

Consumer Perception Analysis of Samsung Products Related to the Controversial Issue of BTS's Suga as Brand Ambassador

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Abstract

This study analyzes consumer perceptions of Samsung products promoted by BTS's Suga as a brand ambassador, focusing on the impact of the controversial issue related to DUI involving Suga. The research method used is a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection through an open-ended questionnaire distributed online to Samsung consumers and BTS fans (ARMY). The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify dominant themes in consumer perceptions. The results of the study indicate that despite the controversial issue involving BTS's Suga as Samsung's brand ambassador, consumer perceptions of Samsung products have a positive view, although there are some weaknesses identified. Suga's influence as a brand ambassador is more pronounced among BTS fans, who feel an emotional connection with their idol. However, many respondents were not affected by the controversial issue and continued to judge the product based on its quality. Respondents also expect Samsung to handle this issue professionally and transparently. This study emphasizes the importance of managing controversial issues and selecting the right brand ambassador in marketing strategies to maintain brand loyalty and consumer purchasing decisions.

INTRODUCTION

Brand ambassador is an individual appointed by a company to represent and promote their products or services. This role is not only limited to advertising or promotions, but also includes direct interaction with consumers, either through social media, public events, or other marketing campaigns. With the hope that their presence can increase consumer appeal and trust in the brand, brand ambassadors are often chosen based on their popularity, positive image, and ability to relate to the target audience. The concept of brand ambassadors has emerged as one of the most effective strategies for building brand image and influencing consumer behavior.

In addition, the role of brand ambassadors is further strengthened by social media. Platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok allow brand ambassadors to interact directly with fans and consumers, creating a more personal and authentic dialogue. Through the content they share, brand ambassadors can build a strong narrative about

the brand, strengthen the brand image, and influence consumer purchasing decisions. These interactions also allow companies to get direct feedback from their audiences, which can be used to adjust their marketing strategies.

Recently, the Korean wave has been booming in Indonesia, especially among the younger generation, and has also had an impact on the millennial generation. Without realizing it, the younger generation in Indonesia is presenting Korean culture which is spread through K-Pop and K-sensation such as beauty products.(Aulia, 2024).The phenomenon of admiring Korean culture (K-POP), which causes Korean fever and Korean syndrome known as the Korean wave (Tambunan, et al., 2024). The Korean wave is a South Korean popular culture phenomenon that has spread throughout the world. It encompasses all aspects of Korean culture, including K-pop, K-drama, K-film, K-hitech lifestyle, Kculture, K-culinary, K-literature, and traditional K-language.

From this phenomenon, companies or brands are finally taking advantage of the potential of the Korean wave and the popularity of Korean artists as a powerful weapon to promote their brands or as bait for the target market of Korean lovers in Indonesia.(Gandur & Prasetya, 2022). This is because teenage K-pop fans will buy items that are related to their idols, for example in the form of clothing, digital products (technology), postcards, posters, concert tickets, and so on that are related to their idols.(Audri et al., 2024).

In today's digital era, collaboration between big brands and celebrities, especially K-pop idols, has become an effective marketing strategy to enhance brand image and attract consumers. Brand ambassadors from K-pop idols have become a popular marketing strategy for global companies, such as Samsung, due to their broad appeal and strong influence among young consumers. One of the famous K-pop idols, Suga from BTS, was appointed as Samsung's brand ambassador to capitalize on BTS's immense popularity in the international market, including Indonesia. Suga's presence as a brand ambassador is expected to enhance brand image and stimulate purchasing interest, especially from very loyal K-pop fans.Ryan (2022)states that brand ambassadors can influence consumer purchasing decisions, where the attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise of a brand ambassador play an important role in shaping consumer perceptions of the brand.

However, in recent times, a controversial issue involving BTS's Suga has emerged, which has attracted great attention from the media and the public. This controversy has created a public debate regarding Suga's image and reputation, which could also affect the public's

perception of the brand he represents, namely Samsung. The controversial case involving BTS's Suga regarding DUI (Driving Under Influence) could trigger a significant impact on his public image. This issue not only has the potential to damage Suga's personal reputation, but it could also affect brand relationships such as Samsung, which may face backlash from consumers who are sensitive to legal and moral issues.(Srivastava, 2024).

