

BUILDING ARTIST-FAN RELATIONSHIP IN THE DIGITAL ERA OF CONSUMPTION

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Abstract—With today's music streaming services, millions of artists and tracks are available for fans worldwide to jam to. It's easy to use with free access available, making it accessible for everyone with internet. All artists aim for the same thing, loyal fans. But with easy accessibility of music, the competition gets tighter. With artists analogous to brands, it's harder to build brand loyalty compared to how it was back in the day, where the only form of music is physical products (e.g., CD, records, cassettes). In the Indonesian creative economy sector, the music industry is one of three main defenders and with so, building artist-fan relationship between Gen Z music consumers in Indonesia and their favorite artists, focusing on digital consumption, is studied. Surveying more than 700 music consumers and analyzed using the PLS-SEM method, results show that high measures of brand trust and commitment significantly influence brand loyalty, and eventually, one's purchase intention. These findings provide insights into how Gen Z views their favorite artists in terms of loyalty for academic research and how various actors in the industry can implement so. Further research is suggested to gain better understanding regarding a narrower scope of fans, artist categories, and specific forms of digital consumption.

Keywords—artists, fans, music marketing, brand trust, brand commitment, brand loyalty, purchase intention, digital consumption

I. INTRODUCTION

Music is the best mind-altering drug in the world—it speaks what cannot be expressed, it is the voice of the soul. Naturally, music is deeply related with the artist, acting as the brand that brings the songs, equivalent to products, mesmerizing all the fans worldwide. Although, with today's music streaming platforms such as Spotify, JOOX, and Apple Music, fans have become less invested in the artists who write the tunes we all love, easing them to “music grazing,” which literally means “touching lightly on the music listened [1].” Spotify, one of the most used platforms to listen to music, has over 1.2 million artists with over 70 million tracks in the platform [2], and that number does not even take into account the artists associated with other platforms. Upon logging into a streaming platform, one directly encounters an extensive selection of tracks, and if one has a premium account in the platform, one has the power to choose which track to jam to on that very second. Other than that, streaming platforms have “curatorial power,” defined as them controlling one's own interest in advance and influencing the interest of others in advance through programming content [3].

These facts then conclude on how hard it is for artists to gain loyalty from their listeners, seeing how commitment on listening to the same artist is difficult to achieve, therefore the trickiness of music actors to build artist-fan relationship. This follows today's digital consumption behavior, where

everything is easily accessible by everyone, unlike back in the days, where the only form of music product available are physical ones (e.g., CDs, records, cassettes) and fans need to spend money for music, therefore creating more involved consumers in terms of purchase. They sought satisfaction through a lengthy selection process [4], compared to today, when everything is available with a single click.

With so, loyalty as defined as an artist-fan relationship has become harder to gain, bringing us to the difficulty of building purchase intention because loyalty is also seen as a form of repeat purchases. With music as the product and artists as the brand attached to the product, the purpose of this study is to analyze how the outcomes of such relationship, classified as brand trust, brand commitment, brand loyalty, and purchase intention, are built with today's digital consumption behavior, as well as how actors in the music industry can use the related findings to build artist-fan relationships. Identical to brands, artists need to communicate their product through consistent visual style and identity, as well as to connect with their fans through three courses of action: emotionally, musically, and personally. Artists also fulfil brand elements, such as name, logo, tagline, story, etc. This study will be focused on the relationship between Gen Z music consumers in Indonesia and their favorite artist(s). In Indonesia, the music industry is one of the creative economy sector's main defenders, leading to it being a prioritized sub-sector along with two others [5] and with Gen Z dominating the population by 27.94%, the authors believes that it's wise to focus on the mentioned scope due to how targeting one's music to Gen Z has the greatest prospect compared to other generational groups in Indonesia. This study will play the important role of exploring how Gen Z views their favorite artists in terms of loyalty, which is believed to be harder today on the account of easy accessibility of music through various digital music streaming services.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In a foundational brand relationship research, brand trust and brand commitment enter as two closely related constructs, as the potential outcome of engagement [6][7].

Brand trust is the willingness of a consumer to trust a brand's ability to fulfill its stated role [8]. Reference [9][10][11][12][13][14] shows that brand trust has a significantly positive effect on brand loyalty, because it builds consumer emotion, letting brands to fulfil the interests of its consumers, and creating emotional bonds to create loyal consumers [15]. The greater the level of brand trust, the greater the level of brand loyalty [16].

