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FANDOM POWER: EXAMINING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT, ATTITUDES, AND PURCHASE INTENTIONS IN K-POP FANDOM-BRAND COLLABORATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Manuscript type: Empirical paper

Research Aims: This study examines the impact of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) fandom in Indonesia, focusing on collaborations between Indonesian companies and K-Pop idols. It aims to understand how fan interactions influence purchasing behavior toward celebrity-endorsed products.

Design/methodology/approach: The research employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze data from 1,016 respondents familiar with collaboration campaigns between Indonesian companies and K-Pop idols. It examines customer-to-customer identification (CCI), customer-to-community identification (CMI), attitudinal engagement, behavioral engagement, attitude toward brand, and attitude toward celebrity.

Research Findings: The findings reveal that CCI is positively linked to CMI and enhances customer attitudinal engagement. Furthermore, CMI significantly impacts both attitudinal and behavioral customer engagement. While attitude toward celebrity predicts purchase intention, attitude toward brand does not. These results highlight the complex dynamics within K-Pop fandoms and their influence on consumer behavior.

Theoretical Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the literature by providing a deeper understanding of distinct types of fan identification and their impacts on different forms of customer engagement. It underscores the importance of celebrity endorsements in shaping purchase intentions within the context of the Hallyu phenomenon.

Practitioner/Policy Implication: The insights from this research can inform marketing strategies for companies leveraging the popularity of K-Pop idols. Marketers should focus on enhancing fan identification and engagement, particularly leveraging celebrity influence to drive purchase intentions.

Research limitation/Implications: *The study is limited to Indonesian fans and specific collaboration campaigns. Future research could expand to other countries and different celebrity endorsements to validate and extend the findings.*

Keywords: *K-pop, fandom, social identification, customer engagement, purchase intention.*

INTRODUCTION

In the Indonesian instant noodles market, a new player entered the saturated market with a strategic vision to boost its brand awareness rapidly. This vision materialised through a collaboration with a prominent Korean boyband, unfolding a marketing campaign that featured collectable cards of the boyband within the instant noodle packages. The allure of these collectables captivated the sizable fan club associated with the Korean boy band, compelling fans to embark on a journey to obtain these cards. With certain cards being rarer than others, acquiring these cards was woven into the narrative of an emotionally resonant experience. Beyond mere noodles, this collaboration transcended to encompass not only the image of the boy band but also the collective fervour of the fandom. The product ceased to be just instant noodles; it became a conduit for the affection of the fandom, triggering a cycle of desire and camaraderie. Through the boy band's charismatic influence, a new contender emerged from near obscurity, metamorphosed by the fervent devotion of its ardent supporters.

This transformative outcome mirrored the aspirations of Lemonilo when they partnered with NCT Dream in 2022. Lemonilo, a "tech-based healthy lifestyle consumer goods"

provider, entered the scene in 2016 with the launch of its instant noodle brand.

The profound impact of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) on the entertainment landscape has reverberated even within Indonesia. Hallyu denotes the worldwide resonance of South Korean cultural phenomena, encompassing pop culture, entertainment, music, TV dramas, and films (Roll, 2021). The Indonesian context saw the emergence and growth of Hallyu in the 2000s, with TV series such as "Secret Garden," "Winter Sonata," and idol groups like Girls' Generation, Super Junior, and BigBang captivating the youth (Jin & Yoon, 2016).

Worldwide, the Hallyu industry has seen remarkable growth over the years, as illustrated by a survey conducted by the Korea Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the past year, the number of Hallyu fans worldwide soared to 225 million, a significant increase from the 9.26 million recorded in the first survey in 2012. These fans are organised into 1,748 fan clubs spread across 119 countries, with approximately 68% of these clubs dedicated to K-pop (Park, 2024). The South Korean music industry, including K-pop, achieved record-breaking sales revenue of roughly 11 trillion KRW in 2022, with an export value of about 927.6 million USD (Statista, 2024).

