

## **Compulsive Buying Model in K-pop Idol**

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### **Abstract**

The relationship between fans and K-pop Idols influences their consumption. Therefore, a K-pop Idol is categorized as a brand based on human brand theory. Moreover, the 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, 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 a bigger sample, and focus on a specific human brand. This paper provides insight for future brand marketing in Indonesia. This study can be considered the first to examine the relationship between upward social comparison, SNS usage, and K-pop addiction, specifically concerning compulsive buying, by referencing the variable of brand addiction to K-pop addiction using Human Brand Theory (Thomson, 2006).

**Keywords:** human brand, k-pop fans, compulsive buying, brand addiction, sns usage, and upward social comparison.

## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1 Introduction*

The Korean Wave, also known as Hallyu, from South Korea, has been growing for two decades. In Indonesia, it does affect the millennial generation daily. K-pop is the most popular Korean culture in Indonesia, immediately capturing the attention of young people. Indonesia is the first place in the world with the largest number of K-pop fans. K-pop groups are known for their various efforts to have strong ties with their fans; 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, daily use items, or collaboration products between a brand and the group. On the

launch day, fans often do not hesitate to buy these items because they think buying items is a way to support and feel closer to their idols (Cui et al., 2018)

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

The loyalty of fans toward them is a form of brand addiction. According to Mrad & Cui (2020), brand addiction is a psychological state related to brand relationships that manifests in daily life, involving positive effectiveness and satisfaction with a particular brand, as well as a constant urge to own that brand's products/ 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 will make their fans curious and end up buying what they wear or own. During the pandemic, there is no outside activity allowed, including concerts. To maintain the connection between idols and fans, the agency holds an online fan meeting and the one who can join this event is the winner of the raffle. Therefore, a lot of fans buy more albums and merchandise to support their idol as their “revenge” because of the situation. Also, brands make Korean artists their Brand Ambassadors because of the parasocial relationship they have with fans. According to Horton & Richard Wohl (1956), parasocial relationships are one-way interactions between viewers toward media personas (actors, singers, broadcasters, etc.), with viewers involving emotions, interest, and time with them.

That consumptive behavior among fans is often exploited by certain parties to reap profits (Chang et al., 2023). K-pop fans all over the world are known as a fandom. 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 fans in Indonesia also creates opportunities for businesses to open new job opportunities (Fitriana, 2022). This can be seen from the many entrustment services (jastip) that have emerged, starting from Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, to e-commerce media. K-Pop group merchandise that is officially inaccessible in Indonesian stores can be purchased via jastip. This jastip operates through social media where they will calculate the price of the goods they want to sell, from the official website of each agency that manages the groups, by directly adding the estimated costs of tax, shipping, and the original price of the product. This jastip phenomenon occurs together with the development of idols and fans as well as social media because it is easier to purchase those products, thereby influencing Compulsive Buying Behavior (CBB). CBB is a preoccupation with shopping behavior that is associated with the urge to buy repeatedly and is 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. This further supports the claim that the use of social media applications can facilitate the opening of shopping applications (Zhang et al., 2017).

### *1.2 Objectives*

This research attempts to close the gap by further exploring this relationship. Previous studies (Zheng et al., 2020) 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.

Based on this background explanation, researchers are interested in researching the influence of brand addiction (in this research, referred to as K-pop addiction), upward social comparison, and SNS use on compulsive buying with the title "Compulsive Buying Model in KPop Idol."

### *1.3 Theoretical Background*

#### *1.3.1 K-Pop Addiction*

Human brand theory (Thomson, 2006) explains the theoretical basis of the relationship between an idol and his followers when a media persona develops into a human brand (an individual considered a brand). In this theory, a human brand, which will hereinafter be called an individual brand, has branded features that create a strong relationship with followers by fulfilling their intrinsic needs and accomplishing successful marketing effects. The value of this personal brand depends on the attributes it carries, thereby creating an overall image in the minds of followers. Follower relationships with brand individuals demonstrate the development of many of the expectations, cognitions, emotions, and behaviours seen in normal interpersonal relationships (Malik et al., 2023). From previous literature explaining individual brands, it can be said that an idol can be called a brand, which in this research will be used as the dependent variable for K-pop addiction, which starts from the brand addiction variable. Francioni et al. (2021) define brand addiction as "A consumer's psychological state involving mental and behavioral preoccupation with a particular brand, driven by an uncontrollable urge to own that brand's products, and involving positive affective and gratification." Mrad & Cui (2017) say brand addiction is a new brand construction, which refers to consumer addiction behavior, where consumers like the brand, and compulsively buy the brand's products (Cui et al., 2018; Weinstein et al., 2016). As emotions and thoughts become more intense, they focus on the brand (Das et al., 2019)

