

# Korean celebrities as brand ambassadors for local brands: an analysis of consumer preferences

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## Abstract

Amidst intensifying market competition and globalization, Indonesian local brands increasingly collaborate with Korean artists as Brand Ambassadors (BA) to leverage the Korean Wave (Hallyu) phenomenon. This study investigates the influence of Korean artist BA on consumer preferences and purchase decisions regarding local brands in Indonesia. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through structured interviews with ten informants selected via non-probability quota sampling. Participants comprised Indonesian consumers aged 17 and above who are enthusiasts of Korean culture and purchasers of brands endorsed by Korean artists. The results reveal that while Korean BA significantly enhance brand awareness, image, and consumer interest, motivated by fan loyalty and promotional incentives, product quality remains the primary determinant in purchase and repurchase decisions. Consumers acknowledge the strategic value of BAs for visibility but distinguish this from product quality assurance. Consequently, while the utilization of Korean BA is an effective strategy for market expansion and brand positioning, it must be substantiated by consistent product quality to mitigate risks and sustain long-term consumer loyalty.

**Keywords:** BA, korean wave, consumer preferences, local brands, product quality.

## Introduction

Competition in the local market is currently increasingly fierce, coinciding with advancements in technology and globalization. To survive in these conditions, companies must implement marketing strategies. According to Swastha and Handoko (as cited in Putra, 2023), marketing strategy is a series of policies and rules, goals and objectives that direct marketing efforts from time to time, especially in facing competitive conditions and a constantly changing environment. One strategy often used in promotions or advertising is collaborating with celebrities as BA. According to Sari (2023), consumer behavior is the process of selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products or services performed by a consumer to fulfill their needs and desires. Understanding consumer behavior is key for companies to develop effective marketing strategies that satisfy consumer needs.

In this era of globalization, the Korean Wave is one of the most widely discussed and interested phenomena. The entry of the Korean Wave into Indonesia is not new; however, the Korean Wave has become increasingly widespread, and its enthusiasts continue to grow to this day. Korean dramas (K-Drama) and Korean pop (K-POP) are mediums that have successfully spread the Korean Wave to various countries, including Indonesia. Therefore, many companies collaborate with Korean artists and idols, appointing them as brand ambassadors. Not only that, companies also often become sponsors in the production process of dramas, music videos, and films from Korea. The following is a list of local brands using Korean artist brand ambassador.

Many local brands had collaborated with Korean artists as their brand ambassadors, it is evident that the Korean Wave phenomenon has become a trend in marketing strategies widely used by companies. The large number of Korean artist and idol fans in Indonesia makes it easier for companies to market their products. Furthermore, many fans want to be like their idols, so they are willing to exert extra effort to mimic their idols' lifestyles, such as buying goods and services recommended by them. Even often, fans buy products solely as a form of support for their idols who become brand ambassadors. Therefore, leveraging the popularity and personality possessed by brand ambassadors is believed to enhance brand image. Additionally, it can attract public attention and encourage consumers to buy. This naturally raises various consumer opinions and influences consumer preferences in purchasing and using products.

**Table 1. Brands with BA**

<b>Product Category</b>	<b>Brand</b>	<b>Brand Ambassador</b>
Skincare	Somethinc	Han So Hee NCT Dream
	Scarlett Whitening	Song Jong Ki TWICE EXO
	Azarine	Lee Min Ho
	White Lab	Sehun EXO
Cosmetic	MS Glow	Cha Eun Woo ASTRO
	Azarine	Red Velvet
	Somethinc	Han So Hee
Food	Lemonilo	NCT Dream
	Mie Sedap	Choi Siwon
	Nabati	Enhypen
	Roma Kelapa	Lee Min Ho
	Oreo	Blackpink
	Mr. Potato	Cha Eun Woo ASTRO
	Chitato	SEVENTEEN (Scoups, Wonwoo, Vernon)
	Ultra Milk	Stray Kids SEVENTEEN (Scoups, Wonwoo, Vernon)
Beverage	Nu Green Tea	NCT 127
	Mogu-Mogu	SEVENTEEN

Research conducted by Fuadi et al. (2023), explains that product quality will still influence purchase decisions, whereas brand ambassadors and price have no influence. However, in research by Purnama (2024), it was concluded that brand ambassadors, quality, and price of a product will mutually influence consumer purchase interest in Scarlett Whitening products in Jakarta.