On the other hand, brand commitment is the desire to keep a positive and beneficial relationship with a brand over time [17], based on one's emotional attachment and preference for a particular brand within a product category

[18]. Examined and assessed as a key deciding component in relationship marketing [19][20], brand commitment has an impact on brand loyalty, with the higher the action of using a brand, the greater the customer's knowledge towards the brand. It then leads to commitment of using the brand yet again, and ultimately, brand loyalty is unlocked.

Brand loyalty suggests a behavioral concept whereas brand commitment implies an attitudinal concept, making both distinct to each other and together creating a successful relationship marketing [17][21], leading us to the following hypotheses:

H1: Brand trust significantly influences brand loyalty

H2: Brand commitment significantly influences brand loyalty

Loyalty is also seen as a form of repeat purchases, which brings us to the purchase intention. Purchase intention refers to the degree of perceptual conviction of a buyer to acquire a particular product or service [22], also referred to as the subjective judgement by consumers reflected upon after the general evaluation of buying products and services [23]. With how brand loyalty is defined as the repurchase or intention, conscious or not, to repurchase of a particular product [24], there is most likely to be a relation between the two variables.

With the customer's purchasing intention, the product is purchased frequently to demonstrate loyalty to the product, demonstrating the positive relationship between both aspects. [25], the last hypothesis reads as follows:

H3: Brand loyalty significantly influences purchase intention

With the elaborated literature from brand trust, commitment, loyalty, and purchase intention, Figure 1 below summarizes the hypotheses in a conceptual model.



Fig. 1. Conceptual model

III. METHODOLOGY

In collecting and examining the data, the authors studied with a quantitative approach to generate numerical data, which is then used to generate statistical data, which will be used to solve problems in this study. Data is gathered personally by the authors using an judgmental or authoritative sampling technique through questionnaires aiming respondents of Gen Z music consumers in Indonesia that has at least one favorite artist. The questionnaire design, as placed in Table 1, is filled with indicators that are adapted from previous studies.

At the end of the data collection period, the number of respondents reached 731, where all are analyzed with the PLS-SEM method with the assistance of the SmartPLS program, containing assessments on reliability test, validity test, collinearity tests, and also structural path significance, to be further interpreted.

TABLE I. QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

No	Variable	Label	Indicator
1	Brand Trust [26]	BT1	I trust my favorite artist(s)
		BT2	I rely on my favorite artist(s)
		BT3	My favorite artist(s) is honest
2	Brand Commitment [27]	BC1	I have grown to like my favorite artist(s) more than others offering the same type of music
		BC2	I like the music offered by my favorite artist(s)
		BC3	To me, my favorite artist(s) is the one whose music I enjoy listening to most
3	Brand Loyalty [28]	BL1	I am loyal to only my favorite artist(s) when it comes to listening and/or purchasing their music
		BL2	For my next listens and/or purchases in music, I will buy from my favorite artist(s) again
		BL3	I always listen and/or purchase music from my favorite artist(s)
		BL4	I usually listen and/or purchase music from my favorite artist(s)
4	Purchase Intention [29]	PI1	I will prefer to purchase my favorite artist(s) over other artists
		PI2	I am willing to purchase from my favorite artist(s)
		PI3	I will make an effort to purchase from my favorite artist(s)

IV. RESULTS

With the PLS-SEM method, the first step is to assess the reliability and validity. Results show all is reliable and valid after achieving an outer loadings and composite reliability value both above 0.7 [30][31] as well as the AVE values above 0.5 [32]. Thirdly, a collinearity test is assessed with an optimal rating of 5 or lower in the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to avoid any collinearity problems, and all VIF values passes the criteria. Lastly, the data uses bootstrapping procedures to test the hypotheses. This method produces T-values to indicate the significance, where at a significance level of 5%, a minimum value of 1.96 is needed.

TABLE II. HYPOTHESIS TESTING RESULTS

Hypothesis	Structural Path	T Value	P Value	Results
H1	Brand Trust -> Brand Loyalty	5.984	0.000	Accepted
H2	Brand Commitment -> Brand Loyalty	15.469	0.000	Accepted
H3	Brand Loyalty -> Purchase Intention	21.728	0.000	Accepted

With the hypothesis testing results seen in Table 2, the results are interpreted as follows:

Hypothesis 1

According to Hypothesis 1, brand trust has a significant influence on brand loyalty. This hypothesis is accepted, in view of how the T-value score is $5.984 > 1.96$ at a significance level of 5%.

