

Factors Influencing K-Pop Idol Fans' Compulsive Buying: The Role of K-pop Addiction, SNS Usage, Upward Social Comparison and Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between fans and K-pop Idol influence their consumption. Therefore, K-pop Idol categorized as a brand based on human brand theory. Moreover, digital era affects their lifestyle. This research aimed to assess K-pop Idol fans' compulsive buying who use SNS in their daily activity. Survey responses were collected from an online sample of 268 K-pop idol fans in Indonesia. The methods were evaluated using software (smart PLS 3) to test the hypothesis. The authors found that, K-pop addiction, upward social comparison, anxiety level, and SNS usage have a direct effect on compulsive buying, this study also found that there is an indirect effect of K-pop addiction that mediates between SNS usage and compulsive buying. Future research should include psychological variables that can influence compulsive buying, use bigger sample, and focus on specific human brand. This paper provides insight for future brand marketing in Indonesia. This study can be said to be the first to examine the relationship between upward social comparison, SNS usage, anxiety level and K-pop addiction towards compulsive buying by referring the variable of brand addiction to K-pop addiction using Human Brand Theory by Thomson.

INTRODUCTION

The Korean Wave or *Hallyu*, from South Korea, has been growing for two decades. Especially in Indonesia, it affects Gen Millennials daily. K-pop is the most popular Korean cultural phenomenon in Indonesia and immediately attracts young people's attention. Indonesia is the country with the world's largest number of K-pop fans (Das et al. 2019). K-pop groups are known for their various efforts to build strong ties with their fans (Black et al. 2012). Therefore, they often release merchandise that is identical to the members or the name of the group itself. The merchandise can be albums, photo cards, everyday items, or collaboration products between a brand and a group. On the launch day, fans often do not hesitate to buy these items because they believe purchasing them is a way to support and feel closer to their idols (Cui et al., 2018).

Human brand theory (Thomson, 2006) theoretically explains the relationship between idols and fans when a media persona becomes a human brand (an individual as a brand)—someone who has branded features that create a strong connection with followers by meeting their intrinsic needs and creating a successful marketing effect. Therefore, in this research, a K-pop idol is considered a brand because they meet the criteria of having branded features and can create a strong relationship with their followers or fans, thereby generating a marketing effect that influences their fans

(Faelens et al. 2021).

The loyalty of fans towards idols is a form of brand addiction. According to Mrad and Cui (2020), brand addiction is a psychological state related to brand relationships manifested in daily life, involving positive effectiveness and satisfaction with a particular brand and a constant urge to own that brand's products or services. K-pop idols are said to be a brand because their appearance both behind and in front of the screen is a marketing practice (Centeno & Wang, 2017), which makes their fans curious and ultimately leads them to buy what the idols wear or own. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when no outside activities were allowed, including concerts, agencies held online fan meetings where only winners by raffle could join. As a result, many fans bought more albums and merchandise to support their idols as their "revenge" due to the situation. Additionally, brands appoint Korean acts as their Brand Ambassadors because of the parasocial relationships they have with fans (Fardouly, 2016). According to Horton and Richard Wohl (1956), parasocial relationships are one-way interactions between viewers and media personas (actors, singers, broadcasters, etc.) that involve emotions, interest, and time spent with them (Gao et al. 2024).

This consumptive behavior among fans is often exploited by certain parties to reap profits (Chang et al., 2023). K-pop fans worldwide are known as fandoms. Fandom is often considered an expression of a larger phenomenon related to fanaticism towards consumption and brands in modern society. This fanaticism provides fans with a source of meaning to build their self-identity, which ultimately encourages them to engage in consumption related to the fandom (Chang et al., 2023). The rapid development of K-pop in Indonesia also creates opportunities for business people to open new job opportunities (Fitriana, 2022). This can be seen from the many entrustment services (*jastip*) that have emerged on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and e-commerce platforms. K-pop group merchandise that is not available in official Indonesian stores can be purchased via *jastip*. This *jastip* operates through social media, where they calculate the price of the goods they want to sell from the official website of each agency that oversees the group, adding estimated costs of tax, shipping, and the original price of the product (Maraz et al. 2014). This *jastip* phenomenon occurs alongside the development of idols, fans, and social media, which makes it easier to purchase these products, thereby influencing Compulsive Buying Behavior (CBB). CBB is a preoccupation with shopping behavior associated with the urge to buy repeatedly, accompanied by momentary relief and pleasure but often followed by regret and guilt about the negative consequences that will be faced (Müller et al., 2015). In particular, the use of SNS targeting consumption-related information encourages materialism in women (Ho et al., 2017), thereby increasing the tendency to make compulsive purchases (Kyrios et al. 2012). This further supports the claim that the use of social media applications can facilitate the opening of shopping applications (Zhang et al., 2017).