Research by Nadila and Windasari (2022), explains that personal congruence and fan engagement have a significant impact on customer brand loyalty through brand attachment and brand love. The Korean Wave has a positive and significant influence on purchase decisions, as explained in research by Sembiring and Prabandari (2021). This is supported by research results stating that K-POP BA have a significant influence on consumer loyalty (Maulida & Kamila, 2021).

Despite growing scholarly attention to Korean Wave marketing, a significant research gap persists. Existing studies have examined brand ambassadors primarily through quantitative lenses — measuring brand awareness, purchase intention, and loyalty scores — without adequately exploring the subjective reasoning processes that lead Indonesian consumers to prefer or reject Korean artist brand ambassadors. Moreover, prior research by Fuadi et al. (2023) and Nadila and Windasari (2022) focused largely on fan engagement and congruence effects without investigating how consumers who are not K-pop fans

respond to Korean celebrity endorsements, nor how product quality moderates the effectiveness of such endorsements. This study therefore addresses these gaps by adopting a qualitative-descriptive approach to explore, from the consumers' own perspective, the factors driving their preferences toward local brands that employ Korean artist brand ambassadors. In doing so, this study contributes empirical qualitative evidence from the Indonesian context to the broader literature on celebrity endorsement and consumer preferences formation.

## **Literature Review**

### **Consumer Behavior**

According to Engel et al. (1995), consumer behavior is the behavior of a person or individual involved in efforts to obtain and use goods and services, including processes preceded by decision-making to determine said action (Sinulingga & Sihotang, 2023). Another definition according to Kotler & Keller is that consumer behavior is a study that learns about individuals, groups, and organizations in selecting, buying, using, and evaluating products to fulfill their desires and needs (Dewi et al., 2022). According to Gerald Zaldman and Melanie Wallendorf, consumer behavior is the physical activity of individuals and the decision-making process in obtaining, using, and evaluating goods and services (Sari, 2023). Consumer behavior is the basis of consumer preferences in making purchasing decisions for goods or services. Based on its nature, consumer behavior is divided into two: rational and irrational consumer behavior.

According to Sinulingga & Sihotang (2023), in determining purchase decisions, consumer behavior is influenced by two factors: internal and external factors. Internal factors are factors originating from the consumer themselves. Internal factors consist of learning experience, memory, personality, motivation, involvement, attitude, and perception. External factors are factors originating from the environment. External factors consist of culture and social factors. Besides internal and external factors, economic factors can also influence consumer behavior.

### **Consumer Preferences**

According to Ronauli & Indriani (2020), consumer preferences are subjective (individual) tastes assessed from the benefits obtained from a product. According to Guleria & Palmar, consumer preferences are how consumers rank products or services,

or prefer one type of product over another, measured from the satisfaction or benefits obtained.

For the purposes of this study, consumer preferences is specifically defined as the inclination to purchase a product based on a combination of subjective evaluations, including emotional attachment to the brand ambassador, perceived product quality, and the symbolic value associated with the Korean Wave, rather than purely rational cost-benefit calculations. This definition distinguishes preference from mere purchase intention: a consumer may express preference for a brand ambassador-endorsed product without completing a purchase if product quality does not meet expectations. This distinction is central to interpreting the findings presented in the Results section.

### **Marketing Strategy**

According to Kotler & Keller (2012), marketing is a series of organizational processes and functions to create communication, deliver value to consumers, and manage relationships with consumers to benefit the organization (Saleh & Said, 2019). According to Cravens & Piercy, marketing strategy is a planned approach carried out by a company to achieve their goals (Darsana et al., 2023). Marketing strategies can be made by determining target markets, developing action plans, and allocating resources to achieve goals (Rachmawati in Saleh & Said, 2019). The purpose of creating a marketing strategy is to understand what is needed and wanted by consumers, create good and unique branding, and build relationships with consumers. Several elements consisting of marketing strategies are market segments, target markets, value propositions, marketing mix, pricing, and promotion.