Hypothesis 2

According to Hypothesis 2, brand commitment has a significant influence on brand loyalty. This hypothesis is accepted, in view of how the T-value score is $15.469 > 1.96$ at a significance level of 5%.

Hypothesis 3

According to Hypothesis 3, brand loyalty has a significant influence on purchase intention. This hypothesis is accepted, in view of how the T-value score is $21.728 > 1.96$ at a significance level of 5%.

V. DISCUSSION

According to the results obtained, it is found that brand trust and brand commitment significantly influences brand loyalty, and brand loyalty does the same towards purchase intention. Even with all the hypotheses accepted, it's quite noticeable to see that the T-value for brand commitment influencing brand loyalty is almost three times more significant than brand trust being the independent variable, and even higher by almost four times when calculating significant influences from brand loyalty to purchase intention. Thus, the authors conclude the presence of strong source of influence from brand trust and brand commitment to purchase intention of Gen Z music consumers in Indonesia to their favorite artists.

Artists have a reputation – they need one to survive in the tight competition. With every artist-fan story heard by everyone through the internet, it's very easy to make or break one, and all that is based on trust, especially with Gen Z's main spur is search for truth [33] further confirming the importance of brand trust. On top of that, Gen Z is filled with confident people [34], which means they won't be afraid to speak up about their encounters with their favorite artists, good or bad. Based on the questionnaire distributed, the authors concludes that an artist needs to be trustworthy, reliable, and honest to gain trust from its fans and take it up to the next level, the final pillar of consumer brand resonance, brand loyalty [35]. Reference [26] confirms that brand trust is directly related to loyalty too, concluding that we can see the alignment between previous studies with this study. In an artist-fan relationship, building brand trust can be done by artists easily, for instance, by releasing new music whenever they said they would. Other examples include speaking up their honest views on controversial matters and actually act like so, sharing their real creative process even if it includes struggle, telling real-life non-staged stories to the fans, and keeping up to their promises, from promises on appearing somewhere to touring to the other part of the world. These actions aiming to build brand trust leads to brand loyalty because it helps to build a trustworthy reputation of an artist, therefore building a positive resonance in the fans' minds and consciously or not, making them loyal.

Commitment significantly and directly impacts brand loyalty [36][37]. The excessive use of words “most,” “always,” and “usually” in listening and/or purchasing music from the respondents' favorite artists all comes with high scores in both brand commitment and brand loyalty variable.

In this study, artists are equivalent to brands, because just like any other, artists have their own voice, story, persona, and branding strategies that builds to how they present themselves and how they are perceived by their fans. Some can be well known because of their amazing ability in transforming real life experiences to love songs (e.g., Taylor Swift, Olivia Rodrigo), and some can be familiar because of their journey from time to time (e.g., Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, Hayley Williams). Artists are very likely to bring the same genre, similar color of songs along their whole musical career, so once a fan falls in love with an artist's type of music, one will commit and stay loyal to the artist, until only if the artist encounters a significant change in brand, like transforming from Pop genre songs to Screamo, or switching from writing love lyrics to hatred-filled lyrics. Until that happens, a fan stays a fan, evolving to a loyal one over time. A phenomenon of musical nostalgia comes connected to this matter too, on how they grow attached to certain tunes brought by their favorite artists – specially betwixt the ages of 12 and 22 where rapid neurological development in the brains occur, which is within the age range of Gen Z today [38]. Commitment also includes growing up to liking the same artist more than others offering the same type of music, which further explains the musical nostalgia phenomenon. If a fan listens to the same artist in a significant period of time, he/she will commit into always listening future tracks released, therefore committing to the artist and being loyal. Although, after speaking numerously about the fan's behavior, the artist also needs to take charge into building the artist-fan relationship on commitment, including actions on releasing new music consistently over time, not changing one's brand that can impact fan's perception deeply, and offering more if not the same level of quality in music. An opposite example lies on international pop sensation, Rihanna, who's last album “ANTI” released almost 5 years ago on 2016, and with her inability to release new music, fans turn away and has more potential of liking another artist offering the same type of music.

Ironically, loyalty does not extend to only listening to and/or purchasing music from favorite artists, as evidenced by a very low value result on the stated indicator in the questionnaire. This is due to the reality where today, a massive number of artists shares uniquely different creations from one another, creating the endless need of music to its consumers, leading them to listen to more than one artist in order to cover as much as genres of music they can absorb. This aligns with the matters brought up earlier in this study, about how streaming platforms today supply so much music for one to jam to.

