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# The Relationship Between Emotional Branding and Consumer Loyalty in K-Pop Merchandise Purchases in Young Adults

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**Abstract**

*The growing Korean Wave phenomenon in Indonesia has driven increased consumption of K-Pop-related products, including merchandise that holds emotional value for fans. Emotional branding is an important strategy in building emotional closeness between brands and consumers, which is believed to influence purchasing loyalty. This study aims to determine the relationship between emotional branding and consumer loyalty in young adults. The method used was a quantitative correlational study involving 55 participants who had purchased K-Pop merchandise, selected through snowball sampling. The instrument used the emotional branding and consumer loyalty scale developed by Innah (2018) based on the theory of Gobe (2005) and Griffin (2005). Pearson correlation analysis showed a positive and significant relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.491$; $p < 0.001$) at a moderate level. These findings indicate that the stronger the emotional branding, the higher the consumer loyalty in purchasing K-Pop merchandise.*

***Keywords:*** *Emotional Branding, Consumer Loyalty, K-pop Merchandise*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization and digitalization, marketing strategies have undergone significant transformations, particularly with the emergence of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) phenomenon, encompassing South Korean music, drama, and popular culture (Dwinanda et al., 2025). K-pop groups are known not only for their musical talent but also for their ability to build strong and loyal fan communities worldwide (Wulandari & Nurhadi, 2025). In Indonesia, K-pop's popularity has grown rapidly and spread across the globe, influencing the lifestyles, fashion trends, and consumption behavior of its fans.

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The Korean Wave phenomenon continues to grow and influence the lifestyles of Indonesians, especially among fans of Korean culture. This influence is evident in the increasing use of Korean fashion, makeup, skincare, food, and even Korean speech and language styles in everyday life (Maulida & Kamila, 2021). This development has also influenced the marketing strategies of various companies in Indonesia, which now frequently use K-pop idols as brand ambassadors. K-pop idols not only present visual appeal, but also have a strong emotional and social influence on consumers, which is proven to increase brand trust, brand image, and purchase intention for the products they promote (Dwinanda et al., 2025).

This shift in the marketing paradigm occurs from a production-oriented approach to one centered on consumer needs and desires. In this context, emotional branding has become an increasingly relevant strategy. Emotional branding not only emphasizes the functional aspects of a product but also builds an emotional connection between the brand and the consumer through experiences, personal values, and consumer identity (Rahma et al., 2025).

Numerous studies have shown that consumers tend to be loyal to brands that create positive and memorable emotional experiences. Lestari et al. (2024) emphasized that emotional connections can encourage consumers to make repeat purchases, provide recommendations, and maintain brand commitment. This suggests that loyalty is determined not only by rational factors such as quality or price, but also by the emotional attachment built by the brand. Consumer loyalty itself is understood as a customer's long-term commitment to a brand, formed through a combination of positive experiences, satisfaction, and a minimum of complaints (Maulida & Kamila, 2021; Lestari et al., 2024).

In the context of the K-Pop industry, this emotional bond is strongly evident in merchandise purchasing behavior. Social media has become a primary platform for disseminating information about concerts and merchandise, further driving impulsive buying behavior among fans (Kaho et al., 2023). Furthermore, age is also a factor influencing this behavior. Wood (in Henrietta, 2012) stated that impulsive buying is influenced by personal characteristics, such as age, which increases between the ages of

18 and 39, corresponding to the early adulthood stage. The higher an individual's emotional attachment to a celebrity, the greater the tendency to impulsively purchase products related to their idol (Putri, et al., 2025).

K-pop merchandise serves not only as collectibles but also as a representation of fandom identity and the emotional closeness between fans and idols. Therefore, it is important to understand whether emotional branding plays a role in shaping consumer loyalty to K-pop merchandise purchases, particularly among young adults, who constitute one of the largest segments of the fandom community.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Emotional Branding

Marc Gobe (in Kusniawati & Setiawan, 2023) states that emotional branding is a concept for creating a brand image that aims to forge a deep emotional connection between the brand and consumers through creative and innovative approaches. Emotional branding aims to connect the brand with the deep human character by leveraging consumers' emotional dimensions, such as love, trust, passion, and aspiration. Emotional branding consists of four main pillars that form the foundation of its practice: relationships, sensory experiences, imaginative approaches, and vision.

Emotional branding goes beyond simply introducing a product; it also builds stories, experiences, and relationships that make the brand feel alive and relevant to consumers. This concept also assumes that when a brand is able to touch emotions, consumers will become more personally engaged and have a higher tendency to demonstrate loyalty (Rahma et al., 2025).

