

# Communication Strategies Implemented by JKT48 Towards Fan Loyalty

*Dieke Marsha Angelica*<sup>1\*</sup>, *Zaki Ainul Fadli*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Japanese Language and Culture Study Program, Faculty Humanities, Diponegoro University, Indonesia

**Abstract.** JKT48 is an idol group originally formed in Indonesia and produced by Akimoto Yasushi. JKT48 debuted in 2011, and still exists in the Indonesian music industry to the present day. JKT48 can survive because they have loyal fans that attend all JKT48 activities which are adapted from events that are also routinely held by JKT48's sister group in Japan. This research focuses on knowing the communication strategies applied by JKT48 that have succeeded in fostering a sense of loyalty of JKT48 fans to remain JKT48 fans for years. This research uses the perspective of social exchange communication theory and parasocial relationship theory. This research uses a qualitative approach with data collection methods in the form of questionnaire surveys, and literature studies. The results of this research are JKT48 uses 4 communication strategies, which are the concept of "Idol you can meet", songs from JKT48 which have various genres and meanings, character building of JKT48 members and a solid JKT48 fanbase environment that has succeeded in making JKT48 have a loyal fan base.

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: [diekemarshaangelica@gmail.com](mailto:diekemarshaangelica@gmail.com)

## **1 Introduction**

JKT48 is an Indonesian idol group produced by Akimoto Yasushi. Akimoto Yasushi is the founder of Japanese idol groups including 48 Group. JKT48 is the first overseas branch of the 48 Group. The oldest of the 48 groups is AKB48, which was formed in 2005. The formation of JKT48 was first announced on September 11, 2011 at an AKB48 event held at Makuhari Messe in Chiba, Japan. JKT48 members are selected through an audition system of dancing and singing. Like other idol groups in Japan, JKT48 uses a regeneration system. JKT48 actively holds auditions every few years. JKT48 has the same concept as other sister 48 Groups, named "idols you can meet".

JKT48 fandom is known as a group fandom that is quite loyal, solid and compact. JKT48 members also treat their fans well. They try to create a close relationship through social media and face-to-face. The frequent interactions between JKT48 members and fans trigger a more intimate feeling from JKT48 fans towards their idols. The feelings felt by JKT48 fans can also be referred to as parasocial relationship interactions. In the relationship between fans and JKT48 members, a social exchange occurs where fans exchange social resources in the form of providing support in the hope of getting happiness from JKT48 members. This is in line with the theory of social exchange communication by George C. Homans. This communication helps organize and maintain mutually beneficial social relationships. JKT48 fans will not regularly attend JKT48 events if they do not get a sense of pleasure from the activities they do. The unending loyalty of JKT48 fans is very interesting to be studied to find out what communication strategies are applied in JKT48 activities, through the concepts of social exchange communication theory and social relations theory, thus triggering JKT48 fans to have high loyalty in supporting JKT48. Research on communication strategies in the J-pop themed idol environment in Indonesia has also been published in previous research by Darmawan Ega Dwiky (2021) with the title Nanoka Marketing Communication Strategy as a J-Pop Idol in Yogyakarta, the results of his research show that the Nanoka Idol Group uses a communication strategy of segmentation, targeting, and positioning selection to be able to compete with other idol groups around the island of Java, Indonesia.

## **2 Result and Discussion**

This research uses a qualitative approach, which aims to understand social phenomenon and human behavior through interpretation and analysis of descriptive and non-numerical data. This research is a case study research to get an overall reference about a target. The data collection method in this research uses questionnaire questions. It aims to find out the point of view of various JKT48 fans with various backgrounds to find out what JKT48's communication strategies are successful in fostering loyalty in their fans. This research successfully collected 157 respondents from JKT48 fan communities with different backgrounds.

## **2.1 JKT48 Activities**

The concept of 48 Groups is “idols you can meet”. All 48 Groups in Japan have their own Theatre in their respective prefectures. The Theatre is used to showcase the idol group members’ regular performances that take place almost every day with various setlists and different members. Through these Theatre performances, fans can see the development of their favorite members. 48 Groups also have other events that are oriented towards establishing intense closeness to their fans, such as the handshake festival and 2shot events. A handshake event is an event where fans can talk one-on-one with their favorite members. When the pandemic happened, the handshake event was replaced with video call event, so the essence of talking only with selected members was not eliminated. Meanwhile, the 2shot event is an activity where fans can take pictures together with their favorite members, so the fans can make memories that are physically present with their favorite members. In the release of new songs, 48 groups have 2 concepts. The first concept is *Senbatsu* (selected members) according to the management’s preference. The second concept is *Senbatsu* according to fan voting or commonly called *Sousenkyo* events. *Sousenkyo* activities held in all 48 groups, all members of the 48 Groups who participated in *Sousenkyo* will compete to get the highest votes from 1-16 to perform the latest single.