This research attempts to close the gap by further exploring this relationship. Previous studies (Zheng et al., 2020a) showed that SNS use, upward social comparison, and anxiety mediated the relationship between brand addiction and compulsive buying. However, this research does not explore how these three factors interact specifically in the context of K-pop fandom. This research seeks to explore these mediation effects within the framework of K-pop addiction (Lee 2014).

Based on this background explanation, the researchers are interested in studying the influence

of brand addiction (in this research referred to as K-pop addiction), upward social comparison, anxiety, and SNS use on compulsive buying, with the title "*The Influence of K-pop Addiction, SNS Use, Upward Social Comparison, and Anxiety on Compulsive Buying of K-pop Fans in Indonesia.*"

Research on brand addiction has previously been conducted with food items, beauty brands, clothing brands, and other luxury brands in Indonesia. However, this is the first time research has been conducted on K-pop fans and brands that use K-pop idols as human brands. Moreover, the addition of variables such as SNS usage, upward social comparison, and anxiety, with their mediation on K-pop addiction, makes this research more complex than previous studies (Malik et al. 2023).

The study by Zheng et al. (2020) on compulsive purchase behavior driven by social comparison, anxiety, and SNS usage served as a reference for the variables in this investigation. Using the journal by Nikolinakou et al. (2024) as a reference, the researcher added an independent variable of K-pop addiction, which originated from brand addiction in the research of Mrad and Cui (2020), which explains compulsive buying as a cause of brand addiction, supported by the results of the journals by Nikolinakou et al. (2024) and Francioni et al. (2021). The researcher also explained the novelty of this research. Figure 1 shows the framework of this study.

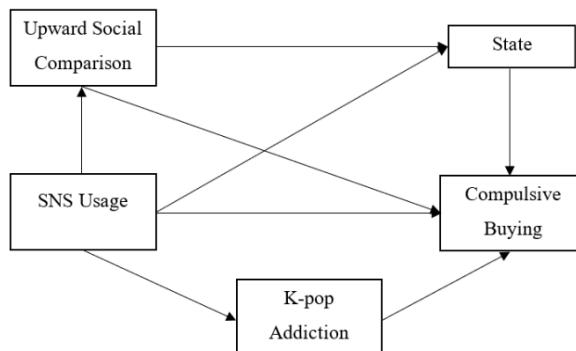


Figure 1. Conceptual Research Model

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative method with a survey as the primary data source. The population consisted of 268 people who like K-pop in Indonesia. The samples successfully collected from the online survey were 268 K-pop fans who had purchased K-pop merchandise through *jastip* services. A questionnaire with 32 items rated on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 5 for "strongly agree") was developed to collect and measure data. This instrument included five subscales: (1) Upward Social Comparison (Bai, X., Liu, X., & Liu, 2013), (2) SNS Usage (Tandoc et al., 2015), (3) State Anxiety (Gong et al., 2010), (4) K-pop Addiction (Mrad & Cui, 2017), and (5) Compulsive Buying (Maraz et al., 2014). The data were analyzed using partial least squares (SmartPLS 3). To evaluate the instrument's validity, a panel of experts reviewed and confirmed its face and content validity. In addition, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the instrument's reliability. The research was conducted using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique, which was carried out using PLS technology with SmartPLS analysis software (version 3.3.6).

RESULTH AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Data collected by the research

Descriptive statistics	Level	Abundance	Percentage
Age	17-22	82	30.6%
	23-28	128	47.8%
	29-33	46	17.2%
	34-40	12	4.5%
Domicile	DKI Jakarta	47	17.5%
	Tangerang	15	5.5%
	Bekasi	8	2.9%
	Bogor	10	3.7%
	West Java	10	3.7%
	Central Java	126	47%
	D.I. Yogyakarta	23	8.5%
	East Java	18	6.7%
	Bali	2	0.7%
	Kalimantan	5	1.8%
Favorite K-pop Group	Sulawesi	4	1.4%
	Super Junior	10	3.7%
	SHINee	21	7.8%
	Blackpink	32	11.9%
	Seventeen	83	31%
	BTS	41	15.3%
	EXO	20	7.5%
	IU	18	6.7%
	DAY6	16	6%
	NCT	12	4.5%
	Stray Kids	15	5.6%

As shown in Table 1, the majority of the participants were in the 23-28 years age group (47.8%) live in Central Java (47%). Moreover, the most popular K-pop group is Seventeen (31%) and the least is Super Junior (3.7%).