### **Brand Ambassador**

According to Utami et al. (2020), brand ambassador is anyone who is passionate about the brand, is willing to talk about it, and may even volunteer brand information on her own". Meanwhile, Fuadi et al. (2023), state that brand ambassador is a person or group of people that come from a popular public figure or key opinion leader (KOL) with the aim to advertise a brand. The use of brand ambassadors is one of the company's efforts to introduce and create a good brand image to consumers and can influence or invite consumers to buy the product. Furthermore, Ajnya et al. (2023), jeopardize the indicators used to evaluate brand ambassadors, namely visibility, credibility, attraction, and power. Lestari (2018), said that brand ambassadors has benefits, such as press coverage, changing perception of brand, attracting new customers, and freshening up an existing campaign.

The theoretical foundation for understanding brand ambassador effectiveness draws on McCracken's (1989) meaning transfer model, which proposes that celebrities carry culturally constituted meanings, values, lifestyles, and personality traits, that transfer first to the product they endorse, and subsequently to the consumer who purchases that product. In the Korean Wave context, Korean artists carry symbolic meanings associated with modernity, beauty standards, and aspirational lifestyles that attach to local brands through the endorsement process. Complementary to this, the celebrity-brand fit framework emphasizes that endorsement effectiveness depends on the degree of congruence between the celebrity's image and the brand's positioning (Kamins, 1990). This study positions its findings within these frameworks: informants' responses regarding BA appeal, product quality evaluation, and fan loyalty behaviors are interpreted as reflections of meaning transfer and fit perception processes operating in the Indonesian market.

It is important to distinguish between two consumer segments implicated in Korean Wave brand ambassador strategies. The first comprises active K-pop fans whose purchase behavior is driven primarily by idol loyalty, a form of parasocial attachment that motivates product support regardless of personal need. The second comprises general consumers attracted to a brand through the ambassador's broader cultural prestige but who evaluate the product on functional criteria such as quality and price. These two groups are likely to differ in their preference formation processes and their susceptibility to the meaning transfer described above. This study explores both segments through its informant pool, and the distinction is reflected in the divergent responses reported in the findings.

## **Korean Wave**

Korean wave is a term for the global spread of Korean popular culture to various countries. Korean wave in Korean is called Hallyu (Han Ryu 한류). This spread refers to the popularity of K-POP, K-Drama, K-Film which are the main mediums in the spread of Hallyu. The spread of Hallyu first peaked in 1990, caused by the success of the K-Drama broadcast "What Is Love?" in 1997 on China Central Television, and the concert of the Korean boyband H.O.T in Beijing in 2000 (Samosir & Wee, 2024). The spread of Hallyu increased in 2002 caused by the K-Drama titled "Winter Sonata". The popularity of K-POP idols is increasingly spread in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, the United States, and Europe (Hendarsin et al., 2024). There are several indicators of the Korean wave, understanding, attitude and behavior, and perception (Lestari, 2018)

## **Brand Image**

According to Purwati & Cahyanti (2022), brand image is the perception and belief held by consumers, as reflected in the associations stored in consumer memory. A good and strong brand image will always be the choice in consumer buying decisions. Factors that form brand image are consumer perceptions based on brand or product recognition, product quality, product size, product durability, and product packaging design.

## **Purchase Decision**

According to Peter & Olson in Marsha et al. (2019), buying decision is a process in which a consumer decides based on knowledge to purchase a particular product among other available alternatives. Meanwhile, Ferdiana Fasha et al. (2022) said, purchase decision is a process experienced by consumers before buying a product. Another definition about purchase decision was brought by Schiffman & Kanuk (2010), a process experienced by consumers when choosing a product from 2 choices or more. This means someone must have alternative products selected to be able to make a decision (Ferdiana Fasha et al., 2022).

