, and shareable within digital environments.

The synthesis indicates that product meanings increasingly circulate through social media, marketplace reviews, electronic word of mouth, user-generated content, influencer narratives, visual storytelling, live commerce, peer recommendations, and online communities. Consequently, product meaning is not fixed at the point of production but continuously reproduced through consumer interaction.

Digital articulation operates across both dimensions of ergo-iconic value. Ergo value can be communicated through quality reviews, demonstrations, comparison videos, tutorials, ratings, and testimonials. Iconic value can be communicated through visual branding, origin stories, cultural narratives, packaging, community stories, and lifestyle content.

Digital articulation therefore provides the communicative mechanism through which functional legitimacy and identity legitimacy become socially visible. Generation Z consumers can evaluate, reinterpret, display, share, and negotiate local product meanings rather than merely receiving producer-created meanings.

### **Proposed Conceptual Framework**

Based on the synthesis, this study proposes a conceptual framework consisting of four interrelated components: local product base, ergo value, iconic value, and digital articulation. These components generate three processes of consumption identity transmission: functional internalization, symbolic recognition, and digital articulation.

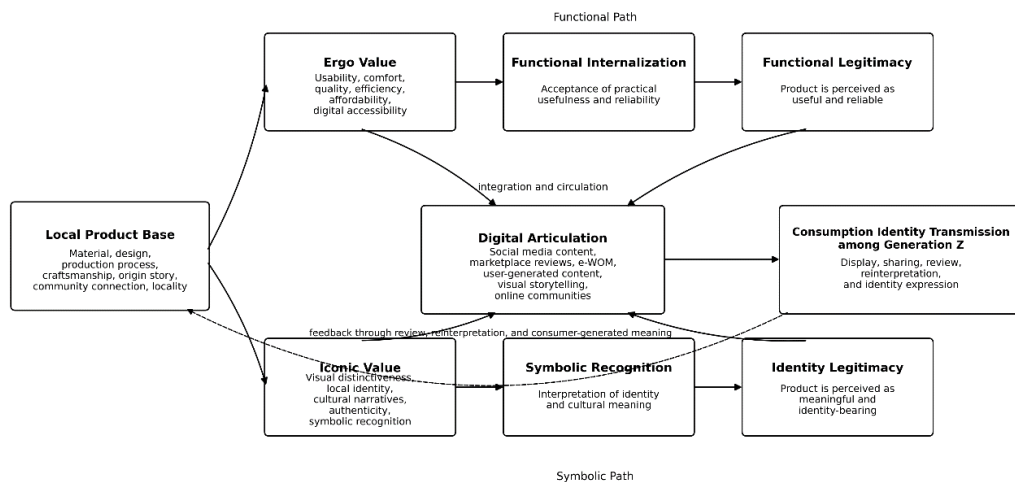
The local product base consists of material characteristics, design, production processes, craftsmanship, origin stories, community connections, and locality. It provides the practical and symbolic resources from which product meanings can develop.

Ergo value comprises usability, comfort, quality, efficiency, affordability, accessibility, and everyday relevance. Through functional internalization, consumers recognize local products as practical and reliable, resulting in functional legitimacy.

Iconic value comprises visual distinctiveness, local identity, cultural narratives, authenticity, symbolic recognition, and social representation. Through symbolic recognition, consumers interpret local products as identity-bearing objects, resulting in identity legitimacy.

Digital articulation represents the circulation and reinterpretation of these meanings through social media, marketplaces, electronic word of mouth, user-generated content, influencer narratives, and online communities.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Ergo-Iconic Value and Generation Z Consumption Identity



Source: Author's conceptual synthesis.

The framework suggests that consumption identity transmission occurs when local products are functionally internalized, symbolically recognized, and digitally articulated. This process is not necessarily linear because consumers may initially encounter products through symbolic appeal, peer recommendations, or digital visibility before evaluating their functional qualities. Nevertheless, sustained identity transmission requires alignment among functional usefulness, symbolic meaning, and digital communicability.

### Conceptual Propositions

Based on the proposed framework, four conceptual propositions are formulated for future empirical examination.

**Proposition 1:** Local products with stronger ergo value are more likely to achieve functional legitimacy among Generation Z because they provide usability, comfort, quality, accessibility, and practical relevance.