#### *1.3.2 Compulsive Buying*

Researchers have explored in depth the various motivations of compulsive buyers. For example, Dittmar (2005) found that the primary goal of compulsive buyers is to enhance their self-esteem through purchases, which agrees with Otero-López & Villardefrancos (2013), who asserted that high-compulsive buyers experience higher levels of image and popularity concerns compared to

low and moderate-compulsive buyers. Similarly, individuals who believe that purchasing a product or service will compensate for or neutralize a negative mood will engage in compulsive buying (Kyrios et al., 2012). In this regard, consumers with negative personality traits are more associated with compulsive buying because these individuals often experience negative psychological states and engage in compulsive shopping to relieve stress and negative moods (Kyrios et al., 2012)

### 1.3.3 The Role of SNS and Social Comparison

In the modern era, many individuals are attached to gadgets and rely on technology. Many individuals use social networking sites or social networking services (SNS) to create personal profiles, bump into others who have the same interests, interact with friends, and see their idols. SNS use is defined as 'social spaces' for people who want to expose themselves to others and stay connected. Identifying other users ("friends") with whom they have connections, reading and reacting to posts made by other users on the site, and sending and receiving messages either privately or publicly (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Some consumers on SNS are frequently exposed to consumption-related activities, ranging from brand-based product advertisements to friends' opinions about recent shopping experiences (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Stephen & Galak, 2012). Additionally, SNS provides an important platform for consumers to announce their items (Xiao et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2017). (Bosshart & Hellmuller, 2009) Define the experience of viewing idols as enjoyment, sensation, relaxation, and diversion. Studies related to uses and gratifications theory have noted that audiences hope to use SNS for entertainment and stress relief (McQuail, 2010).

Social comparison theory describes that individuals are inherently motivated to evaluate their self-concept and abilities and may compare themselves to others when objective evaluations are absent (Festinger, 1957). Compared with traditional social activities, upward social comparison occurs more frequently on SNS (Verduyn et al., 2020). This is partly due to SNS encouraging individuals to present themselves in a positive light, often using various editing tools and exaggerated language to paint a rosy picture of one's life (Verduyn et al., 2020).

Vogel et al (2015) found that people who possess high social comparison values use SNS more often, more intensely, and are more involved. Those who have a chronic tendency toward upward social comparison are more likely to realize that SNS are important venues for social comparison and, therefore, spend more time using them, which often leads to excessive use (Lee, 2014).

### 1.3.4 Research Gap

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 and upward social comparison, with their potential mediation of K-pop addiction, makes this research more complex than previous studies.

#### *1.4 Hypotheses and Research Design*

##### **1.4.1 Upward Social Comparison and Compulsive Buying**

Compulsive buying has been linked to psychopathology, including mood and anxiety disorders (Black et al., 2012), with compulsive buying behavior most likely occurring in response to negative mood states (e.g., stress, anxiety; Billieux et al., 2008). According to social comparison theory (Festinger, 1957), upward social comparison leads to negative self-evaluations. Given that SNS use tends to lead to higher social comparison, affected individuals are expected to develop anxiety due to negative self-evaluation and feelings of inferiority (Faelens et al., 2021). Previous research by Gao et al. (2024) explained that upward social comparison during SNS use can positively predict compulsive buying among Chinese college students. There are two possible explanations for this result. First, online shopping is more attractive and convenient than offline shopping for young consumers in China (Zhao et al., 2014). In addition, Chinese college students are increasingly accustomed to using social networking sites in their daily lives, which always provide them with more convenient comparison channels and more diverse comparison cues, potentially leading to upward social comparison (Pang, 2021), which in turn drives online compulsive shopping (Pahlevan Sharif & Yeoh, 2018). Second, under the influence of traditional Chinese culture, people in such a society are expected to occupy more social resources and obtain higher social status as a way to demonstrate their identity and social achievements (Weiguo et al., 2022). From the description of the previous research theory, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Upward Social Comparison has a positive influence on Compulsive Buying