According to Arfah (2022), purchase decisions are influenced by factors, namely internal factors consisting of motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes; and external factors covering culture, social class, and membership in a group. According to Arfah (2022), there are several purchase decision processes, namely problem recognition of needs, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and finally post-purchase behavior. Based on the explanation, it can be concluded that local brands affected by the Korean Wave create collaborations between brands and celebrities from Korea. The use of Korean artist brand ambassadors on local brands creates a good brand image, thereby influencing consumer preferences towards the brand. From these events, purchase decisions may occur.

The theoretical constructs reviewed above are interconnected in a sequential chain relevant to this study's focus. The Korean Wave serves as the cultural backdrop and aspirational value system within which brand ambassador selection occurs; a Korean artist brand ambassador then transfers these cultural associations to the brand, thereby elevating its perceived prestige and desirability. This enhanced brand image, in turn, shapes consumer preferences by fostering the inclination to choose the endorsed brand over alternatives. Consumer preference then ultimately manifests as the final stage: the purchase decision. This conceptual chain, from the Korean Wave through brand ambassador selection and brand image to consumer preference and finally purchase

decision, structures the interpretive framework applied throughout the Results and Discussion sections.

## Methods

The type of research used in this study is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. According to Sarosa (2021), qualitative research is research that focuses on its natural order, and the research is carried out on phenomena comprehensively with all their complexity. Descriptive research is collecting information about an event as it is at the time of the research without making conclusions that apply generally (Hikmawati, 2020).

### Population and Sample

According to Amin et al. (2023), population is a generalization area existing in research covering objects or subjects from which conclusions can be drawn. The population in this study consists of individuals aged at least 17 years, residing in Indonesia, fans of K-Pop, K-Drama, K-Film, or other Korean culture, and consumers of brands with Korean artist BAs.

According to Amin et al. (2023), a sample is a small part of the population used to represent the population in the research conducted. Meanwhile, according to Amin et al., (2023), a sample is a part of the population taken using certain methods. The sample in this study consists of individuals aged at least 17 years, residing in Indonesia, fans of K-Pop, K-Drama, K-Film, or other Korean culture, and consumers of brands with Korean artist brand ambassadors. The sampling technique used is non-probability, namely a technique where every member of the population does not have the same opportunity to be selected as a sample member (Amin et al., 2023). The type of non-probability sampling taken is quota sampling, namely a technique to determine samples from a population that have certain criteria according to the desired number (Amin et al., 2023).

This study involved a total of 10 informants selected through purposive sampling. Informants were selected on the basis of the following criteria: (1) Indonesian consumers aged 18–35 years; (2) active awareness of the Korean Wave, defined as regular consumption of K-pop music, K-drama, or related content; (3) prior purchase of at least one local brand product that employs a Korean artist as brand ambassador; and (4) willingness to participate in an in-depth interview. The age range reflects the primary demographic segment targeted by Korean Wave marketing in Indonesia, and the

purchase criterion ensures informants possess direct consumer experience relevant to the research question.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

In this study, the technique that will be used to collect data is interviews. According to Sarosa (2021), interviews are discussions between 2 people or more with a specific purpose. The type of interview that will be used is structured interviews. During the interview, the researcher will ask questions that have been prepared on a question list or questionnaire, then the researcher will record and record the answers from the respondents.

### **Sources and Data Collection**

According to Purwanto (2022), primary data sources are obtained directly from the first source or respondents, not through intermediaries either individuals or groups. The data collection technique used in this study is the interview technique. Interviews in this study can be divided into direct interview (face-to-face) and online interview (remote). Interviews were conducted in 2021, with each session lasting approximately 30–60 minutes. Data collection employed both direct (face-to-face) and online (video call) formats, depending on informant availability and location, and all interviews were conducted in Indonesian to ensure natural and uninhibited responses. A semi-structured interview guide was developed prior to data collection, covering key themes including awareness of the brand ambassador, purchase motivation, product quality evaluation, and overall brand perception. All interviews were audio-recorded with informant consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to form the primary data corpus.