Brand loyalty brings a positive and direct effect to purchase intention [25][39]. The authors believes that when a fan is loyal to their favorite artist, it leads willingness to purchase from them, because the constancy in marketing help create emotional ties leading to loyalty, to the extent of recurring purchases and even willingness to spend more. For instance, Korean popular music (K-POP) hardcore fans would purchase items from their favorite boybands like albums, merchandise, and even unofficial fan-made items, which to add, are not cheap. As a case in point in terms of digital consumptions, legendary R&B artist, Beyonce, exclusively released her sixth solo studio album, “Lemonade,” only on online streaming platform, Tidal, which is known to have higher subscription fees than other platforms, which in this case, husband, Jay-Z, holds position in the BOD. With “Lemonade” only available for digital

downloads in Tidal, Beyonce also released physical products such as limited-edition box set, album coffee table book, and a double vinyl LP. "Lemonade" was only released on other streaming services of Spotify and Apple Music three years later. Beyonce proved how loyalty leads to purchase intention, how her fans are willing to subscribe to Tidal to listen to her new music, bringing 1.2 million new subscribers (including free trials) [40].

For fans, music is seen as a statement, a personality, the same way that consumers identify themselves with brands [41], rather than just something simple, adequate, in one's life. In the digital era of consumption, fans embrace their likeliness towards an artist by actions that implicitly promote and encourage word-of-mouth on their favorite artists' songs. When a fan is told to turn on music, he/she will put on a song by their favorite artist. When a fan has power over a streaming party, he/she will put on a music video by their favorite artist. And when a fan is acting as a DJ, he/she will include their favorite artist in the playlist. These actions of fans influence one's surroundings, and with this, the authors would like to point out how artist-fan relationship based on loyalty builds up other's awareness and intention too – they would like to listen and/or purchase the same music too.

VI. CONCLUSION

With the results on relationship between brand trust, brand commitment, brand loyalty and purchase intention as explored in this study, the authors concludes that the core lies in building brand trust and brand commitment. With Gen Z's behavior in everything digital in terms of consumption, it's wise for artists and other actors in the music industry to focus on building artist-fan relationships digitally as well, in which the authors would like to point out a recommendation to do it through social media, where artists can focus on their own line of fans rather than aiming relationship building to the mass market.

Social media shall be used to embrace that the fans are highly essential to the artist and are deeply acknowledged by being proactive in artist-fan relationship building, utilizing their emotions to give rise to an affective commitment, and to be approachable, reactive, and sensitive in all scenarios. A recent case in point lies with Disney-star-turned-Rock-Star, Miley Cyrus' TikTok trend, where TikTok users slash Miley Cyrus fans turn to Cyrus to make big life decisions, with the trend being "If Miley Cyrus comments, I will ..." and Cyrus weighing in, commenting on her fan's posts, engaging directly, and an ultimate building artist-fan relationship. Content created in social media needs to embrace honesty and an artist's trustworthy values. For instance, sharing behind-the-scenes clips, even if it includes signs of struggles, shows fans that they are normal people with mistakes and obstacles too. With the aimed engagement in social media, fans will also co-create contents on their own platforms, seeing how social media allows fans to express their feelings and thoughts online as well as share their experiences with other via numerous channels [42], assisting in the development of brand trust for those with no prior encounters of an artist or one's prospective fans. This can be further triggered by artists creating interactive contents on their accounts.

Lastly, the authors believes that with Gen Z being tech-savvy [43] and today's advanced, easy-to-use, free streaming services used to listen to any artist in the world, it will be harder to aim for a fan to only be loyal to one favorite artist. With millions of tracks available and easily accessible in the

market, Gen Z music consumers are more likely to have several favorite artists, all of whom complement one another, in a competitive and intimidating way it may oddly seem to appear for actors in the music industry. One can be jamming to Favorite Artist X while in deep need of motivation to work but listening to Favorite Artist Y when going through a saddening heartbreak, and another Favorite Artist Z when being in situations full of rage. In conclusion, attachment is needed to build by the actors in the music industry, particularly between the artists and fans, through social media, with the hopes of having the artists approved as one, if not only, of their favorite artists. Furthermore, work one's way through the answers to when, where, and why a fan listens to the artist's music. By studying more about the fans, the artists can tailor their platform to the fans' needs and wants, and ultimately, build a strong artist-fan relationship in the digital era of consumption.

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