##### **1.4.2 Upward Social Comparison, SNS Usage, and Compulsive Buying**

The use of SNS in today's era is more than just using SNS networks based on acquaintances alone (Wang, 2019). To manage their impressions and maintain a good self-image, individuals can present more positive personal information on SNS (Ellison et al., 2006; Yang, 2014; Yau & Reich, 2019). Therefore, SNS can lead to higher social comparison. Previous research has shown that SNS use is positively related to upward social comparison (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). SNS usage has been shown to predict upward social comparison (Wang et al. 2017). Users who spend their time passively viewing content on SNS are more likely to engage in upward social comparison (Wang et al., 2018). The reason for this may be related to the fact that active use of social media enhances social communication, leading to increased daily contact and emotional interactions (Fengxia et al., 2023). Thus, this study hypothesized that:

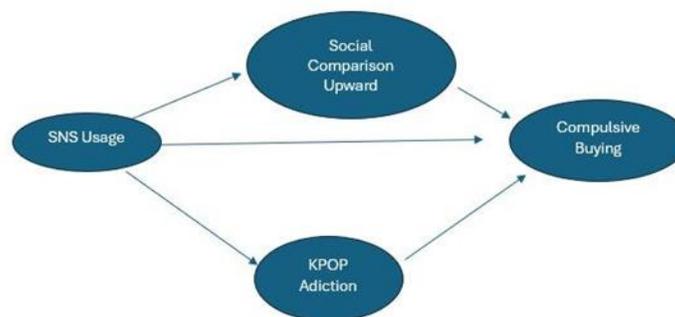
H2: SNS use has a positive impact on Upward Social Comparison

H3: SNS use has a positive impact on Compulsive Buying

1.4.3 SNS Usage, K-pop Addiction, and Compulsive Buying

Research by Ki et al. (2020) also uses social media influencers as human brands that have ties with followers and provide positive marketing benefits for a business to meet the needs of consumers or fans of social media influencers as human brands. Shaffer et al. (2004) emphasized that repeated access to an activity can increase the likelihood of developing an addiction to that activity. Furthermore, it shows that the higher the use of SNS, the more likely users are to advocate for brands, which can lead to brand addiction (VanMeter et al., 2018). Although compulsive buying and brand addiction are addictive consumption, there are important differences between the two constructs. Research shows that compulsive buyers usually deny the extent of their problem and tend to disguise their purchases (Faber & O’Guinn, 1992). In contrast, brand addicts do not deny their addiction; they actively tell others about their love for addictive brands and are proud to own items from addictive brands (Mrad & Cui, 2020). Hence, based on these arguments, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H4: SNS usage has a positive effect on K-pop Addiction
- H5: K-pop Addiction has a positive effect on Compulsive Buying
- H6: K-pop Addiction mediates SNS usage and Compulsive Buying



**2. Method**

This study uses a quantitative method with a survey as a primary data source. The population obtained is 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 service. A questionnaire with 26 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 four subscales: (1) Upward Social Comparison (Bai, X., Liu, X., & Liu, 2013). (2) SNS Usage (Tandoc et al., 2015) (3) K-pop Addiction (Mrad & Cui, 2017). (4) Compulsive Buying (Maraz et al., 2014). The data were analysed 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 using SmartPLS analysis software (version 3.3.6).

**3. Results**

*3.1 Respondent*

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%
Sulawesi	4	1.4%	
Favorite K-pop Group	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%) and lived in Central Java (47%). Moreover, the most popular K-pop group is Seventeen (31%), and the least is Super Junior (3.7%).

*3.2 Cronbach’s alpha and hybrid reliability and convergent validity*

Table 2. Cronbach’s alpha reliability and convergent validity

<b>Variabel</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>CA</b>	<b>CR</b>
<b>CB</b>	0.685	0.885	0.886
<b>KP</b>	0.580	0.896	0.899
<b>SNS</b>	0.592	0.862	0.873
<b>PSA</b>	0.598	0.864	0.865

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

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.