### **Data Analysis**

In qualitative research with a descriptive approach, the elaboration of data analysis involves a deep understanding of consumer preferences regarding the use of Korean brand ambassadors on local brands. Data analysis followed the thematic analysis procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), proceeding through six stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts; (2) generation of initial codes by labeling meaningful segments of text related to consumer preferences, brand ambassador perceptions, and purchase motivations; (3) searching for themes by grouping related codes into broader conceptual categories; (4) reviewing and refining themes against the full data set; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the final report. This process resulted in five thematic categories that structure

the Results section: use of Korean artist brand ambassadors, influence on consumer perception, factors shaping consumer preferences, the relationship between brand ambassador and product quality, and the effectiveness of the strategy.

### **Identifications of Themes and Patterns**

Through in-depth interviews with respondents, audio transcriptions, or interview notes made. The data is then analyzed to identify main themes that emerge related to consumer preferences towards Korean artist brand ambassadors and local brands. Data obtained from interviews are grouped based on similarities or patterns that appear. This allows for the identification of similarities and differences in consumer preferences among different groups. Content from interviews, either in the form of text or field notes, is analyzed in depth to understand the views and arguments of respondents related to the use of Korean artist brand ambassadors on local brands.

Main findings from content analysis are identified, such as preference tendencies for Korean artist brand ambassadors on local brands or brand image. Data from different respondents are analyzed to find differences in their preferences towards Korean artist brand ambassadors on local brands. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, this study employed three measures. First, data triangulation was applied by cross-referencing responses across all 10 informants, identifying convergent patterns and noting divergent cases to strengthen analytical conclusions. Second, thick description, providing detailed contextual accounts of informants' responses, including their rationale and the conditions under which preferences were formed, is employed throughout the Results section to enable readers to judge transferability to similar contexts. Third, member checking was conducted: a summary of key findings was shared with a subset of informants following the initial analysis phase, and their feedback confirmed that the interpretations accurately reflected their expressed views.

## **Results and Discussion**

The following results are drawn from thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with 10 purposively selected informants. The five thematic categories presented below were derived directly from the coding process described in the Methods section: initial codes generated from transcript segments were grouped iteratively until five stable, internally coherent themes emerged. It should be noted that all findings reflect the views and experiences of the participating informants in this study; they are not intended to represent Indonesian consumers in general, and claims of broader generalizability are not asserted.

## Observation Results

Based on the observation results that have been carried out, this study involves ten people as informants who have been selected. The ten informants obtained have met the determined criteria. The ten selected informants consist of eight females and two males. These informants were obtained through observation on social media Instagram, X, and WhatsApp. The researcher conducted selection, then sent messages to prospective informants to ask for their willingness to become informants in this study and made appointments for interviews to be conducted.

## Research Results

### *Use of Korean Artist BA on Local Brands.*

The use of Korean artist BA on local brands is a marketing strategy that is appropriate to carry out at this time. The spread of K-pop trends and the popularity of Korean artists are able to increase consumer interest in a brand. All informants have positive opinions regarding the use of Korean artist BA on Local Brands. The following are some interview quotes that can be evidence of this statement.

*"In my opinion, the use of BA who are Korean artists by local brands in Indonesia is a clever marketing strategy. This utilizes the large popularity of Korean artists among the Indonesian public, especially K-pop fans, to increase brand awareness and attract consumer interest. Korean artists have global appeal that can help local brands significantly increase their image and exposure"*

*(Informant 1).*

*"The K-pop trend and the popularity of Korean artists really have a very positive influence on the interest of local consumers, especially domestic brand products. People become more interested and aware of local products that use Korean artist icons. This is a good opportunity for local brands to take advantage of this trend."*

*(Informant 3).*

These responses indicate that Korean artist brand ambassadors function primarily as attention and awareness drivers, aligning with the meaning transfer mechanism described by McCracken (1989): the cultural capital of K-pop which includes modernity, appeal, and aspirational identity, is perceived to transfer onto the endorsed brand. The informants' framing of the strategy as "clever" and "positive" reflects a receptive consumer attitude toward cultural endorsement, consistent with findings by Fuadi et al.

