

Influence of Korean dramas on brand perception among gen z in Pontianak: a qualitative study on Kopiko

Richel Jayreh El Rapha S

Departmen Bisnis Digital, Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis Sabda Setia, Pontianak, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the influence of Korean drama product placement on brand perception among Generation Z viewers in Pontianak, Indonesia, with a focus on the Indonesian brand *Kopiko*. Anchored in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, the research investigates how narrative media (stimulus) elicits emotional and cognitive reactions (organism) that shape symbolic brand perception (response). Eighteen Gen Z respondents were selected through purposive sampling and participated in structured online interviews. The results indicate that *Kopiko*'s placement in dramas such as *Vincenzo* and *Little Women* enhanced its symbolic value through narrative immersion, emotional character connection, and cultural alignment. Participants reported increased brand recall, emotional resonance, and in some cases, behavioral intent to repurchase *Kopiko*. These findings suggest that product placement in emotionally engaging and culturally resonant media is a powerful tool to influence brand perception, particularly among media-savvy youth audiences. The study highlights the potential of strategic media integration in shaping localized consumer behavior and offers practical implications for brand communication strategies in emerging markets.

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Corresponding Author:

Richel Jayreh El Rapha S
Departemen Bisnis Digital, Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis Sabda Setia
Jl. Purnama 2, Kecamatan Pontianak Selatan, Kota Pontianak, Kalimantan Barat 78121
Email: richeljayrehel.raphas@itbss.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the Korean Wave (Hallyu) has become a powerful global cultural phenomenon, influencing various aspects of lifestyle, including music, fashion, beauty, and entertainment. Korean dramas (K-dramas), in particular, have played a central role in this movement by shaping audience preferences and emotional connections through compelling narratives and relatable characters. This cultural wave is especially popular among younger generations, notably Generation Z, who are highly engaged with digital platforms and global content. A study by Alruthaya et al. (2021) identifies Generation Z as true digital natives who have never experienced life without the internet, making them highly receptive to international digital trends. Similarly, Content Science (2024) reports that Gen Z spends an average of 4 hours per day using mobile applications, excluding games, with primary activities being streaming video and browsing social media. Furthermore, Criteo (2023) found that Gen Z watches an average of 23 hours of video content per week, demonstrating their strong preference for global audiovisual entertainment. This habitual engagement with digital media platforms explains why K-dramas, which are widely available through global streaming

services like Netflix, Viu, and Disney+, have become a dominant cultural influence among this cohort in Indonesia. This immersion has made Generation Z highly susceptible to the implicit marketing messages embedded in dramas, including brand visibility through product placements. Recent empirical evidence shows that product placement increases brand recall and purchase intention more effectively than traditional television commercials alone (Gamage et al., 2023). In fact, a study by Purnomo (2023) on Indonesian audiences found that product placement in media has a positive and significant influence on brand awareness and, through that mediating effect, on consumer buying interest. This immersion has made Gen Z highly susceptible to the implicit marketing messages embedded in dramas, including brand visibility through product placements. While many studies have explored how Gen Z responds to product placements in Korean dramas at the national level, there remains a lack of attention to how these effects manifest in specific regional contexts. Pontianak, a mid-sized city in West Kalimantan, presents an interesting case where these dynamics can be observed more closely. Gen Z in Pontianak does not simply consume Korean cultural content passively they tend to actively imitate the behaviors, fashion styles, and social norms portrayed in K-Dramas. According to Maryani et al. (2024), fans of Korean dramas in Pontianak, particularly university students, are increasingly adopting K-Drama-inspired clothing, makeup trends, and social behaviors in their daily lives. This strong inclination toward cultural imitation suggests a heightened receptivity to the subtle marketing messages embedded in the media they consume. However, despite this clear pattern of behavioral influence, no prior study has specifically examined the impact of product placement such as the case of Kopiko within Korean dramas on Gen Z audiences in Pontianak. This study, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by exploring how product exposure in media content influences consumption behavior in a localized Indonesian context.