The issue is a major concern for Samsung, given the reputational impact it could have on consumer perception. On the one hand, there is a chance that Suga and BTS fans will continue to support the brand, viewing the incident as a human error that can happen to anyone. On the other hand, there is a risk that cannot be ignored. Many consumers may feel disappointed or even angry at Suga's actions, especially if they have high expectations of the behavior and public image that an idol is supposed to uphold. This negative reaction could lead to a decline in purchasing interest, with consumers choosing to stay away from Samsung products in protest or dissatisfaction.

According to sources within Samsung, there is a big risk in retaining a brand ambassador who is involved in a social controversy. Although Suga has a large fan base, his controversial actions could damage Samsung's brand image. In response to the incident, Samsung Germany removed Suga's promotional photos featuring the Galaxy S24 Ultra from their official accounts. This shows that the company is starting to consider the impact of Suga's involvement in the advertisement. Currently, Samsung is not taking any direct action to remove Suga from the advertisement campaign because their contract was signed with BTS as a group, not an individual. The final decision will depend on how the situation develops and how the public responds.

In the context of marketing management, it is important to understand that marketing strategies involving brand ambassadors must consider not only the attractiveness and positive image of the individual, but also the potential risks that may arise from the controversy involving them. Marketing management theory emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining a positive brand image, as well as managing relationships with consumers effectively. In this case, the actions taken by Samsung in response to the Suga controversy will greatly determine how consumers perceive the brand in the future.

Several previous studies have discussed the relationship between brand ambassadors and consumer perceptions. Research byGoddess & Chandra (2025)stated that brand ambassadors have a significant influence on consumer perception, but do not directly influence purchasing decisions. In the studyAmanda et al. (2024), it is explained that

brand ambassadors influence consumer perception and trust in brands. Research by Sitepu (2023) also found that consumer perceptions of brand ambassadors affect satisfaction in using e-commerce services. On the other hand, research by Nugroho et al. (2024) shows that brand ambassadors can influence purchasing decisions, especially among Shopee users.

In the context of controversial issues, research by Irawati & Akbar (2024) examines the influence of influencers involved in controversy on brand image and purchase intention of skincare products in Kudus. The results show that involvement in controversy has a significant impact on consumer perception and behavior. Another study by Marcelino et al. (2024) analyzed netizens' perceptions of the controversial issue of Indomie brand ownership on social media, and found that negative perceptions can trigger boycott actions. In addition, Li et al. (2022) in their international study explained that brand involvement in social issues can strengthen or damage consumer perceptions, depending on the emotional connection that has been built with the brand.

Thus, there is an important research gap to be filled. Further research is needed on how consumer perceptions are formed and changed when brand ambassadors are involved in controversies, as well as their influence on brand loyalty and purchasing decisions. This research is relevant, especially in the digital era which is heavily influenced by public opinion and perceptions formed through social media. Therefore, this study aims to deeply analyze consumer perceptions of the controversial issue involving BTS's Suga as Samsung's brand ambassador, as well as its impact on brand loyalty and purchasing decisions. This research is important to conduct considering the great influence of public figures in shaping public perception, especially in the digital era which is full of information and opinions that spread quickly.

METHODS

This research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze Samsung consumer perceptions regarding the appointment of BTS's Suga as a brand ambassador, especially the controversial issues that emerged when SUGA became a brand ambassador. Data collection will be carried out through an open questionnaire distributed through social media to Samsung consumers and BTS fans (ARMY). The study will involve between 30 participants until data saturation is reached, which is when the data obtained no longer provides new information or repetition occurs in the answers. In the book by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) "The Discovery of Grounded Theory," the concept of data saturation is a criterion for ending data collection in grounded theory research. They emphasize that data collection must be continued until no new information emerges.

This questionnaire aims to explore respondents' views, opinions, and experiences regarding the controversial issue, and how it affects their perception of the Samsung brand. Questions in the questionnaire will cover aspects such as awareness of the issue, the impact of the issue on Samsung's brand image, and its influence on purchase intention of Samsung products.