The upsurge in K-Pop's popularity was accompanied by fans who actively identified themselves as part of fandoms associated with specific groups. Within the Korean entertainment sphere, fandom refers to a collective of individuals ardently admiring and supporting a musical group or idol. Beyond individual adoration, fandom represents a social phenomenon and cultural practice (Jung & Lee, 2009). Fan-driven activities encompass diverse actions like streaming music videos, voting, purchasing albums and merchandise, and advocating for the idol or group through fundraising.

This sense of affiliation among fans constitutes a phenomenon termed social identification. Social identification reflects an individual's inclination to align with a social group, driven by the aspiration to elevate their self-esteem (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Members of these social groups actively engage in communal interactions and pursuits aligned with their self-identity, forging a psychological connection to the collective fate (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

These interactions among individuals within a group significantly influence their engagement and involvement. In this context, fandoms are akin to customers of idol-producing agencies within the Korean entertainment sector, and their engagement equates to customer engagement. Scholarly literature (Hollebeek, 2011; Vivek et al., 2014) frames customer engagement as a psychological state rooted in emotional and cognitive ties between customers and brands within specific contexts. Engaging with a brand and its community through interaction

and communication cultivates brand understanding, loyalty, and purchase intent (Prentice et al., 2018).

Given the burgeoning practice of employing Korean idols as brand ambassadors for Indonesian products, exemplified by the Lemonilo × NCT Dream collaboration, this study scrutinises whether customer engagement among the NCTzen fandom, the official name for dedicated fans of NCT Dream, suffices to amplify purchase intention. It further investigates the extent to which the level of social identification within the NCTzen fandom influences the degree of customer engagement. The study explores whether attitudes towards the Lemonilo brand and NCT Dream impact purchase intention within the NCTzen community. This research model, adapted from Prentice et al. (2019) and Min et al. (2019), embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the impact of identity-driven consumer engagement on NCTzen fandom's purchase intention, using Lemonilo products featuring K-pop merchandise, particularly photocard collectables, as its focal point.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Culture Theory

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) offers a unique and insightful lens to examine the intricate dynamics between consumers, cultural meanings, and the market. As an interdisciplinary field of study, CCT delves into the multifaceted relationships individuals share with products, brands, and consumer experiences, unravelling the rich tapestry of cultural influences shaping these interactions. At its core, CCT challenges

conventional perspectives by spotlighting the pivotal role of consumers as active agents who consume, co-create, and shape cultural meanings.

Emerging in the late 20th century as a response to the limitations of traditional consumer behaviour theories, CCT introduces a paradigm shift that acknowledges the significance of culture in shaping consumer behaviours, preferences, and identity formation. This study embarks on a journey into the realm of CCT, where scholars explore the nuanced interplay between consumers and their cultural contexts, transforming mundane acts of consumption into profound expressions of identity, social belonging, and symbolic communication.

In this literature review, this research delves into the foundational principles and critical tenets that underpin the domain of Consumer Culture Theory. The origins, theoretical underpinnings, and the evolution of its core concepts will be traversed. A diverse array of scholarly contributions will be encountered throughout this exploration, illuminating how consumption is not merely transactional but deeply intertwined with constructing self-concept, social relationships, and cultural narratives.

K-pop Idol Fandom and Merchandise

Drawing from the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) lens, "fandom" emerges as a dynamic interplay between consumer devotion, cultural meanings, and identity formation. The term "fandom" finds its origins in the fusion of "fan," signifying an ardent

enthusiast, and "dom," denoting a domain, community, or collective. Reysen and Branscombe (2010) trace the roots of "fanatic" back to the Latin term "fanaticus," often used to depict individuals who harbour an impassioned adoration for a person or object. Within the Korean entertainment industry context, "fandom" encapsulates a congregation of individuals who harbour intense affection for a celebrity, idol, or musical ensemble.