**Proposition 2:** Local products with stronger iconic value are more likely to achieve identity legitimacy among Generation Z because they communicate visual distinctiveness, local identity, authenticity, and symbolic meaning.

**Proposition 3:** The interaction between ergo value and iconic value strengthens the relevance of local products for Generation Z more effectively than either functional value or symbolic value alone.

**Proposition 4:** Digital articulation strengthens the transmission of consumption identity by enabling Generation Z to display, share, review, and reinterpret the ergo-iconic value of local products in social-digital spaces.

## DISCUSSION

The proposed framework extends existing perspectives on product value by positioning local product consumption as an interaction among functional usefulness, symbolic meaning, and digital communicability. Traditional product value literature emphasizes consumer evaluations of benefits and sacrifices (Zeithaml, 1988), multidimensional

consumption values (Sheth et al., 1991), and dimensions such as quality, price, emotional value, and social value (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). The present synthesis builds on these perspectives by proposing that functional value performs a foundational role in the transmission of consumption identity.

In this framework, ergo value is conceptualized as functional legitimacy. This interpretation extends earlier conceptualizations of ergo-iconic value, which associated ergo dimensions with distinctive product attributes, functional comfort, artistic comfort, pleasure value, and marketing performance (Andriyansyah, 2018). Subsequent studies have connected ergo-iconic value with service value and SME competitiveness (Andriyansah et al., 2020; Andriyansah et al., 2023). The present framework further suggests that ergo value provides the practical conditions under which symbolic claims become credible to Generation Z. Locality alone cannot sustain consumption identity if the product does not satisfy contemporary expectations regarding usability, quality, affordability, accessibility, and convenience.

The iconic dimension complements this functional foundation by providing identity legitimacy. This argument is consistent with symbolic consumption and consumer culture theory. Belk (1988) explains that possessions can become extensions of the self, while Arnould and Thompson (2005) position consumption within broader cultural meanings, social relations, and identity projects. Holt (2004) similarly demonstrates that brands and products can acquire cultural significance through narratives that consumers employ in identity construction.

The present framework extends these perspectives by proposing that local products can become identity-bearing media when their symbolic attributes are recognized as authentic, distinctive, relevant, and communicable. Iconic value should therefore not be equated with traditionality, cultural ornamentation, or the simple use of regional symbols. Symbolic elements become identity-bearing when consumers can connect them to self-expression, belonging, cultural pride, community, or lifestyle distinction. This argument also extends earlier ergo-iconic research associating iconic value with distinctiveness, artistic appeal, social representation, and ecological identity (Andriyansyah, 2018; Andriyansah, 2025).

The integration of ergo and iconic value represents the primary conceptual contribution of the framework. Product value and symbolic consumption literature have traditionally provided complementary but analytically distinct explanations of why consumers value products. The proposed framework integrates these perspectives by arguing that functional usefulness and symbolic recognizability mutually reinforce one another. Function without symbolic meaning may generate utility without identity attachment, whereas symbolism without functional credibility may generate attention without sustained trust.

This integration also extends previous applications of ergo-iconic value. Earlier studies have examined the construct in relation to marketing performance, service value, SME competitiveness, social media virality, digital product value, and agricultural product innovation (Andriyansah et al., 2020; Andriyansah et al., 2023; Andriyansah & Saputra, 2025; Andriyansah et al., 2026; Sukendri et al., 2025). The present framework shifts attention toward consumption identity by conceptualizing local products as value-bearing media through which practical performance and identity meaning can be simultaneously transmitted.

Digital articulation further differentiates the proposed framework from conventional approaches to product and symbolic value. Research on Generation Z consumption

demonstrates that technology-mediated environments influence expectations concerning convenience, autonomy, interaction, and consumer experience (Priporas et al., 2017). Social media also influences Generation Z consumption through visual communication and peer-mediated processes (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021), while electronic word of mouth enables consumers to communicate product evaluations beyond producer-controlled channels (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Building on this literature, the framework conceptualizes digital articulation as more than digital promotion or product visibility. Digital articulation represents a mechanism through which product meanings become socially interpretable and reproducible. Reviews, marketplace ratings, social media posts, user-generated content, recommendations, and online discussions allow consumers to participate directly in defining whether local products are useful, authentic, distinctive, meaningful, or identity-relevant.