4.2 Assessing the fit of the measurement model Figure 2 illustrates the measurement model in the standard mode

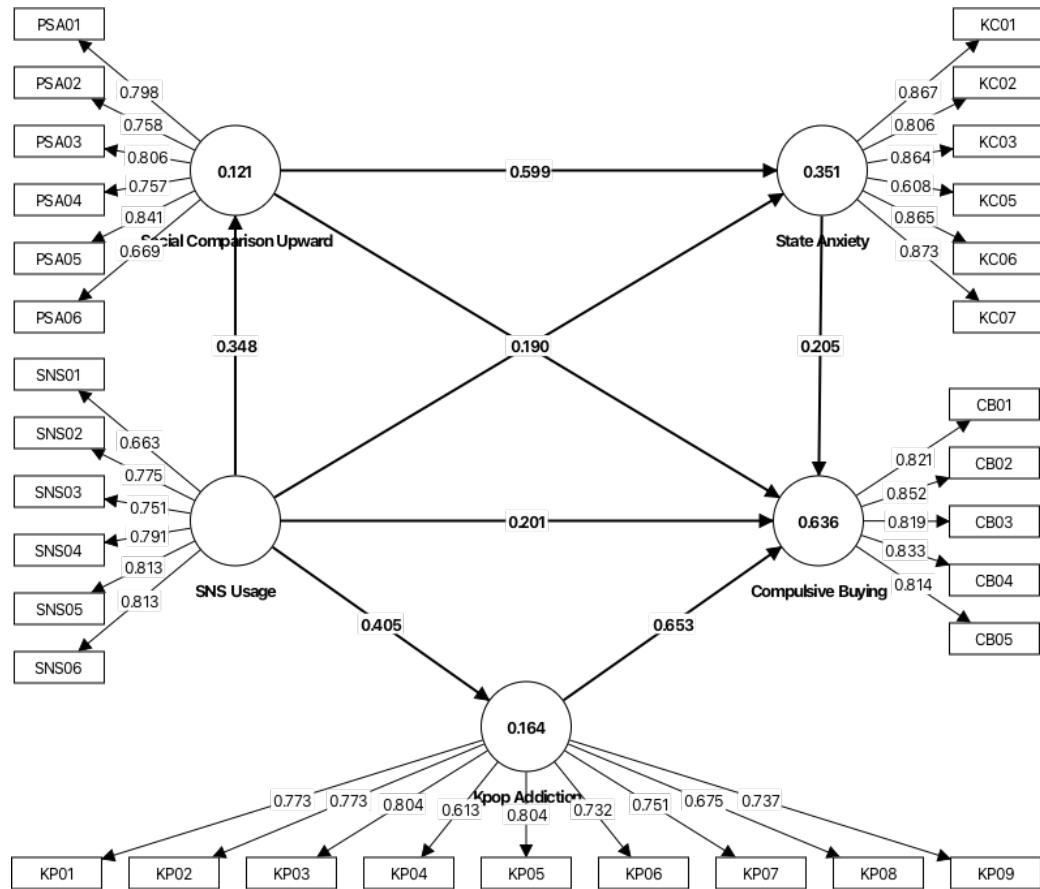


Figure 1. Model for measuring model factors in standard mode

Cronbach's alpha is used to assess the reliability of the investigation. The calculated values are greater than 0.7 for all the dimensions, indicating the acceptable reliability of all the subscales and items. Table 2, provides Cronbach's alpha values as well as the results of composite reliability and convergent validity assessments.

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha and hybrid reliability and convergent validity

Variable	AVE	CA	CR
CB	0.685	0.885	0.886
KP	0.580	0.896	0.899
SNS	0.592	0.862	0.873
PSA	0.598	0.864	0.865
KC	0.741	0.912	0.913

Note: CB= Compulsive Buying, KP= K-pop Addiction, SNS= SNS Usage, PSA= Upward Social Comparison, KC= State Anxiety. CA= Cronbach's Alpha, CR= Composite Reliability.