Beyond mere appreciation, fandom members exhibit an amplified commitment to endorsing and supporting their revered figure. Rigid criteria do not confine membership in a K-pop Idol Fandom; it represents a multifaceted process where an individual's identification as a fan deepens, accompanied by the adoption of functional roles that extend beyond performance and encompass cultural engagement (Koenigstorfer et al., 2010; Bulck et al., 2016). To enter a fandom within K-pop, individuals must establish a profound fan identity and partake in activities that manifest their devotion. In K-pop, these supportive actions encompass following idols on social media, participating in their events, streaming music videos, voting in competitions, procuring merchandise, and advocating for idols among peers.

To provide context to this research, the K-Pop merchandise featured in the collaboration between Lemonillo and NCT Dream is a set of "collectable photo cards" included inside Lemonillo packages. These collectable cards hold significant value among K-pop fans. Photo cards, often

included in idol albums, play a crucial role in fan interactions. Exchanging these photo cards is one of the core activities among some fandom members, fostering a sense of community and connection (Desnika & Tambunan, 2023). The practice of card collecting has a long history and is associated with various fandom communities, such as Pokémon, Magic: The Gathering, and Yu-Gi-Oh! (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004). This tradition enhances fan engagement and highlights the importance of tangible merchandise in sustaining the vibrant culture of K-pop fandoms.

Within the context of K-pop merchandise, CCT elucidates the intricate nexus between consumption practices, symbolic meanings, and fandom dynamics. K-Pop merchandise comprises an array of items tailored to satiate the desires of fandom, encompassing tangible products adorned with the idol's image, ranging from fans and hand banners to mugs and keepsakes (Kim et al., 2018). Additionally, K-pop merchandise can manifest in forms designed to bolster the idols themselves, encompassing music albums, posters, photocard sets, light sticks, vinyl CDs, and more.

Within the framework of CCT, the Korean entertainment industry encounters a paradigm shift as it grapples with the evolving landscape of music consumption. The Korean music record market's contraction and the proliferation of diverse concepts from idol groups have truncated the lifespan of Korean idol groups, prompting a reevaluation of revenue-generation strategies (Jung & Lee, 2009).

The concept of "one-source-multi-use," rooted in the Japanese entertainment industry, gains traction as the Korean industry embraces a revenue model underpinned by an expansive array of products tied to idol stars, thereby fostering a close-knit relationship between idols and their fandom. Through this lens, K-pop merchandise transcends its functional utility to become a conduit for cultural expression, social affiliation, and the co-creation of meaning within fan culture and consumption.

Social Identification

According to Abrams & Hogg (1988), the impetus for individuals to align themselves with a social group stems from a desire to bolster their self-assurance. This inclination toward group affiliation prompts individuals to gravitate toward activities that resonate with significant facets of their identity, fostering a sense of psychological interconnectedness with the collective destiny of the group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Tajfel (1979) asserted that social identity materialises as an individual's self-concept shaped by their affiliations with various groups. These affiliations, spanning social class, familial ties, and more, often evoke profound sentiments of pride and self-worth. In the present study, the construct of social identification unfolds into two distinct facets: customer-to-customer identification (CCI) and customer-to-community identification (CMI).

Within a community, a member who consistently shares information assumes a

recognisable identity among fellow members seeking and absorbing such information. This phenomenon embodies CCI. Conversely, CMI transpires when members perceive the community as a source of assistance, spurring their interaction with fellow members and reinforcing their self-identification within the larger community.

Customer Engagement

Brodie et al. (2011) conducted a comprehensive literature review on customer engagement, unveiling two fundamental propositions out of five, which encompass (1) the occurrence of post-purchase interactions between customers and organisations and (2) the recognition of customers as essential contributors to value creation, working alongside organisations and various stakeholders. These propositions underscore customers' pivotal role, surpassing their traditional role as mere product consumers. However, it is essential to note that not all customers are equally inclined to participate; only those actively engaged with the organisation are likely to collaborate. Consequently, through strategic customer engagement initiatives, companies can effectively influence the degree of emotional attachment that customers develop toward their brand (Tuguinay et al., 2022).