### Consumer Loyalty

Nurhayani et al. (in Anggraini & Santoso, 2025) state that consumer loyalty is a customer's tendency to purchase a particular product or use a service offered by a company with a high degree of consistency. According to Griffin (2005), the

characteristics of loyal consumers include regular repeat purchases, cross-purchase across product and service lines, referrals to others, and resistance to competitors' influence.

Consumer loyalty is influenced by the evaluation of a selected brand, product, or service, whether it meets or exceeds expectations. Therefore, these consumers are likely to exhibit a positive attitude, a desire to repurchase the same brand, product, or service, and a desire to serve as a reference for others (Kusniawati & Setiawan, 2023).

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, deductive approach with a non-experimental design and correlational analysis to determine the relationship between emotional branding and consumer loyalty without manipulating variables. The study involved 55 respondents, all of whom were in the early adulthood range (18–40 years), according to Hurlock's (2011) developmental threshold. All respondents were K-Pop fans who had purchased merchandise. Because the exact population of K-pop fans in Indonesia is unknown, this study employed a non-probability sampling technique, the snowball sampling method, which involves recruiting participants from one group to another with similar characteristics (Sugiyono, 2015).

The researchers used a scale developed by Innah (2018) based on the emotional branding aspects of Gobe (2005) and consumer loyalty aspects of Griffin (2005). The reliability test results using McDonald's Omega showed an ω of 0.813 for the emotional branding scale and ω of 0.732 for the consumer loyalty scale, indicating that both scales are reliable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Item validity was tested using Corrected Item–Total Correlation with a criterion of $r \geq 0.30$ (Azwar, 2012).

The instrument was developed as a Google Form questionnaire and distributed online to eligible participants. The collected data were then examined, analyzed, and validated through the stages of assumption testing, instrument quality testing, hypothesis testing, and preparation of a research report in the form of a scientific article. The data analysis process was conducted using Jamovi version 2.6.44. The analysis stages

included: (1) descriptive analysis; (2) Shapiro–Wilk normality test with a p value of > 0.05; (3) linearity test through observation of scatterplot patterns; (4) hypothesis testing using Pearson correlation.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

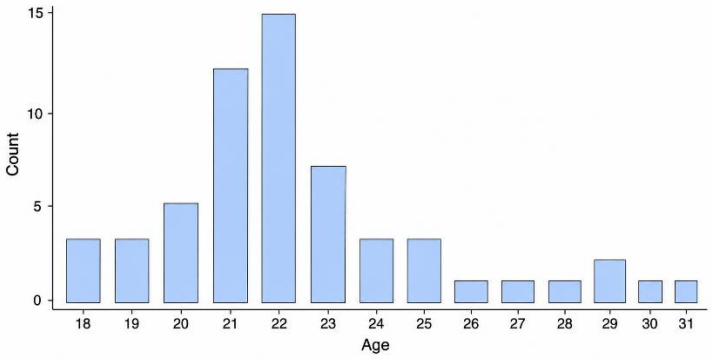
a. Respondent Characteristics

**Frequencies of Gender**

| Gender | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 54 | 98.2% | 98.2% |
| Male | 1 | 1.8% | 100.0% |

The results of the descriptive analysis show that the majority of respondents in this tudy were female, namely 54 people (98.2%), while there was 1 male person 1.8%).

**Frequencies of Age**



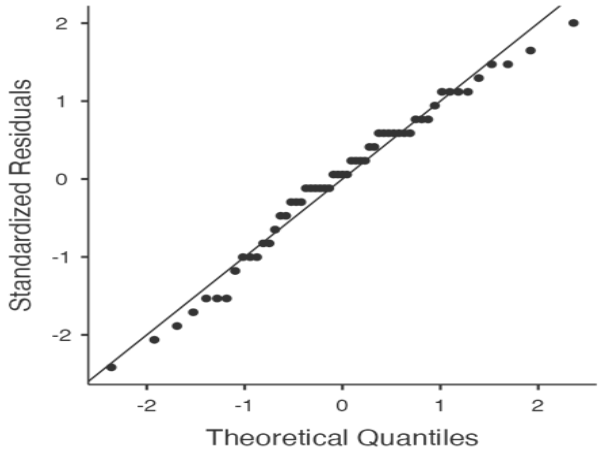

The age distribution of respondents ranged from 18 to 33 years. The most dominant age groups were 22 years old (27.3%) and 21 years old (21.8%). Other age groups had smaller proportions, such as 23 years old (10.9%), 20 years old (7.3%), and 18, 19, 24, and 25 years old, each with 5.5%. Those aged 25 and above had a relatively low percentage (1.8%–3.6%).