With this concept, JKT48 also has lots of activities that are implemented with fans. JKT48 adapted all activities from sister groups in Japan, such as doing Theatreshow, handshake festivals, *senbatsu sousenkyou*, 2 shots, and official fan club events. JKT48 has a Theatre located in Fx Sudirman Mall, Jakarta. The current JKT48 theatre show price is RP. 200,000 for each show. Theater tickets can only be purchased on the JKT48 website.

Since 2020, JKT48 theater & concert can also be streamed online. JKT48 theater performances are held every day, except Monday. Through this theatre activity, JKT48 fans are able to frequently come and watch the development of JKT48 members at each show. Since its debut, JKT48 has regularly held handshake festivals with an interval of three months. After the pandemic, the handshake festival activities were replaced with the personal meet and greet. In personal meet and greet activities, fans can still talk one-on-one with the member of their choice but without shaking hands. Personal meet and greet tickets are priced at Rp. 50,000 for a 10-second duration. JKT48 also holds a 2shot event, so fans can make memories with taking a photo together with the member of their choice. JKT48 fans can buy 2shot event tickets, which cost Rp. 150,000. The venue for personal meet and greet and 2shot activities is not only held in Jakarta, but also in several major cities in Indonesia. After the pandemic, JKT48 also held video call events every month to make it easier for worldwide fans to interact with members. Video call ticket is priced at Rp. 100,000 for a 50-second duration. JKT48 regularly held big concerts such as anniversary concerts, member graduation concerts, and concerts with new themes every year. All JKT48 members are very active on social media, especially on Instagram and Twitter. In order to greet fans more often, currently each JKT48 member has a showroom account. Showroom is a livestreaming platform that originated in Japan. Initially this platform was only used by 48 Groups based in Japan, but since 2020, JKT48 members can regularly greet their fans by livestreaming their daily activities on the showroom application. JKT48 fans can watch the live showroom for free, but fans can also give paid gifts through showroom app to get a high position in the viewer rank in the live streaming. Like other sister group members in Japan, JKT48 members will greet the top-ranked fans every time the live showroom is in session. JKT48 fans can also subscribe to each JKT48 member's private message. Private message is a service from JKT48 management in collaboration with LINE platform. By subscribing to private messages, JKT48 fans will get broadcast messages written directly by JKT48 members. JKT48 also has an official fanclub program, fans who join as JKT48 official fanclub will get various benefits, such as special events, special content only for fanclub members, and also prioritized purchase schedules for every event held by JKT48. These activities are conducted in order to give JKT48 fans many moments to get closer to their favorite JKT48 members.

## **2.2 In-group rules and JKT48 fandom environment**

JKT48 has tightly packed events throughout the year and is quite close to their fans. Therefore, JKT48 also adapted the rules of the 48 Japanese Groups known as the Golden Rules. This rule was created because JKT48 wants to provide a positive impact and example for fans and society. The rules that are believed and applied in the JKT48 group, as rules aimed at the attitude of its members in maintaining the good name of the group. According to JKT48 The 1st official guide book, the following are the contents of JKT48's golden rules:

1. JKT48 members are not allowed to date.
2. JKT48 members are not allowed to smoke or drink alcohol.
3. JKT48 members are not allowed to wear flashy clothes and excessive make up.
4. JKT48 members are not allowed to directly interact with fans on social media.
5. JKT48 members are not allowed to travel without a guard or bodyguard.
6. JKT48 members are not allowed to go to nightclubs or discotheques while still on contract.
7. JKT48 members are not allowed to put their signatures in any place without permission from the management.
8. JKT48 members are not allowed to neglect their education.