According to Table 3, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each latent variable is greater than the correlation coefficients between that variable and other variables, which establishes the discriminant validity of the model. Moreover, in this research, Compulsive Buying (CB) has a square root value of 0.828 is greater than other constructs 0.760 (KP), 0.201 (SNS), 0.486 (PSA), 0.700 (KC).

Table 3. Composite reliabilities and average variances extracted

Variable	CB	KP	SNS	PSA	KC
CB	0.828				
KP	0.760	0.762			
SNS	0.201	0.426	0.770		
PSA	0.486	0.582	0.347	0.773	
KC	0.700	0.734	0.157	0.589	0.861

Table 4. Results of hypothesis testing

	O	M	STDEV	T	P Values	Results
KP → CB	0.653	0.654	0.064	10.210	0.000	Meaningful, positive
SNS → CB	0.201	0.206	0.065	3.100	0.002	Meaningful, positive
SNS → KP	0.405	0.410	0.057	7.114	0.000	Meaningful, positive
SNS → PSA	0.348	0.351	0.058	5.982	0.000	Meaningful, positive
SNS → KC	0.190	0.195	0.065	2.920	0.004	Meaningful, positive
PSA → CB	0.143	0.142	0.052	2.770	0.006	Meaningful, positive
PSA → KC	0.599	0.601	0.048	12.461	0.000	Meaningful, positive
KC → CB	0.205	0.207	0.070	2.934	0.003	Meaningful, positive
SNS → KP → CB	0.265	0.269	0.050	5.327	0.000	Meaningful, positive

Note: CB= Compulsive Buying, KP= K-pop Addiction, SNS= SNS Usage, PSA= Upward Social Comparison, KC= State Anxiety, ** (Significant), ns (Non-Sig), Original Sample (O), M= Sample Mean, STDEV= Standard Deviation, T= T-Statistics. sig 95%, std error 5% = t > 1,96 dan p < 0,05.

Table 4 demonstrates the results of data analysis based on direct relationships and the effects of the mediating variables that are examined using the bootstrap method, which shows the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The results of this study indicate that of the 9 hypotheses proposed, all were accepted. Previous studies used brand variables in general and showed that the test value of SNS use mediated by brand addiction on compulsive buying was smaller than its greater direct effect (Nikolinakou et al., 2024). However, in this study using humans as brands, it was found that the indirect effect value through mediation from K-pop addiction was greater than the direct effect value of the two variables.

This study focuses on the relationship between Upward Social Comparison, Anxiety Level, K-pop Addiction, SNS Usage, and Compulsive Buying among K-pop fans in Indonesia. This study also found that there is an indirect effect of K-pop addiction that mediates between SNS usage and compulsive buying. From 268 respondents, most of whom are between the ages of 23-28 years old, which shows that the impact of K-pop addiction on compulsive buying is high, but for upward social comparison, SNS usage, and anxiety level is low. This study also found that the mediation effect of K-pop addiction is greater than its direct effect, which means that most of the relationship between the independent variable (SNS usage) and the dependent variable (compulsive buying) occurs through the mediator variable (K-pop addiction), not directly.

This study can be said to be the first to examine the relationship between upward social comparison, SNS usage, anxiety level, and K-pop addiction towards compulsive buying by referring to the variable of brand addiction to K-pop addiction using Human Brand Theory. Thomson, (2006) explains the theoretical lens of the relationship between an idol and his/her followers when the media persona develops into a human brand (an individual considered a brand).

CONCLUSION

This study successfully identified the key factors influencing compulsive buying behavior among K-pop fans in Indonesia, with the primary finding that K-pop addiction serves as the main mediator between social media usage (SNS) and compulsive buying. The analysis revealed that fans' emotional attachment to their idols as human brands exerts a stronger influence than direct exposure to social media content. Additionally, upward social comparison and anxiety were found to significantly exacerbate compulsive buying tendencies, particularly when fans constantly compare themselves to idols or fellow fans on social media platforms. These findings make an important contribution to the literature by introducing the human brand theory perspective within the context of K-pop fandom, while also uncovering unique dynamics in the Indonesian context, such as the prevalent *jas tip* (proxy shopping) phenomenon.

The practical implications of this research include recommendations for the industry to develop more responsible marketing strategies, such as promoting merchandise based on sentimental value rather than exploitative tactics, and implementing measures to limit excessive targeted advertising. For fans, the study highlights the need for greater awareness of the financial and psychological risks associated with compulsive buying. A key limitation of this study is its geographically restricted sample and cross-sectional approach, suggesting that future research could

benefit from broader sampling and longitudinal methods to better understand behavioral changes over time.

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