

# Exploring Consumer Preferences for University Merchandise: The Impact of University Identification, Product Attributes, Social Motivation, Purchasing Experience

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between university identification, product attributes, social and psychological motivation, and purchasing experience with buyer preferences and purchase decisions regarding official Universitas Padjadjaran (Unpad) merchandise. Using the Spearman Rank Correlation method, data were collected from 23 respondents, including students, lecturers, and academic staff at Unpad. The findings indicate a positive and significant correlation between university identification and buyer preference, suggesting that merchandise serves as an identity symbol for students and alumni. Similarly, product attributes such as design, material quality, and exclusivity significantly influence purchasing preferences. Moreover, social and psychological motivation, including peer influence and emotional attachment, was found to be a strong predictor of merchandise preference. Additionally, customer experience in both physical stores and online platforms affected purchasing decisions, emphasizing the need for improved accessibility and service quality. The study highlights that buyer preference directly influences purchase decisions, reinforcing the role of branding, marketing strategies, and consumer engagement in university merchandise sales. The results provide strategic insights for enhancing Unpad's merchandise marketing efforts, with implications for future research on university branding and consumer behavior in higher education institutions.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several universities in Indonesia, including Universitas Padjadjaran (Unpad), Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB), and Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), have transitioned into State Universities with Legal Entity (*Perguruan Tinggi Berbadan Hukum* - PTN-BH). This status grants universities greater autonomy in managing their resources and finances, encouraging institutions to seek additional revenue to support operational sustainability and academic development. One of the strategies implemented is selling official university merchandise. However, a major challenge in optimizing merchandise sales is the low enthusiasm for inter-university sports leagues in Indonesia. Unlike in Europe and the United States counterpart, where campus sports are an integral part of academic culture and significantly boost the demand for university merchandise (Phillips et al., 2014), student engagement in university sports leagues in Indonesia remains relatively low. Additionally, limited promotional efforts and ineffective marketing strategies contribute to the low interest of students in purchasing university merchandise.

To enhance institutional revenue, Unpad has implemented a merchandise marketing strategy through Shop Up, a retail unit dedicated to selling official university merchandise. The launch of Shop Up, officiated by Unpad's Rector, Prof Rina Indriastuti, reflects the institution's commitment to diversifying revenue streams and strengthening its brand identity. In addition to a physical store, Unpad has embraced digital marketing trends by making Shop Up available on the e-commerce platform Tokopedia, enabling broader access for students, alumni, and the general public to purchase exclusive Unpad products online (Universitas Padjadjaran, 2023). This initiative aligns with strategies adopted by various global universities to increase student engagement and institutional loyalty through visual branding elements represented in their merchandise. Moreover, product attributes such as appealing design, high-quality materials, and logos that reflect the university's identity significantly enhance the perceived brand value (Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2021; Chen & Xie, 2022; Harrison & Walker, 2022; Jones & Smith, 2021). Therefore, a combination of institutional identification, superior product attributes, and effective marketing strategies serves as a key factor in encouraging students to purchase university merchandise.

Beyond marketing efforts, the success of university merchandise sales is also influenced by student's identification with their educational institutions. Factors such as academic reputation, quality of facilities, and university brand personality play crucial roles in shaping student's emotional attachment to their institutions (Balaji, Roy, & Quazi, 2019; Wilkins & Huisman, 2019). Students with degree of university identification are more likely to express their affiliation by purchasing and using official university merchandise. Additionally, peer influence significantly impacts student's preferences and purchasing decisions regarding university merchandise. Social support from academic communities and engagement in campus life enhances student's inclination to buy university-branded products as an expression of belonging and social status (Fredricks & Appleton, 2020). Furthermore, psychological capital factors, such as optimism and resilience, contribute to strengthening student's emotional attachment to their institutions, ultimately affecting their loyalty to university products (Carmona-Halty & Slåtten, 2021). Thus, in addition to effective marketing strategies, building a strong campus community and culture is essential for increasing student interest in purchasing university merchandise in Indonesia.

Shopping experience also plays a crucial role in shaping student's preferences for university merchandise. Factors such as services quality, physical store convenience, and product accessibility on digital platforms contribute to customer satisfaction and product loyalty (Prabowo, 2018; Hendarsono & Sugiharto, 2013). In the digital ecosystem, trust in e-commerce platforms and online shopping orientation also influence student's purchasing decisions regarding university merchandise (Rohmah, 2018; Azifah & Dewi, 2016). Students who have a positive shopping experience, whether in physical stores or online platforms, are more likely to make repeat purchases and recommend the products to their peers. Therefore, Universities that can affectively manage product quality, strengthen marketing strategies, and enhance shopping experiences will be better positioned to increase the competitiveness of their merchandise in the market and strengthen student loyalty to their institution.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the Spearman Rank Correlation method was employed to analyze the relationship between two ordinal variables using a sample consisting of 23 students, lecturers, and academic staff at Universitas Padjadjaran. Spearman Rank Correlation is a non-parametric statistical technique used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between two ranked (ordinal) variables (Sugiyono, 2017). This method was selected because the data obtained did not meet the normality assumption and were ordinal in scale. The analysis procedure involved ranking each variable, calculating the rank differences for each observation pair, and finally determining the Spearman correlation coefficient based on the established formula. This approach enables researchers to assess the extent of the relationship between the examined variables without requiring assumption of normal data distribution (Wahyudin et al., 2022).