Pontianak, a mid-sized city in West Kalimantan, offers a compelling snapshot of Gen Z's deep engagement with Korean cultural exports. A study by Fortunata and Setyo Utami (2021) on the Korean drama fan community in Pontianak found that watching addiction significantly influences imitation behavior among adolescents particularly in aspects such as fashion, language style, and daily social interactions. This cultural emulation is not limited to behavior alone but extends into consumption patterns, especially toward brands featured in Korean dramas. One key mechanism driving this influence is product placement, where branded items are naturally embedded into scenes and character interactions enhancing brand exposure and recall without interrupting the storytelling. Despite clear evidence of behavioral imitation among Gen Z in Pontianak, no existing study has specifically investigated how product placement such as Kopiko, a brand prominently featured in some Korean dramas affect actual consumer behavior in this local context. This research seeks to fill that gap by examining how media-integrated branding shapes purchasing decisions among young viewers in regional Indonesia. According to Kurniawan and Ningsih (2021), such placements foster emotional connections and symbolic meanings, elevating ordinary products into aspirational symbols. An example of this phenomenon is Kopiko, an Indonesian coffee candy that gained increased recognition after being featured in the popular Korean drama Vincenzo (Anggraini et al., 2023).

This study aims to explore the role of Korean dramas in shaping brand perception among Gen Z viewers in Pontianak, using Kopiko as a focal case. Brand perception refers to how consumers process brand-related stimuli both cognitively, through recognition, memory, and beliefs, and emotionally through feelings, associations, and symbolic meanings (Keller, 2013; Ghanem et al., 2024). These perceptions are critical because they influence brand attitudes and long-term consumer loyalty (Dwivedi et al., 2021). In the context of K-dramas, the emotional attachment viewers develop with characters and narratives may be transferred to the brands embedded in those scenes, a phenomenon known as affective transfer or narrative transportation (Escalas, 2004; Purnomo, 2023). As Generation Z continues to engage with globalized media content, understanding how these perceptions are formed becomes essential for marketers seeking innovative and culturally embedded strategies to reach younger audiences effectively.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to deeply explore and interpret the lived experiences of Generation Z in Pontianak regarding product placement of the *Kopiko* brand in Korean dramas. A phenomenological approach was considered the most suitable for this research

due to its emphasis on understanding the subjective meanings and personal experiences of individuals. Rather than focusing on generalizations or numerical data, this method seeks to capture the essence of how individuals experience, make sense of, and emotionally respond to specific stimuli in this case, branded products embedded within Korean drama narratives. The central aim of this research was to understand how Kopiko's appearance in Korean dramas influences the way Gen Z viewers perceive the brand, including its emotional value, symbolic meaning, and perceived relevance within their lifestyle. Korean dramas are known for their compelling storytelling, character development, and visual aesthetics, all of which can contribute to subtle yet powerful brand associations. When a product like Kopiko is featured within such emotionally charged content, it is hypothesized that viewers may internalize the product's image through affective and cognitive pathways consciously or unconsciously altering their perception of the brand.

To collect primary data, the study utilized an online data collection strategy, specifically using Google Form as the main instrument. This tool was chosen for its practicality, efficiency, and accessibility, especially during a time when in-person interviews may be restricted or impractical. The form was distributed through various digital platforms commonly used by Gen Z, such as Instagram Stories, WhatsApp groups, and LINE messenger, to ensure it reached the target demographic effectively. The questionnaire consisted of both demographic questions and open-ended prompts that encouraged participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of product placements they had noticed in K-dramas. A total of 18 participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify and select individuals who are especially knowledgeable or experienced with the phenomenon of interest. Participants were required to meet specific criteria, including being part of Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2008), residing in Pontianak, and having watched at least one Korean drama that featured visible product placements.