(2023) that Korean brand ambassadors positively influence purchase decisions for local skincare products.

### *Influence of Korean Artist BA on Consumer Perception.*

Based on the research results obtained, BA can influence consumer perceptions regarding the image and popularity of the brand. However, the quality of a product cannot be measured from the BA used by the brand. Thus, consumers do not always choose brands with Korean artist BA only, but can also choose other brands that do not use said BA. The following are some interview quotes that can be evidence of this statement.

*"I am personally on the neutral side. Where in my opinion, the product is indeed good, because big artists certainly to become a brand ambassador (BA) of a product have been carefully considered by their management. If this product is bad, the management of the artist or maybe the artist themselves would not possibly agree to become a BA of the related product. But on the other hand, it is not necessarily true that I am suitable with the brand. So I remain careful in product selection, even though the BA is a Korean artist"*

*(Informant 5).*

Informant 5's neutral stance is analytically significant. Unlike informants who express straightforward enthusiasm, this respondent conditions their preference on product merit — accepting the brand ambassador's signaling value as a quality cue from management, but ultimately subordinating it to direct product evaluation. This divergence reveals an important segmentation within the consumer base: highly engaged fans may purchase primarily out of idol loyalty, while less fan-invested consumers apply a more rational calculus in which the brand ambassador serves as an initial attractor but not a sufficient purchase driver. This distinction maps directly onto the fan vs. general consumer typology discussed in the Literature Review.

### *Factors Influencing Consumer Preferences towards Brands with Korean Artist BA.*

Factors that influence consumer preferences towards local brands using Korean BA are not far from the form of fan loyalty to their idols, and the desire to have freebies or gifts given by certain brands to consumers. The following are some interview quotes that can be evidence of this statement.

*"The K-pop trend and the popularity of Korean artists have a major influence on consumer interest in products from local brands. K-pop fans are often very loyal and enthusiastic about supporting products associated with their idols. This can increase sales and create positive buzz"*

*for local brands. In addition, the use of Korean artists as brand ambassadors can provide positive sentiment and trust in product quality"*

*(Informant 1).*

*"Once, when NCT became brand ambassadors for local brands instant noodles Lemonilo and Tostos snacks. I bought it because I wanted to get photocard, besides photocard indeed the brand is delicious"*

*(Informant 2).*

*"Yes, I have bought local brand products that use Korean artists as brand ambassadors. Usually, the main factor is because I really like the Korean artist, so I am interested in trying the product"*

*(Informant 3).*

These responses collectively illustrate that fan loyalty and freebie incentives are the two dominant drivers of preference in this category. The NCT/photocard example (Informant 3) is particularly revealing: the purchase was jointly motivated by idol support and the tangible product value ("the brand is delicious"), suggesting that even fan-driven purchases are not immune to quality evaluation. This aligns with celebrity-brand fit theory (Kamins, 1990): when the ambassador's image fits a quality-associated brand, purchase intention is reinforced through both emotional and functional pathways.

### *BA with Product Quality*

The use of Korean artist BA influences consumer preferences. However, product quality remains the first thing chosen by consumers when buying products. This statement can be proven by the interview results obtained, namely all informants chose product quality. The following are some quotes obtained.

*"I will choose product quality more than just the use of Korean artist BA. Although BA can attract my attention, good product quality will ensure my satisfaction and encourage repurchase."*

*(Informant 1)*

*"Product quality, because quality becomes the main factor to find consumer interest to remain buying the product or used regularly."*

*(Informant 4)*

These findings confirm that product quality functions as a moderating variable in the brand ambassador-preference relationship. The brand ambassador attracts initial

consumer attention and generates trial intent, but sustained preference and repurchase behavior are governed by whether the product delivers on quality expectations. This two-stage process, attraction via ambassador, retention via quality, is consistent with Nadila and Windasari's (2022) finding that brand loyalty in Korean ambassador contexts depends on post-purchase satisfaction rather than ambassador appeal alone.