Sampling will use purposive sampling technique, with the criteria of respondents who have experience using Samsung products and are aware of controversial issues related to Suga BTS and BTS fans. Data collected from the questionnaire will be analyzed using thematic analysis, by identifying dominant themes and patterns that emerge from respondents' answers. In the study The Last Supper (2021), thematic analysis follows six steps according to Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Data recognition: researchers understand the transcripts through repeated reading.
2. Initial coding: highlighting important parts of the data in small chunks.
3. Theme search: organizing codes into main themes based on the relatedness of meaning.
4. Theme review: re-check whether the themes compiled really match the data.
5. Defining and labeling themes: clarifying and defining boundaries for each theme.
6. Report preparation: compiling a narrative of the analysis results with in-depth descriptions.

The research results will be presented in the form of a comprehensive descriptive narrative, supplemented with direct quotes from respondents' answers to strengthen the findings and provide a clear picture of Samsung consumers' perceptions of this controversial issue. In addition, social media analysis can also be conducted to see consumer views and reactions to product promotions or introductions on social media platforms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data obtained through an open questionnaire, various consumer perceptions and attitudes towards Samsung products were found, especially in relation to the involvement of BTS's Suga as a brand ambassador and the controversial issues that accompany it. The analysis was carried out using a thematic analysis approach, namely by identifying the main themes and narrative patterns that emerged from the respondents' answers. From the data results, four main related themes were obtained, namely quality, purchasing decisions, controversial issues and responses. To better understand the details of the problem themes, the following are the sub-themes and the number of codings for each theme. The first theme that emerged was the perception of the quality of Samsung products. The following are the themes and sub-themes and the number of codings presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Themes of perception of Samsung product quality

Theme	Sub Themes	Number of Coding
Quality	General Product Quality	20
	Technological innovation	12
	Screen quality	10
	Camera quality	10
	Battery quality	12
	Product design	12
	Price and value	11
	Product weaknesses	6

	Comparison with other brands	8
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Most respondents have a positive view of Samsung's product quality. They consider Samsung as a brand that excels in technological innovation, attractive design, battery life, and screen and camera quality. One respondent said, "Samsung is known to have good product quality, especially in terms of technological innovation, quality, and an integrated ecosystem." Another respondent also stated, "In my opinion, Samsung's product quality among Androids is a top product because it can compete with other well-known brands." However, some also highlighted several weaknesses, such as relatively expensive prices, devices that heat up quickly, and the performance of the Exynos chipset which is considered less than optimal compared to Snapdragon. In general, consumer perceptions of Samsung's product quality remain positive, although expectations for value for money are an important note for some respondents.

The influence of BTS Suga as a brand ambassador on purchasing decisions. . The following are the themes and sub-themes and the number of codings presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Theme of the Influence of BTS's Suga as a brand ambassador on purchasing decisions

Theme	Sub Themes	Number of Coding
Buying decision	The Influence of Brand Ambassador (Suga BTS)	25
	Product quality	10
	Product price	12
	Emotional and attachment	10
	Brand reputation	20
	Features and technology	15
	Personal needs	5

There are differences in attitude patterns between respondents who are BTS fans (ARMY) and those who are not. Respondents who are ARMY tend to admit that Suga's presence as a brand ambassador increases the emotional appeal of the product. They feel a sense of pride when using a product associated with their idol. One respondent stated, "Seeing Suga as a brand ambassador gives a positive impression of the product, and increases my trust in the brand." . Another respondent also stated that "the presence of BTS as a brand ambassador is also an added value that makes me more interested". However, another respondent who is not a BTS fan said that the purchasing decision was based more on quality, price, and features, not on the public figure who promotes it. This shows that the role of brand ambassadors is stronger emotionally for certain consumer groups, but is not the main factor for the overall market. In terms of the effectiveness of selecting BTS's Suga as a brand ambassador, the majority of respondents considered that the step was appropriate and strategic. BTS's global popularity, especially among the younger generation, is considered to have a positive influence on brand image. Several respondents said that selecting Suga as a brand ambassador helped create an emotional connection between consumers and the brand. "Suga has a positive image, global influence, and a strong fan base, so he can increase the emotional appeal of Samsung products," said one respondent. However, several respondents emphasized that the role of brand ambassadors should only be a complement, not the main factor in building brand image.