This perspective is particularly important for understanding Generation Z because identity transmission in digital environments cannot be treated as passive inheritance. Younger consumers do not merely receive local meanings established by producers, communities, or previous generations. Instead, they can select, reinterpret, evaluate, display, and negotiate these meanings through digital practices. Local product identity is therefore reproduced through interaction between producer-created attributes and consumer-generated interpretations.

The proposed framework consequently reframes consumption identity transmission as a dynamic rather than linear process. A consumer may first encounter a local product through social media, recognize its symbolic appeal, evaluate its functional performance, and subsequently communicate the experience through digital platforms. These digital articulations then become resources through which other consumers encounter and interpret the product. The process can therefore become recursive, with digital communication continually influencing functional and symbolic evaluations.

Theoretically, the framework makes three main contributions. First, it extends product value theory by positioning functional value as a source of legitimacy that supports subsequent identity interpretation. Second, it extends symbolic consumption and consumption identity theory by demonstrating that symbolic meanings require functional credibility and digital communicability to remain relevant in contemporary consumption environments. Third, it advances ergo-iconic value by conceptualizing the construct as an integrated mechanism through which function, identity, and digital experience enable local products to transmit consumption identity.

The four propositions provide directions for empirical validation. Future quantitative research can examine relationships among ergo value, iconic value, functional legitimacy, identity legitimacy, digital articulation, and consumption identity. Qualitative studies can investigate how Generation Z interprets and negotiates these dimensions across different categories of local products, while mixed-method research can examine how functional performance, symbolic identity, and digital expression interact across consumption contexts. Such research would help determine whether the conceptual relationships proposed in this article operate consistently across product categories, cultural contexts, and digital platforms.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article develops a conceptual framework for understanding ergo-iconic value in local products as a mechanism for transmitting Generation Z consumption identity. The main argument is that local products become relevant to Generation Z when functional

usefulness, symbolic recognition, and digital communicability are mutually connected. Locality alone is not sufficient to make a product meaningful to younger consumers. A product must first work as a reliable and accessible object of everyday consumption, while also carrying symbolic meanings that can be recognized, interpreted, and communicated in digital environments.

The article contributes to product value literature by repositioning ergo-iconic value as a bridge between functional value and symbolic value. Ergo value provides functional legitimacy because it allows local products to be accepted as useful, comfortable, reliable, affordable, and accessible. Iconic value provides identity legitimacy because it enables local products to be recognized as distinctive, authentic, meaningful, and identity-bearing. The strength of local products therefore does not lie in function alone or symbolism alone, but in the integration between the two. This integration explains how local products may move from being ordinary market goods to becoming media of consumption identity.

The article also contributes to studies of consumption identity by showing that identity transmission is not a passive or linear process. In digital consumption environments, Generation Z does not simply inherit local meanings from tradition, producers, or older generations. Rather, young consumers select, reinterpret, display, review, and negotiate product meanings through social media, marketplaces, electronic word of mouth, user-generated content, and online communities. Digital articulation therefore becomes a key process through which local products are made visible, discussable, and socially communicable.

The proposed framework consists of four interrelated components: local product base, ergo value, iconic value, and digital articulation. These components generate three processes: functional internalization, symbolic recognition, and digital articulation. Through these processes, local products may achieve functional legitimacy, identity legitimacy, and consumption identity transmission among Generation Z.

Practically, the framework suggests that local entrepreneurs, MSMEs, brand managers, and policymakers should avoid separating product quality from identity-based communication. Strengthening local products requires attention to usability, durability, design coherence, authenticity, storytelling, digital access, and consumer experience. Digital promotion should not merely pursue visibility or virality; it should articulate the connection between product function, symbolic meaning, and consumer identity.

As a conceptual article, this study does not empirically test the proposed framework. Future research may examine the relationships among ergo value, iconic value, digital articulation, legitimacy, and consumption identity through quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method designs. Further studies may also compare how the framework operates across different local product categories, such as food, fashion, craft, beauty products, and tourism-related products

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## DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

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