### *Success and Effectiveness of Using Korean Artist BA on Local Brands.*

Based on the research results obtained, it can be known that the use of Korean artist BA on local brands can provide positive and effective results. This effectiveness can be obtained by leveraging the popularity of Korean artists. In addition, a brand must maintain product quality, so that a brand can achieve success. Even so, certainly there are various challenges in the use of Korean artist BA on local brands. The following are some interview quotes that can be evidence of this statement.

*"I see this strategy as an innovative and effective step in competing in the market. By leveraging the popularity of Korean artists, local brands can attract a wider market attention and increase their competitiveness. This also shows that local brands adapt to global trends and strive to remain relevant in an increasingly competitive market."*

*(Informant 1).*

*"If talking about risks, in my opinion, it depends on the local brand itself being able to provide good quality to consumers or not. because during the promotion period the brand makes the BA a Korean artist, fans will try and buy it but if the product quality is not right then there will not be repurchase after the Korean artist is no longer the BA."*

*(Informant 2).*

## **Discussion**

### *Use of Korean Artist BA on Local Brands.*

The utilization of Korean artist brand ambassadors (BAs) in local brand marketing strategies offers significant strategic advantages. Firstly, employing Korean celebrities can substantially enhance brand awareness by leveraging their extensive fan bases and high visibility across social media platforms and entertainment channels. Secondly, this association elevates the brand image through the transfer of positive attributes such as trendiness, sophistication, and cultural relevance that these artists typically embody. Thirdly, Korean artist endorsements enable brands to expand their target market penetration, reaching previously inaccessible consumer segments, particularly younger

demographics and international audiences who follow Korean popular culture. Finally, Korean artists possess a distinctive appeal rooted in the global phenomenon of Hallyu (Korean Wave), which creates emotional connections and aspirational associations that transcend traditional marketing boundaries. This event received a positive response and was able to attract consumer attention. Through the global popularity possessed by Korean artists, a brand has the opportunity to be known globally and enter the international market. This finding extends prior literature in an important way. Fuadi et al. (2023) demonstrated a positive relationship between Korean brand ambassadors and purchase decisions in the skincare category using quantitative methods; the present study adds qualitative depth by revealing the underlying mechanism, consumers perceive the Korean artist's cultural capital as a credible endorsement of the brand's quality and market seriousness. The four advantages identified by informants (brand awareness, brand image, market expansion, and special appeal) correspond closely to the strategic functions of celebrity endorsement described by Utami et al. (2020), suggesting that these benefits operate across both fan and non-fan consumer segments.

### *Influence of Korean Artist BA on Consumer Perception*

By leveraging the popularity of Korean artists who become BA, it can also increase the popularity of the brand and can increase brand awareness so that brands that were previously unrecognized by the public can be recognized because they use BA. In addition, the use of Korean artist BA can also influence brand image. Because with the good image possessed by the BA, it can increase the image of the advertised brand, and if the BA is known to have a bad image by the public, then the brand image can also be viewed poorly by consumers. Conversely, BA Image can also be destroyed if a brand has a bad image. Therefore, the selection of BA must also be determined by several things so as not to bring bad impacts to both parties.

This is consistent with Nadila and Windasari's (2022) finding that personal congruence between celebrity and consumer identity is a significant driver of brand loyalty. The present study contributes nuance by showing that congruence operates differently across consumer types: for K-pop fans, the congruence is identity-based (idol loyalty); for non-fan consumers, congruence is assessed through a quality-prestige lens. The neutral informants, exemplified by Informant 4, represent consumers in whom neither form of congruence is automatically activated, requiring stronger product-level evidence to convert brand ambassador awareness into preference.

### *Factors Influencing Consumer Preferences towards Brands with Korean Artist BA*

Several psychological and behavioral mechanisms further explain how Korean artist brand ambassadors influence consumer preferences and purchase decisions. The idol attachment theory suggests that when a fan's idol becomes a brand ambassador, this association generates heightened enthusiasm and emotional investment, directly translating into trial purchases and product adoption among devoted followers. Furthermore, consumer behavior in this context often extends beyond mere product satisfaction to encompass symbolic consumption, wherein fans purchase endorsed products as tangible evidence of loyalty and support for their idol, irrespective of personal product preference or actual usage intentions, a phenomenon reflecting the parasocial relationships characteristic of fan-celebrity dynamics. Additionally, promotional incentives such as exclusive freebies (e.g., artist photocards, merchandise) and experiential rewards including fan meetings or meet-and-greet events serve as powerful extrinsic motivators that not only stimulate initial purchase behavior but also foster brand engagement and community building among consumer-fan segments.