2.1 Research Chronology and Procedure

This research used a qualitative descriptive method with phenomenological analysis, focusing on the lived experiences of Gen Z viewers who have encountered Kopiko product placements in Korean dramas. This design is effective for exploring symbolic and emotional interpretations of media exposure (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.2 Chronology and Procedure

To maintain systematic progression, the research was conducted in structured phases. Each phase built upon the previous to ensure clarity and coherence in the research process.

Table 1. Research Chronology and Procedure

Step	Activity	Description
1	Problem Identification	Define research gap and focus on Kopiko placement in K-dramas
2	Theoretical Framework	Use of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model
3	Research Design	Selection of qualitative phenomenological method
4	Participant Selection	Purposive sampling of 18 Gen Z respondents from Pontianak
5	Data Collection	Distribution of Google Form
6	Validation	Apply member checking and peer review
7	Problem Identification	Define research gap and focus on Kopiko placement in K-dramas

2.3 Research Chronology and Procedure

Sampling is a method used to determine a portion of the population that will be used as research subjects (Handayani, 2020). A sample refers to a small group selected from the population that shares similar characteristics and is analyzed to represent the entire population in a study (Sugiyono, 2017).

This study employed purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, which involves selecting participants based on specific criteria (Sugiyono, 2020). This technique was chosen to focus on a targeted group relevant to the research objective, namely, Gen Z consumers in Pontianak who meet certain criteria.

Table 2. Participant Inclusion Criteria

Criteria	Description
Age Range	18–25 years
Location	Pontianak
Korean Drama Exposure	Watched ≥ 2 dramas in the last 6 months
Product Familiarity	Aware of Kopiko as a brand
Age Range	18–25 years

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the research findings based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theoretical framework, which was originally developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). The S-O-R model is widely used in psychology and consumer behavior studies to explain how external environmental stimuli can influence internal emotional and cognitive states, which subsequently trigger behavioral responses. In marketing and media research, this model helps scholars and practitioners understand how exposure to marketing content such as advertisements, product placements, and brand integrations can affect audience perceptions, emotional engagement, and ultimately, their behavioral intentions.

In the context of this research, the external stimulus is the appearance of Kopiko, a well-known Indonesian coffee candy brand, in the narrative scenes of popular Korean dramas. The organism refers to the internal reactions emotional, cognitive, perceptual experienced by viewers, particularly those belonging to Generation Z. Finally, the response represents the consumer outcomes, such as interest in the product, desire to purchase, change in brand perception, or symbolic identification with the brand. This study is particularly relevant in the digital era, where cross-cultural media consumption is widespread, and Korean popular culture (commonly known as the “Korean Wave” or *Hallyu*) plays a significant role in shaping youth trends, lifestyle, and purchasing behavior across Asia, including in Indonesia. Generation Z, as digital natives, are active consumers of K-dramas and are highly susceptible to subtle media cues such as product placements. As such, their interpretations of brands featured in media narratives are not merely transactional but often emotional and symbolic.

The focus of this study is to understand how the strategic placement of Kopiko in Korean dramas influences the brand perception of Gen Z consumers in Pontianak, West Kalimantan. The research aims to answer not only whether the participants noticed the product, but also how they felt about it, how they interpreted it, and whether their behavior or attitude toward the brand changed after watching the drama. The qualitative data collected from 18 respondents provided rich and nuanced insights that go beyond surface-level observations. Using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model as a theoretical framework, the findings are organized into three interrelated components: (1) exposure to product placement (stimulus), (2) emotional and cognitive reactions (organism), and (3) behavioral and attitudinal responses (response). The results are based on qualitative data gathered from 18 participants through a structured online interview.

3.1 Exposure to Kopiko in Korean Dramas (Stimulus)

The first phase of the S-O-R model, stimulus, refers to an external influence that initiates a psychological or perceptual reaction. In this research, the stimulus is the visual and contextual presence of Kopiko in Korean drama content. The majority of participants reported that they had seen Kopiko appear in Korean dramas, either during a direct viewing or indirectly through short video clips on platforms like TikTok. Some respondents remembered specific dramas such as *Vincenzo* and *Little Women*, while others had a vague recollection or were unaware of the placement altogether. This indicates that the visibility of product placement depends not only on the medium but also on the audience’s attentiveness and viewing habits.