JKT48 management also applies some strict rules for fans who participated in all JKT48 events. All rules for fans who attend JKT48 events, have been written on the JKT48 website. At JKT48 theater performances or concerts, the audience is not allowed to record the performance unless it is allowed during a special time for recording. Fans are not allowed to take pictures with JKT48 members except at 2shot events. During video call and personal meet and greet events, fans are also not allowed to record conversations with members or disseminate it. If these rules are violated, JKT48 management will impose strict sanctions, which is the fan will be blacklisted at all events held by JKT48.

## **2.3 JKT48 communication strategy**

Referring to the questionnaire data that has been filled out by 157 respondents who are JKT48 fans, it can be concluded that JKT48 has carried out several communication strategies that have succeeded in

making fans loyal and remain with a long time span in the fandom. The following are the communication strategies implemented by JKT48:

1. The concept of “Idol you can meet”.

One of the communication strategies adopted by JKT48 is to maintain closeness with fans and create the impression that they are “idols you can meet” concept. JKT48 members actively interact with fans through social media, hold fan meet events, and provide opportunities for fans to feel close to group members. This concept strengthens the parasocial interaction relationship between fans and group members. Although the interaction occurs through mass media or public events, fans feel the opportunity to interact directly with their idols. This strengthens the emotional bond and desire to get to know the group members more closely and motivates the fans to come to every event held by JKT48. In these occasions, there is a direct social exchange between group members and fans. Fans give attention, support, and appreciation to group members, while group members give their attention, smiles, and time to interact with fans. This creates a give-and-take relationship that can strengthen the bond between group members and fans.

2. JKT48’s songs have various genres and meanings.

The main product of idol groups is music. By presenting songs that have different genres and meanings, JKT48 can reach various types of fans with diverse musical preferences. JKT48’s songs can also represent the values and stories carried by the group. For example, songs with themes of friendship, struggle, or courage can reflect the spirit and values that JKT48 wants to represent. These songs help in communicating the group’s message and identity to fans. Songs with strong messages or touching melodies can create an emotional bond between group members and fans, thus fueling a sense of identification and loyalty. This variety of songs is also a reason for JKT48 fans to attend JKT48 theater shows and concerts.

3. Character building of JKT48 members

When JKT48 members demonstrate positive character traits, such as respect, cooperation, and a good attitude, fans feel impressed and connected to them. Group members who obey the Golden Rules create a sense of trust and admiration from fans, which can strengthen their loyalty. JKT48 members who obey the Golden Rules reflect positive values that are valued by fans. When fans see group members who hold ethical principles that are important to them, fans feel more connected and motivated to support and remain loyal to the group and members. The Golden Rules will make fans feel as if they are the closest person to the

members they support. With these Golden Rules, the feeling of fans who want to always be close and know the development of members will continue to be monetized by JKT48 management which will make JKT48 idol business will continue to survive.

#### 4. JKT48's solid fanbase environment

JKT48 fans already have their own culture that has been formed since the debut, so the JKT48 Fandom environment is maintained because they understand the limits of certain rules. In a solid fanbase environment, JKT48 fans feel like part of a community that shares the same interests and love for the group. They feel they have an identity as JKT48 fans, which creates an emotional bond and sense of belonging to the group. A solid fanbase environment often involves community activities, such as fan meetings, fan events, or joint projects. Through these activities, fans can interact with each other, share experiences, and strengthen bonds with fellow fans. Participation in these community activities can strengthen fans' sense of loyalty and attachment to JKT48.

### 3 Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis conducted by researchers regarding the results of data findings in research related to communication strategies carried out by JKT48 on fan loyalty, it can be concluded that JKT48 has four communication strategies, which are the concept of "Idol you can meet", the variety of songs, the character of JKT48 members, and a solid fandom environment, successfully fostering fan loyalty. The number of events organized by JKT48 makes fans feel close to the group members. Fans can talk about many topics that will continue to be told at the next event. JKT48 events that are easily accessible and scheduled make fans wait for the event to be held again every year and become one of the reasons for staying in the JKT48 fandom. JKT48 has a variety of songs with varied genres so fans will not feel bored. Songs with different genres can reaching out to music fans from various backgrounds and preferences. This widens the fan base and has the potential to attract new attention. JKT48 fans tend to support the same member from the beginning until the member graduates from JKT48. Therefore, members who have strong characters and good behavior will be a great motivation for JKT48 fans to always support the member's career in the group. In addition, good relationships between fellow JKT48 fans are also a reason why fans stay in the fandom. Fans who feel supported and accepted by fellow fans are

more likely to be loyal to the group because they feel part of a community that supports each other.

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