#### *BA with Product Quality*

Product quality remains the main factor that can influence consumer preferences to buy products or even perform repurchase. Product quality must be commensurate with the BA used. A brand must always maintain and improve its product quality. With good quality and characteristics possessed by a brand, it will make consumers perform repurchase. A good brand is not only known by its BA, but also by its quality.

The primacy of product quality found here aligns with Fuadi et al.'s (2023) result that product quality is a stronger predictor of purchase decision than brand ambassador alone. This study extends that finding qualitatively: informants articulate a clear cognitive hierarchy in which the brand ambassador creates opportunity (awareness, curiosity) while product quality determines outcome (repeat purchase, loyalty). For brand managers, this implies that investing in Korean artist endorsements without ensuring product quality parity with the ambassador's prestige level risks generating one-time trial purchases that do not convert to sustained consumer preference.

#### *Success and Effectiveness of Using Korean Artist BA on Local Brands*

Based on the description presented above, it can be known that the use of Korean artist BA on local brands is a strategy that is effective and provides positive results. The effectiveness of this strategy is obtained by leveraging the popularity of the BA. So that

the brand can increase brand awareness, increase brand image, attract consumer attention, expand market reach, by using Korean artist BA. However, the use of Korean artist BA on local brands also has risks and challenges, including:

- a. High costs are required to collaborate with famous Korean artists;
- b. If bad rumours emerge about the BA, the brand image can drop;
- c. Product quality and identity must match the BA image.

The effectiveness of Korean artist brand ambassador strategies is therefore conditional rather than absolute. Effectiveness is maximized when: (a) the selected ambassador has strong fan-base engagement among the brand's target demographic, (b) the brand's product quality matches the ambassador's prestige level, and (c) tangible fan incentives are incorporated into the promotional strategy. These conditions distinguish highly effective from moderately effective implementations — a nuance not captured in prior quantitative studies that aggregate across varying levels of ambassador-brand fit.

## Conclusion

Based on the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the use of Korean artist BA on local brands can influence consumer preferences towards product purchase decisions, especially for fans. The use of this strategy can increase brand awareness and a good brand image. However, product quality remains the main factor in product purchase decisions. Thus, the use of this strategy must still be balanced with various other aspects, as well as paying attention to various existing risks and challenges. For brands that use Korean artists as BA, they must maintain and always improve their product quality, so as not to always depend on the role of Korean artists as BA by considering various risks and challenges.

The findings offer several actionable insights for local brand managers. First, Korean artist brand ambassador selection should prioritize celebrity-brand fit over fanbase size alone; a highly popular artist endorsing a product perceived as low-quality will generate initial trial but not loyalty. Second, brands should incorporate fan-oriented incentives — limited-edition photocards, signed merchandise, or fan meet access — as these directly drive purchase among the K-pop fan segment. Third, marketing communications should address fan and non-fan audiences differently: fan-directed messaging may emphasize idol connection and community belonging, while general consumer messaging should highlight product quality credentials and value proposition independently of the ambassador's popularity.

This study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample is limited to 10 purposively selected informants, which, while appropriate for qualitative depth, restricts transferability of findings to broader consumer populations. Second, the study was conducted in a single geographic and cultural context (Indonesia), and findings may not transfer directly to other Southeast Asian markets with different levels of Korean Wave penetration. Third, data are self-reported through interviews, and social desirability bias — particularly among K-pop fans — may have influenced informants to overstate their brand ambassador-driven purchase motivations. Fourth, the researchers' own familiarity with fan culture may have introduced interpretive subjectivity, despite the credibility measures employed.

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