Table 3. Participant Exposure to Kopiko in K-Dramas

Mode of Exposure	Frequency	Example Statements
Direct viewing (e.g., <i>Vincenzo</i> , <i>Little Women</i>)	8/18	“Pas nonton drama <i>Little Women</i> .” “Waktu <i>Vincenzo</i> , aku sadar langsung.”
Social media (TikTok, Twitter)	6/18	“Pertama kali nyadar dari TikTok.” “Aku baru tau dari base Kdrama di Twitter.”
Did not see but heard from others	3/18	“Aku belum pernah lihat langsung, cuma tahu dari teman atau medsos.”
Never noticed	1/18	“Nggak pernah lihat. Gak ngeh.”

“Yes, when I watched *Little Women*.”

“I think I noticed it in *Vincenzo*, I realized it right away.”

“I saw it from a video clip on TikTok, not directly from the drama.”

These findings indicate that media convergence plays a significant role in brand exposure. While television or streaming content is the primary medium, social media acts as an amplifier that extends the lifespan and reach of media messages. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), marketing stimuli

do not always function in isolation; rather, their effectiveness is shaped by the surrounding communication environment, including peer influence and digital media discussions. Even participants who were not conscious of Kopiko during the initial viewing became aware of it later, suggesting the importance of indirect and mediated exposure in shaping brand awareness.

3.2 Cognitive and Emotional Reactions (Organism)

The second phase, **organism**, refers to the internal cognitive and affective reactions triggered by a stimulus. These include attitudes, judgments, emotions, and mental associations with the brand. Participants in this study responded with a wide range of emotional and cognitive assessments. Some found Kopiko's placement to be natural, relevant, and even clever. They noted that it blended well with the scenes, such as when characters were tired or working late. Others described the placement as neutral, meaning it did not bother them or significantly enhance the scene. A few participants admitted that while they recognized it as advertising, it was done in a subtle and acceptable way. Only one participant described the placement as disruptive or forced.

Participant responses to Kopiko's placement were predominantly neutral to positive. Many respondents described the integration as natural and unforced, often citing how it aligned with the scene's context such as characters feeling tired and consuming Kopiko to stay awake. Others perceived the placement as clever or engaging, and a few even expressed surprise at seeing an Indonesian brand in a Korean drama. Notably, almost no participants viewed the placement as disruptive or annoying.

Table 4. Emotional and Cognitive Reactions

Sentiment Type	Frequency	Example Quotes
Positive	9/18	"Keren dan kekinian."
Neutral	4/18	"B aja, nggak ngeganggu."
Slightly disruptive	3/18	"Sadar ini iklan, tapi wajar."

"It was interesting, makes Kopiko seem cool."

"It didn't bother the story, so I think it was fine."

"I was surprised. Like, 'how did Kopiko end up there?'"

"It was just okay, I didn't really notice it."

Several respondents indicated that Kopiko felt more modern or even "Korean" after they saw it appear in a drama. These emotional and perceptual shifts suggest that symbolic value is being constructed through associative meaning linking the brand to the narrative, aesthetic, and cultural tone of the content. As Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015) describe, perception is a selective process. Consumers evaluate stimuli based on personal relevance, prior knowledge, and emotional state. Positive reactions indicate that Kopiko's integration into the drama's narrative and tone was congruent, which fosters positive affective response and higher message acceptance. Furthermore, some participants mentioned feeling national pride, seeing an Indonesian product featured in a global entertainment platform. Emotional triggers such as surprise, nostalgia, and pride are powerful tools for shaping brand attitudes (Solomon, 2019).