*3.3 Composite reliabilities and average variances extracted*

Table 3. Composite reliabilities and average variances extracted

<b>Variabel</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>KP</b>	<b>SNS</b>	<b>PSA</b>
<b>CB</b>	0.828			
<b>KP</b>	0.760	0.762		
<b>SNS</b>	0.201	0.426	0.770	
<b>PSA</b>	0.486	0.582	0.347	0.773

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).

3.4. Results of hypothesis testing

Table 4. Results of hypothesis testing

	O	M	STDEV	T	P Values	Results
<b>KP → CB</b>	0.653	0.654	0.064	10.210	0.000	Meaningful, positive
<b>SNS → CB</b>	0.201	0.206	0.065	3.100	0.002	Meaningful, positive
<b>SNS → KP</b>	0.405	0.410	0.057	7.114	0.000	Meaningful, positive
<b>SNS → PSA</b>	0.348	0.351	0.058	5.982	0.000	Meaningful, positive
<b>PSA → CB</b>	0.143	0.142	0.052	2.770	0.006	Meaningful, positive
<b>SNS → KP → CB</b>	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, \*\* (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 shows 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 6 hypotheses proposed, all were accepted.

4. Discussion

This study declares that the more K-pop fans compare themselves to other K-pop fans, the more it can boost their compulsive purchases of goods or other merchandise related to K-pop idols that they desire or admire. This study also confirms research by Y. Zheng et al. (2020b), which suggests that upward social comparison can lead to negative emotions, such as increased anxiety levels. Consequently, online shopping is used as a means of compensation to alleviate these negative emotions, ultimately contributing to compulsive purchases.

Furthermore, the higher SNS usage is associated with greater upward social comparison among K-pop fans. This finding aligns with previous research by Xiang & Kong (2024), which demonstrated a positive correlation between SNS usage and upward self-comparison among local university students. In fact, browsing other people's social networking sites is essentially a process of exposure to other people's information (Lian et al., 2017).

Then, this study indicates that the higher the use of SNS, the higher the compulsive buying behavior among K-pop fans.

This research is consistent with previous research by Pahlevan Sharif & Yeoh (2018) on young people in Malaysia who frequently spend time online, which stated that individuals who use SNS excessively exhibit a stronger urge to buy compulsively.

Also, the higher the use of SNS, the higher the K-pop fan's addiction to K-pop as a human brand. The findings of this study align with previous research by Nikolinakou et al. (2024c), which stated that individuals who frequently use social media (SNS) and have difficulty effectively regulating their negative emotions are vulnerable to brand addiction.

The more addicted K-pop fans are to their idols (as brands), the more likely they are to engage in compulsive buying. Previous research by Alic & Kadrić (2024) described individuals seeking long-term rewards from brand satisfaction, which directs them to become brand addicts, leading them to engage in compulsive buying.

Lastly, the results of this study show that the indirect effect is greater than the direct effect, meaning 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), rather than directly. When the mediation effect is greater than the direct effect, it indicates that K-pop addiction plays a significant role in explaining how or why SNS usage influences compulsive buying. The findings of this study align with previous research by Nikolinakou et al. (2024b) that found that female respondents who spent more time on social media increased their level of brand addiction, increasing their desire to constantly view their favorite brands, leading to compulsive buying behavior.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study focuses on the relationship between Upward Social Comparison, K-pop Addiction, SNS Usage, and Compulsive Buying. This study also found that there is an indirect effect of K-pop addiction that mediates between SNS usage and compulsive buying. The data shows that the outcome of K-pop addiction on compulsive buying is high, but for upward social comparison and SNS usage 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, and K-pop addiction towards compulsive buying by referring the variable of brand addiction to K-pop addiction using Human Brand Theory by (Thomson, 2006) which 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 who is considered as a brand).

This outcome suggest that brands can develop more personal and meaningful merchandise, so purchases are based more on sentimental desires than compulsive behaviour. Furthermore, future research can be conducted by examining other variables. The use of qualitative methods to explore the in-depth experiences of K-pop fans related to compulsive buying can also be a significant academic contribution.

However, this study provides some important information about compulsive buying among K-pop fans, there are some limitations. First, the sample used cannot describe all of Indonesia because the sample size is small. Second, the study did not focus on a specific human brand, so further research is needed. Third, the variables used are limited, and further research should include psychological variables that can influence compulsive buying.

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