In the context of the controversial issue involving BTS's Suga, the following are the themes and sub-themes and the number of codes presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Controversial issue themes involving BTS's Suga

Theme	Sub Themes	Number of Coding
Controversial issue	The Influence of Controversial Issues on Product Views	15
	Response to controversial issues	20
	The impact of controversial issues on brand image	11
	Consumer expectations regarding issue handling	10
	Product recommendations after controversial issues	7
	The decision to change brand ambassadors	10

The majority of respondents stated that this did not affect their perception of Samsung products. They tend to separate the quality of the product from the personal life of the brand ambassador. One respondent commented, "I judge a product based on quality, not on the personal life or issues involving the artist." However, there were also respondents. A number of fans expressed their disappointment, especially when the issue was related to ethical values. Some respondents even considered that such an issue could have an impact on the brand image if not managed properly by the company. In response to this issue, respondents had various expectations for Samsung's actions. Some hoped that Samsung would remain professional and not rash in making decisions. They emphasized the importance of official clarification, transparent public communication, and a wise approach in assessing the situation. One respondent wrote, "I hope Samsung remains professional and transparent. If the issue is serious, Samsung should provide an official clarification and take wise steps without rushing to terminate the partnership." There were also those who suggested that Samsung consider replacing the brand ambassador if it was necessary to maintain the company's global reputation. Despite the controversial issue, most respondents were still willing to recommend Samsung products to others. This shows that the perception of product quality is stronger than the influence of the brand ambassador's personal issues. Even those who are aware of the controversy still express their willingness to repurchase Samsung products in the future, as long as the quality remains intact.

Regarding the response to Samsung's response, the following are the themes and sub-themes and the number of codes presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Response themes to Samsung's response.

Theme	Sub Themes	Number of Coding
Response	Samsung Response Rating	15
	Issue handling strategies	10
	Response to brand image	12
	Openness and transparency	10
	Response speed	8
	Consumer satisfaction with response	10

Many respondents considered that the company was quite careful and considered various factors in making its decision. . One respondent stated that "Samsung's response to this controversy reflects a careful approach and considers various factors, including the impact on reputation and the dynamics of the contract with BTS as a whole. However, they should also be more transparent and quick in providing clarification so as not to cause prolonged speculation." A response that is considered wise and not hasty is considered to maintain public trust. Some

said that the temporary removal of Suga's content on social media was a form of risk mitigation, while his reappearance in advertisements in other regions shows that Samsung has not taken steps to terminate the cooperation directly. This shows Samsung's efforts to maintain its reputation while maintaining a professional relationship with its public figures. . This is in line with the respondent's answer "Samsung's response to this situation seems to be trying to balance between maintaining its brand image and maintaining its relationship with BTS" If Samsung ultimately chooses to replace Suga as a brand ambassador, some respondents understand the decision as a strategic step to maintain the company's reputation. However, they also reminded that such actions must be carried out with clear and empathetic communication so as not to cause disappointment among fans. Such decisions risk disrupting the emotional connection that has been built between brands and consumers.

This study shows that consumer perceptions of Samsung products remain positive despite the controversial issue involving BTS's Suga. Suga's involvement as a brand ambassador has a strong emotional impact only on his fans (ARMY), but product quality remains the main factor in purchasing decisions. Samsung's brand loyalty remains intact, and consumers expect the company to handle controversial issues wisely to maintain their brand's positive image.

DISCUSSION

The research findings show that most respondents have a positive perception of Samsung product quality, reinforced by various previous studies. Research by AisNandi et al. (2024) stated that the quality of Samsung products including technological innovation, elegant design, and advanced features such as cameras and long-lasting batteries have a significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions in Semarang City. This is in line with the statements of respondents in this study who considered that Samsung excels in terms of technology and its product ecosystem. In addition, Rojikun (2022) in his research at the Cililitan Wholesale Center found that consumer perceptions of Samsung product quality have a direct impact on purchasing interest, especially because of the brand's consistent reputation in presenting quality products. However, perceptions of price are also an important note, as found both in this study and in a study by Insyira & Irianto (2024), which states that despite high quality, perceived high prices can affect repeat purchase loyalty. These studies confirm that positive perceptions of Samsung product quality are the dominant factors that shape consumer trust and purchasing decisions, although price and technical factors remain the subject of evaluation.