3.3 Brand Associations and Behavioral Responses (Response)

The third component of the S-O-R model, **response**, refers to the resultant behavior influenced by the previous stages. In this study, participants reported behaviors ranging from actual purchasing to increased curiosity or reinforced brand loyalty. A significant number of participants reported a desire to purchase or consume Kopiko after seeing it in a drama. For some, this stemmed from existing positive experiences with the brand, while for others, the placement rekindled interest or curiosity. Respondents also mentioned how the placement made Kopiko appear more relevant, trendy, or in line with Korean lifestyle aesthetics demonstrating how symbolic value influences both attitudes and consumer behavior.

Table 5. Behavioral Outcomes

Behavioral Response	Frequency	Description
Bought Kopiko after viewing	5/18	Triggered by seeing in drama
Renewed interest/curiosity	7/18	Pengen coba lagi karena penasaran
No change in behavior	6/18	Sudah sering beli sebelumnya

"I already liked Kopiko, so seeing it was fun."

"I ended up buying it at the small store after seeing the drama."

"I wanted to try it again, just out of curiosity."

"Yes, it made me want to taste it again, it's kind of nostalgic."

These statements highlight how product placement, when embedded in media that resonates with cultural and generational identity, can extend beyond branding into behavioral intent. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), behavioral responses in marketing involve not only immediate purchases but also changes in intention, preference, and loyalty. The participants' interest in repurchasing Kopiko illustrates symbolic behavior, where the product becomes a part of an emotional narrative. This aligns with Solomon (2019), who emphasizes that symbolic consumption often drives purchase decisions especially among Gen Z, who value identity expression through everyday choices.

3.4 Narrative Media, Character Affinity, and Cultural Alignment: Building Symbolic Brand Value

The results also show that three core elements, narrative media, character affinity, and cultural alignment are crucial in influencing how young audiences interpret and internalize the symbolic meaning of a brand: **Narrative Media:** K-dramas serve as powerful vehicles for emotional engagement. When Kopiko appears within a compelling storyline, it is more than a visual cue it becomes part of the narrative, acquiring symbolic weight that enhances recall and relevance. Participants perceived the placement as seamless and even enjoyable, a testament to the effectiveness of storytelling in brand communication. **Character Affinity:** Respondents expressed emotional resonance with characters who consumed Kopiko, particularly when it was used to convey relatable moments (e.g., fatigue, stress, casual interaction). These associations allowed the brand to inherit the likability or emotional strength of the character, reinforcing its perceived authenticity.

"When one of the characters was tired, he ate Kopiko. I was surprised, like 'how did that happen?'"

"When the actor or actress felt sleepy, they would take out a Kopiko. It was kind of funny."

Cultural Alignment: Even though Kopiko is an Indonesian product, its presence in a Korean setting gave it a sense of "belonging" within that cultural frame. Many participants described the brand as feeling "Korean," "modern," or "on-trend" after seeing it in dramas. This recontextualization shows how symbolic value is shaped by the cultural narratives to which a brand is attached.

"It feels trendy... and I guess it kind of feels Korean too."

"Yes, it's modern and cool."

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore how product placement of *Kopiko* within Korean dramas shapes brand perception among Generation Z viewers in Pontianak, using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model as a guiding theoretical framework. The findings reveal that symbolic brand meaning is co-constructed through immersive narrative exposure, emotional attachment to characters, and cultural alignment with aspirational lifestyles. Gen Z respondents were found to interpret Kopiko's product placement not merely as a marketing act but as an organic part of the story, resulting in emotional engagement, symbolic association, and in many cases, behavioral intent to repurchase. Three key components influence this process. First, narrative media enabled deeper message internalization through emotional storytelling. Second, character affinity created parasocial connections that transferred perceived authenticity to the brand. Third, cultural alignment amplified the symbolic value of Kopiko by situating it within desirable and modern Korean contexts, thereby enhancing its relevance among youth audiences.

These insights underscore the strategic potential of embedding local brands within globalized media environments. For marketers targeting Gen Z consumers, particularly in secondary cities like Pontianak, such strategies can elevate brand perception and deepen consumer engagement. Future studies could expand the scope to other cities or explore comparative effects across different product categories and media formats.

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