



THE ROLE OF FANDOM CULTURE IN K-POP MERCHANDISE PURCHASE DECISIONS AMONG INDONESIAN FANS

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received July 03, 2026

Revised July 19, 2026

Accepted July 21, 2026

Available online August 01, 2026

Keywords:

K-pop, Fandom Culture, Purchase Decisions, Digital Engagement, Consumer Behavior



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ABSTRACT

The research initially begins with the very high intensity K-pop fandom culture that facilitates digital involvement in Indonesia, although it is not accompanied by the buying of official merchandise in all cases. Therefore, the present research seeks to study fandom culture by investigating influence which influence the purchasing decision of Indonesian fans purchasing K-pop merchandise and findings which motivate and prevent purchasing. This study uses a quantitative methodology through an online survey among Indonesia's K-pop fans, and it is subsequently statistically evaluated in terms of the relationships between variables. The investigation demonstrates that culture of fandom and digital engagement have an impact on purchases but a conversion from digital fandom to purchase behaviour is also a function of value, purchasing power and perceived benefit of the product. We can conclude from these observations that culture of fandom offers more than just emotional support; it also influences consumption behavior, which has a strategic implication for K-pop agencies that can formulate more effective promotional campaigns with product sale potential.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid proliferation of the Korean Wave/Hallyu, it has come to be recognized as a cultural phenomenon internationally, and in Indonesia, a major part of the landscape of the Korean world, Korean culture has become a more important part of the global landscape. Introduced as a part of Korean drama programming broadcast on TV in the late 2000s, Hallyu has gradually expanded into larger levels of cultural consumption, including K-pop, fashion, food, and beauty products, which demonstrates how Korean popular culture penetrated Indonesia's popular spending styles and habits in cultural consumption forms (Ahmad et al., 2024).

In parallel to rising K-pop popularity, increased consumption of official K-pop products has also made this country's commercial culture and tourism more salient. Albums, photocards, keychains, lightsticks – the products we have now are no longer just entertainment, they are actually a symbolic object for identity, loyalty for idols, emotional feeling. This phenomenon provides opportunities for design and digital marketing innovation by small and micro enterprises as K-pop fandoms constitute the largest loyal and commercially viable consumer cluster (Nurjanah & Srifauzi, 2025), as well as they are embedded and undergirding the broader economic backdrop.

Modern digital technology platforms have played a crucial role in shaping the K-pop consumer market of Indonesia as well. The recent rapid development of availability of internet, streaming media and social media platforms, as well as the ability to have an exchange with idols and fandom communities on their platforms, the circulation of promotional content and merchandise information (Ahmad et al., 2024). Regarding this latter phenomenon, fandoms are viewed as shared social communities when emotions, identity, and jointness drive fandom's actions towards idol support through online-mediated behavior and consumption (Handoko et al., 2024; Miranda et al., 2022). This pattern is particularly apparent within Indonesia, a nation where K-pop followers frequently utilize Instagram, Twitter/X and WhatsApp to receive updates, provide information for and take part in fandom-related promotional events (Sutardi et al., 2024).

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The strategic importance of Indonesia in an international context within the K-pop industry also reinforces why a study of merchandise consumption deserves further study. Statistics give Indonesia about 18.47% of the worldwide K-pop music market, which is one of the largest K-pop consumer markets (Chartmetric, 2024, as cited in Goodstats, 2024). At the same time, the trend of K-pop fandoms has inspired fans to gather and exhibit merchandise to pay homage to idols and establish idols as legitimate in the fan community (Hidayati & Harahap, 2024). Such conditions raise the argument that K-pop fans' consumption of merchandise cannot be reduced solely to a functional economic transaction, but that it also needs to be a socially and symbolically embedded practice.

In contrast, prior research has focused more on promotion, consumer behavior, and motivation as antecedents to purchase intention, rather than whether under circumstances of economic constraint, this intention could be positively translated into purchasing choice (Lolonto et al., 2024; Fadhillah et al., 2024). Most Indonesian K-pop fans are either students or young users with low and unstable income, therefore, intense fandom attachment does not cause any purchase decision. Accordingly, willingness to pay stands as an analytical variable that can be used to investigate if such a positive emotive and digital commitment is transformed into a suitable purchase decision when facing specific financial limitations.

