



Roles of K-pop Idols as Brand Ambassadors for Gen Z's Buying Behavior in Indonesia's E-Commerce

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze whether K-pop idols becoming a trend among generation Z also affect the brand image and customers' buying behavior when they become marketplace brand ambassadors. This study used a quantitative approach. Data were analyzed using path analysis and hypothesis testing processing methods using Partial Least Squares (PLS) with Smart PLS with a sample of a hundred Gen Z respondents. The results show a relationship between brand ambassadors, brand image, brand awareness, and buying behavior. E-commerce that uses famous K-Pop idol brand ambassadors, currently the favorite celebrity of Gen Z, as a form of advertising does not only affect brand image and awareness but also buying behavior.

Keywords: brand ambassador · brand awareness · brand image · buying behavior · K-pop idol

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Korean Wave, or Hallyu, has developed and been accepted by people all over the world, and the popularity of K-pop is expanding beyond Asia [7, 14]. The Korean Wave is becoming increasingly popular because more K-Pop idols love South Korea's boy and girl bands.

Indonesia is listed as the country with the largest number of K-Pop fans in cyberspace in 2021 and the country that talks about K-Pop the most on Twitter based on Twitter and CNN Indonesia report in 2021. Meanwhile, a seven-member vocal group from South Korea named BTS was the most talked about idol on Twitter globally and in Indonesia. Based on YouTube analytics, until February 2023, 2 K-pop idols are in the top ranking because of the most subscribers among other world musicians, namely Blackpink and BTS. The number of subscribers to Blackpink girl band from South Korea has reached 84.2 million subscribers, followed by Bangtan Boys, aka BTS, following in second place with 73.5 million subscribers.

In Indonesia, collaboration with K-pop artists or idols is mostly done by e-commerce companies. Indonesian millennial and generation Z are generally competent in using technology (digital savvy) and idolize influencers. In this case, K-pop artists or idols, the number of celebrities involved in endorsements products and services are increasing and becoming one of the most important advertising tools because of their likability and appeal. Therefore, many marketers use celebrities to influence consumer purchase decisions to increase sales and expand market share [2, 11]. To increase the users' number, the current e-commerce marketing strategy uses artists or idols as brand ambassadors.

The e-commerce sector in Indonesia continues to grow. According to research by Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company, the economic value of the e-commerce sector in 2022 has increased by 22% compared to the previous year and is projected to continue to grow to US\$95 billion in 2025. In Indonesia, many K-pop idols are taking part in becoming brand ambassadors for various local brands and e-commerce. Tokopedia, which leads the Indonesian marketplace, used BTS and Blackpink as brand ambassadors in 2021–2022.

One of the ways to provide a competitive advantage is by offering high-quality, customized products to our brand ambassadors and special limited-edition products that create the desired image for our special customers so that brand image has a positive and meaningful impact on brand awareness [4, 10]. Brand ambassadors have a significant impact on customer attitudes by creating a desirable brand image, and the appearance of brand ambassadors on social networks increases the impact of social networks on brand awareness [1, 9, 11]. Brand image has a positive impact on customers' buying behavior and also customers' intention to purchase reputable brands online [12, 15].

1.2 Purpose of This Study

Previous studies show the importance of advertising using ambassadors in marketing and the role of brand awareness and image in brand management. This research provides a model for assessing the effect of brand ambassadors on purchasing behavior through brand image and awareness. Adding new attributes to buying behavior is done to provide novelty. This study aims to analyze the role of K-pop idols as brand ambassadors for the buying behavior of Indonesian Gen Z in e-commerce.

1.3 Roles of Brand Ambassador

Brand ambassadors are brand representatives who confirm brands by their reputation and a mediator between internal and external brand management that can have a significant impact on customer perception of brands and organizations [6, 10]. When brand ambassadors join social networks, the impact of social networking on brand awareness increases. Brand ambassadors have a significant effect on the customer's attitude by creating a desirable brand image [1, 3, 5, 9].

Brand awareness is very important during online purchases and when shopping is risky for customers. Numerous studies examined celebrities' positive and negative effects on brand awareness. Earlier studies discovered a relationship between brand ambassadors and brand awareness [1, 3, 5]; between brand ambassadors and brand image [1, 9]; and between brand image and brand awareness [2, 13].

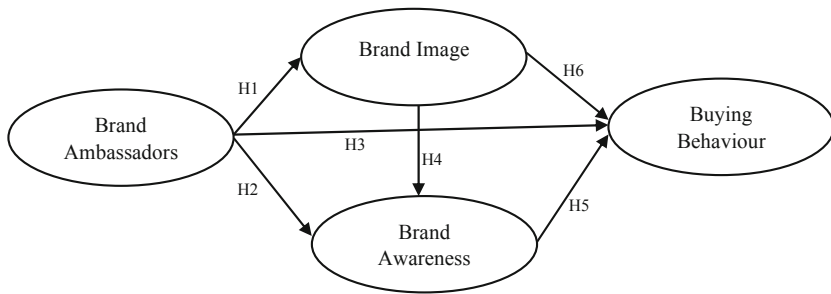


Fig. 1. Research Model

Since the success of celebrity endorsements is based on the different celebrity traits that consumers consider to be prominent, it results in actual purchasing decisions. Companies believe that celebrities influence consumers' purchase decisions and consumers are willing to buy a product just because it was endorsed by their favorite celebrity [4].