b. Classical Assumption Test Results

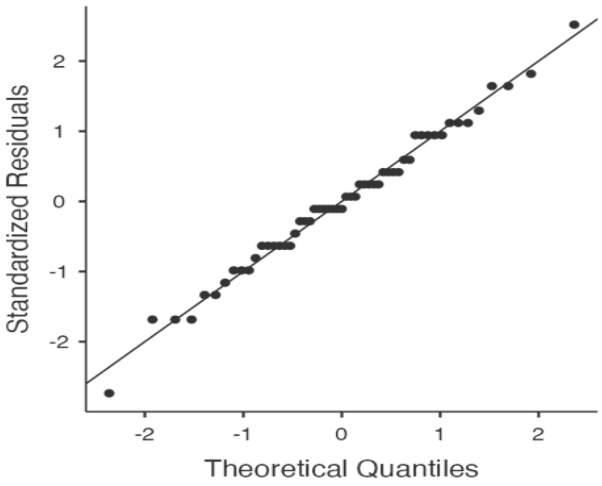
| | Emotional Branding | Consumer Loyalty |
|---|---|---|
| N | 55 | 55 |
| Mean | 48.7 | 47.6 |
| Median | 49 | 47 |
| Mode | 52.0 | 47.0 |
| Standard deviation | 5.66 | 5.71 |
| Minimum | 35 | 32 |
| Maximum | 60 | 62 |
| Shapiro-Wilk W | 0.977 | 0.990 |
| Shapiro-Wilk p | 0.358 | 0.935 |

The results of the Shapiro–Wilk normality test showed that both variables had a p-value > 0.05, indicating that the data distribution can be considered normal. Furthermore, the linearity test showed a diagonal pattern of dots, rather than a random pattern. This indicates a linear relationship between emotional branding and consumer loyalty.

**Emotional Branding**



**Consumer Loyalty**




## c. Hypothesis Test Results

*Correlation Matrix*

| | | Emotional Branding | Consumer Loyalty |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Emotional Branding** | Pearson's r | — | |
| | df | — | |
| | p-value | — | |
| **Consumer Loyalty** | Pearson's r | 0.491 | — |
| | df | 53 | — |
| | p-value | <.001 | — |

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between emotional branding and consumer loyalty ($r = 0.491$ and $p < 0.001$). The correlation coefficient value is in the moderate category. This means that the higher the emotional branding consumers perceive towards K-Pop merchandise, the higher their level of loyalty in making purchases.

## Discussion

The results of the study indicate a significant and moderate relationship between emotional branding and consumer loyalty in K-Pop merchandise purchases among young adults ($r = 0.491$; $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that the stronger the emotional

involvement consumers feel with a brand, the greater their tendency to exhibit loyal behaviors such as repeat purchases, product recommendations, and remaining loyal to the brand despite the availability of alternatives.

In the K-Pop fan phenomenon, emotional branding is evident through fans' enthusiasm for purchasing limited-edition merchandise, albums, and demonstrating their fandom identity through the items they consume. Meanwhile, loyalty among K-Pop fans is reflected in repeat purchases, merchandise collections, and a willingness to pay high prices for exclusive items. This means that the emotional experience constructed through narratives, visuals, and fandom identity significantly contributes to consumer loyalty.

The results of this study align with those of Lestari, Wahib, and Susanto (2024), who found that emotional branding has a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty, both directly and through the mediation of customer satisfaction. Furthermore, another study by Kusniawati and Setiawan (2023) also showed consistent results, indicating a strong relationship between emotional branding and consumer loyalty ($r = 0.661$) and contributing 44% to the loyalty outcome. The emotional aspect of branding is a crucial factor influencing consumer decisions.

Thus, overall, this study finds that emotional branding plays a significant role in shaping consumer loyalty and contributes to the development of literature and marketing strategies in the context of K-pop fans.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study found a significant positive relationship between emotional branding and consumer loyalty in purchasing K-pop merchandise among young adults at a moderate level ($r = 0.491$ and $p < 0.001$). This means that the higher the emotional branding perceived by consumers, the higher their loyalty to make repeat purchases. Emotional branding is a psychological driver that strengthens consumer commitment to a brand, so consumers are more likely to stay, support, and make repeat purchases. Thus, emotional branding is proven to be related to consumer loyalty, especially among young adults involved in purchasing K-pop merchandise.

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This research recommends that future research consider adding other variables and increasing the sample size to achieve more representative and accurate results. Furthermore, merchandise manufacturers can also strengthen their emotional branding strategies to build stronger emotional bonds with fans.

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