To bridge this gap, this study aims to examine the interaction between fandom culture, digital engagement, product and situational factors, and willingness to pay in influencing Indonesian fans' purchase of official K-pop merchandise. It serves not only to clarify fandom-based enthusiasm's relationship with actual consumption behavior but also to add to the Hallyu, fandom, and consumer behavior literature by clarifying the mechanism through which fandom culture is translated into purchase decision in the Indonesian context.

2. METHODS

This is a quantitative study based on a survey using online questionnaires. The study subjects are Indonesian K-pop fans aged 17 or older who are currently engaged in the fandom, know the K-pop items, and are members of the fandom, participating in fandom activities on social media. The research sample was established through non-probability sampling, specifically employing a combination of purposive and snowball selection to identify respondents who fulfill the requirements. In this study, primary data were collected via an online Likert-scale questionnaire, while secondary data were obtained from academic journals, e-books, and statistical data to strengthen the background and the development of the research instrument. There are several variables measured: independent variables such as fandom culture and product & situational factors; mediating variables such as digital engagement and willingness to pay; and dependent variables such as purchase decision. Data collected via online questionnaires were analyzed using SmartPLS software through several assessments, including reliability and validity tests, descriptive analysis, and PLS-SEM, to investigate the correlations between variables, encompassing both direct and indirect impacts. The researcher employed measurement model and structural model evaluations to evaluate construct quality, the strength of correlations across variables, and the importance of the study hypotheses.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis began with an evaluation of the measurement model to ensure that all constructs met the required reliability and validity criteria before testing the structural relationships. The results indicate that all constructs satisfied the thresholds for Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. This shows that the constructs of digital engagement, fandom culture, product and situational factors, willingness to pay, and purchase decision were measured consistently and were suitable for further analysis.

Table 1

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Digital Engagement	0.897	0.899	0.936	0.829
Fandom Culture	0.900	0.901	0.937	0.833
Product & Situational Factors	0.877	0.888	0.924	0.802
Purchase Decision	0.874	0.874	0.922	0.798
Willingness to Pay	0.939	0.940	0.957	0.846

Construct Reliability and Validity

Discriminant validity was then assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio. All values were below the recommended threshold, indicating that each construct captured a distinct conceptual domain. This result is important because it confirms that the variables in the model are empirically separable and that the relationships among them can be interpreted with greater confidence.

Table 2 Discriminant Validity

	Digital Engagement	Fandom Culture	Product & Situational Factors	Purchase Decision	Willingness to Pay
Digital Engagement					
Fandom Culture	0.699				
Product & Situational Factors	0.719	0.664			
Purchase Decision	0.727	0.775	0.721		
Willingness to Pay	0.752	0.722	0.762	0.775	

After the adequacy of the measurement model was established, the structural model was evaluated. The coefficient of determination shows that the model has acceptable explanatory power, particularly for willingness to pay and purchase decision. This result implies that the aforementioned variables are substantively

elucidating how official
purchases are formed

Table 3. Coefficient of

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Digital Engagement	0.396	0.392
Purchase Decision	0.495	0.492
Willingness to Pay	0.628	0.620

significant in
K-pop merchandise
among Indonesian fans.

Determination**Fandom Culture and Digital Engagement**

The findings show that fandom culture has a positive and significant effect on digital engagement. This result indicates that fandom identity, solidarity among fans, and the moral obligation to support idols serve as social drivers of fans' online activity. In this context, fandom does not operate merely as a symbolic affiliation, but as a social mechanism that encourages active participation in digital spaces. This finding is consistent with Social Identity Theory, which explains that individuals tend to behave in ways that reflect the group identities they internalize. In the present study, membership in a fandom encourages fans to follow promotions, share content, and participate in online activities related to official merchandise. Academically, this result extends prior studies by showing that fandom culture has measurable behavioral consequences in the context of consumption, not only psychological or symbolic effects.