Figure 1 shows the research model. The research questions in this study are to test the 6 hypotheses. The 6 hypotheses (H) are as follows: (H1) Brand ambassadors (BA) have a significant impact on the brand image (BI); (H2) Brand ambassadors (BA) have a significant impact on brand awareness (BAW); (H3) Brand ambassadors (BA) have a significant impact on buying behavior (BH); (H4) Brand image (BI) has a significant impact on brand awareness (BAW); (H5) Brand awareness (BAW) has a significant impact on buying behavior (BH); and (H6) Brand image (BI) has a significant impact on buying behavior (BH).

2 Research Methodology

This study used an objective, descriptive survey to gather data, and it was correlational in terms of the relationships between the variables. This research uses purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling technique.

Samples needed to meet the following criteria: (1) Indonesian generation Z born in 1997–2012, and (2) have shopped at e-commerce at least 1 time in the last 3 months. A hundred (100) respondents' responses were evaluated based on the five-point Likert scale. The collected data for this current study were analyzed using Partial Least Squares (PLS) structural equation modeling (SEM) by Smart PLS 3.

3 Result and Discussion

Table 1 shows the respondents' demographic regarding gender, education, and monthly expenditure information. Most respondents were women, student status, or high school graduates with an average expenditure of under IDR 1 million.

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) can be used to determine convergence validity. Cronbach's alpha is greater than 0.7 for each variable, indicating that every variable is reliable. Convergent validity is also established

Table 1. Respondents' Profiles

Gender	Education	Monthly Expenditure (IDR)
Female (58%)	Bachelor's degree (35%)	under IDR 1 million (53%)
Male (42%)	High school graduate (65%)	IDR 1 million – 3 million (47%)

because Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is consistently greater than 0.5 and $CR > AV$ (Table 2).

The results of this test are presented in Table 3. The research hypotheses can be examined based on the measurement model results; the t-statistic is higher than the critical value of 1.96, which is higher than the critical t-value at the error level of 5%, indicating the significant correlation between observed variables with their relevant latent variables. Hypotheses are supported if the T-statistic value is higher than 1.96 and the P-value is less than equal to 0.05. The results show that of the six hypotheses, one hypothesis is not supported.

Table 2. Convergent validity and reliability of research variables

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Brand Ambassador	0.927	0.942	0.731
Brand Awareness	0.877	0.905	0.578
Brand Image	0.880	0.909	0.628
Buying Behavior	0.941	0.958	0.850

Table 3. The Results of the Hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	T Statistics*	P Values**	Description
BA → BI	4.853	0.000	supported
BA → BAW	7.002	0.000	supported
BA → BH	6.379	0.000	supported
BI → BAW	11.772	0.000	supported
BAW → BH	2.247	0.025	supported
BI → BH	1.542	0.124	Not supported

* T Statistics > 1.96

** P Values ≤ 0.05

4 Conclusion

Hypothesis 1, BA has a significant impact on BI. This result is in line with [11]. If the role of the brand ambassador increases, the brand image will also increase. Based on the mean value of the indicators that measure BA, two indicators have the highest scores. The reputation of K-pop idols such as BTS and Blackpink is some added value in recommending products so that it becomes a driving force for purchases on Tokopedia. The presence of BTS and Blackpink are considered important symbols for shopping recommendations at Tokopedia and Shopee (i.e., both are the largest Indonesia's e-commerce). Meanwhile, students from Gen Z who use e-commerce always read online comments from other customers to help them know whether their choice is right.

Hypothesis 2, BA has a significant impact on BAW. The results of previous studies also support this result. When respondents see Tokopedia advertisements more often by showing their BA K-pop idols, such as BTS, they can easily recognize the Tokopedia brand from their competitors. Customers are also easily aware of Tokopedia's presence in their daily lives and when talking about Tokopedia, they easily and quickly remember some of the features of Tokopedia's products.

Hypothesis 3, BA has a significant impact on BH. This result is in line [4, 8]. Customers will feel more familiar with the Tokopedia brand after seeing their K-pop idols like BTS or Blackpink in each Tokopedia or Shopee advertisement. Even from the results of high scores on the buying behavior indicator, customers feel similarities between them and Tokopedia because they like the presence of their K-pop idols, such as BTS.

Hypothesis 4, BI has a significant impact on BAW. Many previous studies also support this result. Reading lots of positive online comments or testimonials from other customers regarding e-commerce brands such as Tokopedia can make customers more aware and easily recognize the Tokopedia brand from competitors.

Hypothesis 5, BAW has a significant impact on BH. Previous studies also support this result. The more often customers see e-commerce, such as Tokopedia advertisements, the more they can immediately remember Tokopedia when they want to find a product to buy. The more customers are aware of Tokopedia's presence in their daily life, the more they are interested in buying Tokopedia products than in other marketplaces, even though they have the same features.

Hypothesis 6, BI does not have a significant impact on BH. From the data processing results, the increase in e-commerce brand image does not affect the increase in Gen Z's buying behavior. This is probably due to e-commerce with the many product brands being sold and sellers. Suppose the product that the customer wants is unavailable at Tokopedia. In that case, they will not wait to be available at Tokopedia but can buy it through other platforms such as Shopee. Especially the buying behavior of Gen Z or students whose spending is less than 1 million, usually more on price considerations to buy certain products.

This study has a limited number of respondents in certain areas and certain generations, namely Gen Z, who like K-Pop idols and are even fanatics. Further research can add variables such as brand loyalty.

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