This study utilized Spearman Rank Correlation method to examine the relationship between university identification and affiliation, product attribute, social and psychological motivation, and purchasing experience, in relation to consumer preferences and expectations, and buying decision of official Universitas Padjadjaran merchandise. The research sampling process employed purposive sampling, with the criterion that respondents must have at least been aware of or purchased Universitas Padjadjaran merchandise through Shop Up's physical stores or through their e-commerce. The data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed to determine the extent to which these

factors contribute to shaping consumer preferences and purchasing decisions regarding Universitas Padjadjaran merchandise.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The majority of respondents indicate that using Unpad merchandise serves as an identifier of their affiliation with the university. With an average score of 4.6 out of 5, this finding suggests a strong sense of pride in wearing Unpad merchandise, reinforcing their feeling of being part of the institution. Regarding the product quality, respondents expressed satisfaction with Unpad merchandise. The average score of 4.01 out of 5 indicates that the products meet their expectations, particularly in terms of material quality, durability, and price-to-quality ratio. However, the design aspect received relatively lower scores, suggesting room for improvement in this area. In terms of social and psychological factors, wearing Unpad merchandise fosters a sense of connection among respondents with their peers and alumni. This reflected in an average score of 4.13 out of 5, indicating that the use of Unpad Merchandise enhances their affiliation with university. Respondents also reported satisfaction with their purchasing experience, both in physical stores or via Tokopedia, as reflected in a score of 4 out of 5. However, accessibility issues were noted, as respondents perceived that the physical store's location was not easily reachable. Furthermore, respondents prefer purchasing Unpad merchandise as a way to support university's programs. They are also more likely to purchase merchandise if the product are exclusive or limited edition. When making a purchase decision, respondents view Unpad merchandise as an opportunity to express their pride as students or alumni. They also believe that by purchasing Unpad merchandise, they contribute to preserving the university's culture and promoting its image beyond the campus

After conducting the Spearman Rank Correlation test with a t-table value of 1.72074 ( $\alpha=0.05$ ,  $df=21$ ), several key findings emerged from the analysis:

#### **University Identification and Buyer Preference**

The  $r_s$  score of 0.629 and t-value of 4.7454 indicate a positive and significant relationship between university identification and buyer preference. This finding supports previous research, which suggests that merchandise serves as an identity symbol that reflects social status and individual preferences (Rudiya, Supriyadi, & Junaidi, 2024; Prasetyo, 2022).

#### **Product Attributes and Buyer Preference**

The  $r_s$  score of 0.3278 and t-value of 1.8323 suggest a positive and significant relationship between product attributes and buyer preference. This finding aligns with prior studies, which emphasize in purchasing merchandise (Rahman & Wibowo, 2022)

#### **Social and Psychological Motivation and Buyer Preference**

The  $r_s$  score of 0.7369 and t-value of 6.5837 indicate a positive and significant correlation between social and psychological motivation and buyer preference. This result is consistent with previous research, which highlights that psychological factors such as motivation, perception, knowledge, and attitude significantly impact purchasing decisions (Munawaroh, 2021; Wahyudi, 2024; Saragih, 2023; Alfarisi, Rafidah, & Budianto, 2024).

#### **Purchase Experience and Buyer Preference**

A positive and significant relationship was also found between purchase experience and buyer preference, as reflected in an  $r_s$  score of 0.4209 and t-value of 2.5350. these findings align with previous studies that demonstrate how customer experience significantly influences purchasing decisions (Aditya & Gunaningrat, 2024; Rohmadhonawati, Anggraeni, & Hidayat, 2024).

#### **Buyer Preference and Purchase Decision**

Lastly, this study found a positive and significant relationship between buyer preference and purchase decision, with an  $r_s$  score of 0.4291 and t-value of 2.6025. this result supports prior research, which identifies various buyer preferences that influence purchase decisions (Ronauli & Indriani, 2020; Fauziah & Hasanah, 2024).

### 4. CONCLUSION

The study hypothesized that factors such as university identification, product attributes, social and psychological motivation, and purchasing experience significantly influence buyer preferences and purchase decisions regarding official Universitas Padjadjaran merchandise. The result of the Spearman Rank Correlation test confirmed these relationships, demonstrating positive and significant correlations between these variables and consumer purchasing behavior. These findings reinforce the premise that university-branded merchandise serves as an identity maker, reflects consumer preferences, and contributes to institutional branding and engagement. Furthermore, the

study highlights potential avenues for future research and practical applications. Enhancing product attributes, improving accessibility to physical stores, and leveraging digital marketing strategies could further increase student engagement and merchandise sales. Additionally, fostering a stronger sense of university affiliation through community-building initiative and expanding promotional efforts may enhance student's willingness to purchase and advocate for university merchandise. Future studies could explore a broader demographic scope, including alumni and external university stakeholder, to assess long-term brand loyalty and purchasing behaviour. Moreover, integrating advanced marketing analytics and consumer behaviour models could refine promotional strategies and optimized merchandise offerings. Ultimately, this study provides a foundation for the strategic development of university merchandise marketing, bridging institutional identity, consumer preferences, and purchasing behaviour. Future research should continue exploring the evolving landscape of university branding and its commercial potential, particularly in response to shifts in digital consumption trends and global merchandising strategies.

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