Digital engagement, product factors, and willingness to pay

The results further show that digital engagement has a positive and significant effect on willingness to pay. Fandom culture also has a positive effect on willingness to pay, and product and situational factors positively influence willingness to pay as well. These results show that willingness to pay is influenced by social attachment, digital interaction, and product factors.

Table 4 Path Coefficients

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Digital Engagement -> Willingness to Pay	0.306	0.305	0.066	4.621	0.000
Fandom Culture -> Digital Engagement	0.629	0.626	0.062	10.145	0.000
Fandom Culture -> Willingness to Pay	0.272	0.272	0.068	4.018	0.000
Product & Situational Factors -> Willingness to Pay	0.339	0.338	0.064	5.252	0.000
Willingness to Pay -> Purchase Decision	0.703	0.701	0.047	14.960	0.000

The influence of digital engagement on willingness to pay indicates that interaction with promotional content, official accounts, and fandom-related activities strengthens fans' perception that merchandise is worth purchasing. This is consistent with Customer Engagement Theory, which views engagement as a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral connection between consumers and consumption objects. For K-pop merchandise, digital engagement appears to reinforce perceived value and financial readiness rather than directly producing purchase behavior. At the same time, the positive effect of product and situational factors on willingness to pay highlights the importance of accessibility and exclusivity in shaping purchase evaluation. Official K-pop merchandise is therefore not perceived merely as a functional product, but as a symbolic object that carries emotional and social value. This finding is important because it shows that purchase readiness depends not only on fandom loyalty, but also on whether the product is considered valuable, obtainable, and worth the financial sacrifice.

Willingness To Pay and Purchase Decision

The most pronounced relationship in the model is the effect of willingness to pay on purchase decision. The research found that the decision to buy official K-pop products is primarily determined by fans' readiness to allocate financial resources to the product. Namely, fandom fervor and digital engagement are only half the battle, as they must be complemented by an actual willingness to pay before a purchase decision can occur. This finding would concord with the Theory of Planned Behavior, focusing specifically on the notion of readiness to act that is influenced by evaluation, social influence, and perceived control. For this aspect, willingness to pay acts as the catalyst that converts fandom-based attachment and digital interaction into purchase behavior. This research adds to the literature by demonstrating that official K-pop merchandise consumption is better explained through willingness to pay than through purchase intention alone, which seems to be an important gap in research on fandom and consumer behavior in Indonesia.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that fandom culture contributes to the purchase decision of official K-pop merchandise within the Indonesian fan community through the mediating roles of digital engagement and willingness to pay. The analysis indicates that fandom identification, solidarity among fandom members, and the moral drive to support idols are not a mere symbolic attachment but instead act as social forces that

encourage fans to engage more actively in digital spaces and to develop a greater readiness to pay for official merchandise. This research has also demonstrated that digital engagement strengthens willingness to pay through higher engagement with promotional material, official channels, and fandom-engaging social media. Additionally, product and situational factors, especially accessibility and exclusivity, are significant in promoting fans' perception of merchandise value. The aforementioned results indicate that fans are not motivated to purchase primarily by fandom enthusiasm, but rather by how social identification interacts with digital participation, product evaluation, and financial readiness. The main conclusion of this research is that willingness to pay is the most influential mechanism in terms of converting fandom-based enthusiasm to an actual purchase decision. The high digital engagement and strong fan attachment are not enough to influence the purchasing decision if the fans do not find the merchandise valuable, attainable, and worth the financial sacrifice. In this sense, willingness to pay is the primary explanatory variable that translates interest and interaction into actual consumption behavior. Thus, this study adds to the Hallyu, fandom, and consumer behavior literature by showing that official K-pop merchandise purchases arise from a multidimensional process driven by fandom culture, digital engagement, product and situational factors, and willingness to pay. The study therefore extends previous research that has largely focused on purchase intention by demonstrating that willingness to pay provides a more relevant explanation for the transition from fan engagement to actual purchase decision in the Indonesian K-pop merchandise context

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