The findings on the theme of the influence of BTS's Suga as a brand ambassador on consumer purchasing decisions, especially among ARMY, are in line with several recent studies that highlight the role of celebrities in marketing strategies. Research by Aulia (2024) in Medan City shows that the presence of brand ambassadors such as Suga has a positive influence on purchasing decisions among the ARMY community. However, this influence is not statistically significant, indicating that other factors such as brand personality and the Korean wave phenomenon have a more dominant role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions. Meanwhile, research by (Dewi & Chandra, 2025) in the Jabodetabek area highlighted that brand ambassadors such as BTS significantly influence purchasing decisions by increasing brand awareness and strengthening brand image. This shows that although the presence of celebrities can increase brand awareness and brand image, the final purchasing decision is still influenced by other factors such as product quality and price. However, not all studies find a significant influence of brand ambassadors on purchasing decisions. A study by Audri et al. (2024) in South Korea showed that product features and brand image have a significant influence on purchasing decisions, while celebrity endorsements have no significant influence. This indicates that consumers consider functional aspects and brand image more than celebrity endorsements in making purchasing decisions. Overall, these findings support the argument that the role of brand ambassadors such as BTS's Suga has a strong emotional impact on certain consumer groups,

especially loyal fans. However, for more rational consumers, factors such as product quality, price, and features remain the main considerations in purchasing decisions. Therefore, an effective marketing strategy needs to consider market segmentation and adjust the promotional approach according to the characteristics of target consumers.

On the theme of the impact of the controversial issue involving BTS's Suga on consumer perception of Samsung products, it is in line with the results of several recent studies. The majority of consumers tend to separate product quality and the personal lives of brand ambassadors. However, there are also some consumers who feel that the issue can affect brand image if not handled properly by the company. A number of fans expressed their disappointment. Some even sent wreaths to HYBE, BTS's agency, as a form of protest and demand that Suga be removed from the group. The messages on the wreaths reflected feelings of betrayal and criticism of the management who were considered not transparent in handling the case. Research by Audri et al. (2024) in South Korea showed that celebrity endorsement had no significant influence on purchasing decisions. In contrast, product features and brand image had a greater influence. This indicates that consumers consider functional aspects and brand image more than celebrity endorsement in making purchasing decisions. In addition, a study by The Last Supper (2022) regarding Samsung x BTS co-branding found that the brand ambassador variable has a positive but insignificant effect on purchase intention. In contrast, brand image and price have a positive and significant effect. This suggests that although the presence of celebrities can increase emotional appeal, factors such as brand image and price are more important in determining purchase decisions. These findings support the argument that although controversial issues involving brand ambassadors can cause discomfort for some consumers.

In the context of handling controversial issues, Mustikawati et al. (2020) emphasizes the importance of effective communication strategies. Companies need to maintain credibility and transparency in dealing with issues involving brand ambassadors to maintain consumer trust. Overall, these findings support the argument that although controversial issues involving brand ambassadors may cause discomfort for some consumers, product quality and brand image remain key factors in perception and purchasing decisions. Therefore, companies need to focus on managing brand image and effective communication in dealing with such issues.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that consumer perception of Samsung products promoted by BTS's Suga as a brand ambassador remains positive despite the controversial issues involving Suga. Some important points that can be taken from this study are:

1. **Product Quality:** Most respondents rated Samsung's product quality as superior, with technological innovation and attractive design. Although some weaknesses were identified, such as relatively expensive price and chipset performance, positive perceptions of product quality remained dominant.
2. **Brand ambassador influence:** Suga's presence as a brand ambassador has a strong emotional impact, especially among BTS fans (ARMY). Respondents who are fans feel an emotional connection that increases their trust in the product. However, for respondents who are not fans, purchasing decisions are based more on the quality and features of the product than the public figure who promotes it.
3. **Response to Controversial Issues:** The majority of respondents stated that the controversial issue involving Suga did not affect their perception of Samsung products. They tend to separate the quality of the product from the personal life of the brand ambassador. However, there is an expectation from respondents that Samsung will handle this issue professionally and transparently to maintain the brand's reputation.
4. **Marketing Implications:** This study highlights the importance of selecting the right brand ambassador and managing controversial issues in marketing strategies. Brands should

consider the emotional and reputational impact that brand ambassadors' actions can have, as well as how this can impact brand loyalty and consumer purchasing decisions.

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