Porter et al. (2011) further elaborate on customer engagement, categorising it into two distinct types: Customer Attitudinal Engagement (CAE) and Customer Behavioral Engagement (CBE). The attitudinal facet embodies a psychological state characterised by heightened involvement, a sense of ownership, and a

profound connection to the brand, encompassing cognitive and affective dimensions. Conversely, the behavioural aspect encompasses a range of observable behaviours that extend beyond mere transactions, driven by the individual's cognitive and affective states.

Attitudes toward the Brand and the Celebrity

As understood through the lens of CCT, attitude is a multifaceted construct that encapsulates an individual's cognitive and affective evaluation of an object, advertisement, or person (Min et al., 2019). This evaluative dimension shapes the lens through which consumers interact with and interpret their consumption experiences, thereby shaping the intricate nuances of their consumer behaviours. However, the dynamism of attitudes, while often stable over time, can be malleable, swayed by the ebb and flow of marketing interventions, such as television advertisements and celebrity endorsements (Solomon et al., 2012). In the context of CCT, attitudes are not passive constructs but are shaped and reshaped within the socio-cultural milieu, reflecting the complex interaction between external stimuli and internal perceptions.

Applying the principles of CCT, attitudes towards a brand delve beyond a mere transactional evaluation. They metamorphose into emotional responses that are deeply embedded in the symbolic and cultural significance attributed to the brand. CCT contends that brand attitude extends beyond functional attributes and invokes a more profound emotional resonance,

encapsulating the positive or negative nature of a consumer's purchase intention and their broader perception of the brand (Lutz et al., 1983). Through the lens of CCT, a brand is not just a commodity; it morphs into a vessel of meanings, aspirations, and social identity, shaping how consumers view themselves and relate to the world around them.

Transcending the realm of objects, attitudes towards celebrities are equally germane within CCT's purview. Celebrities encapsulate cultural symbols, embodying values, aspirations, and ideals. Their association with a brand lends a sense of authenticity and credibility that resonates with consumers who identify with their persona. According to Min et al. (2019), consumer attitudes towards celebrities are rooted in perceptions of credibility, expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Within the CCT framework, these characteristics are refracted through the cultural lens, shaped by societal norms, media representations, and individual experiences.

In conclusion, attitudes within the realm of CCT transcend static evaluations, evolving through dynamic interplays between cultural cues, individual interpretations, and marketing interventions. Embracing a holistic understanding of attitudes as deeply embedded within cultural narratives and symbolic constructs, CCT elucidates how these attitudes weave the fabric of consumer behaviours, branding strategies, and the intricate dance between individuals and the cultural marketplace.

Purchase Intention

Purchase Intention within the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) framework pertains to customers' likelihood of making future purchasing decisions based on their subjective evaluations of products, particularly within a certain income threshold (Sharma et al., 2021). This cognitive assessment subsequently translates into concrete purchasing behaviour over time. Notably, Dodds et al. (1991) posited that purchase intention encapsulates the latent potential for consumers to initiate a purchase action. Echoing this, Kumar et al. (2021) emphasised that purchase intention is intertwined with subjective judgments that shape consumers' anticipated future behaviours, encapsulating what they intend to acquire in subsequent transactions.

Sharma's (2021) perspective underscores the significance of purchase intention as a vital gauge for predicting consumers' forthcoming buying actions. This indicator is paramount, as consumers meticulously weigh various aspects' advantages and disadvantages before purchasing (Hewei & Lee, 2022). In this light, companies can effectively cultivate a heightened inclination towards purchasing when customers fully understand and genuinely endorse the products being presented (Gasior, 2021). Such endorsement not only influences customers' perception of the product's value but also shapes their intentions to engage in future transactions, thereby reflecting the intricate interplay of culture, consumption, and behavioural inclinations within the realm of CCT.

RESEARCH MODEL

The research model in this study is adapted from the primary reference article by Prentice et al. (2019). Additionally, the study incorporates the Attitude variable from the

research model presented in the journal article by Min et al. (2019). Figure 1 exhibits the research model, and the following are the detailed research hypotheses that formed the model tested in this study.

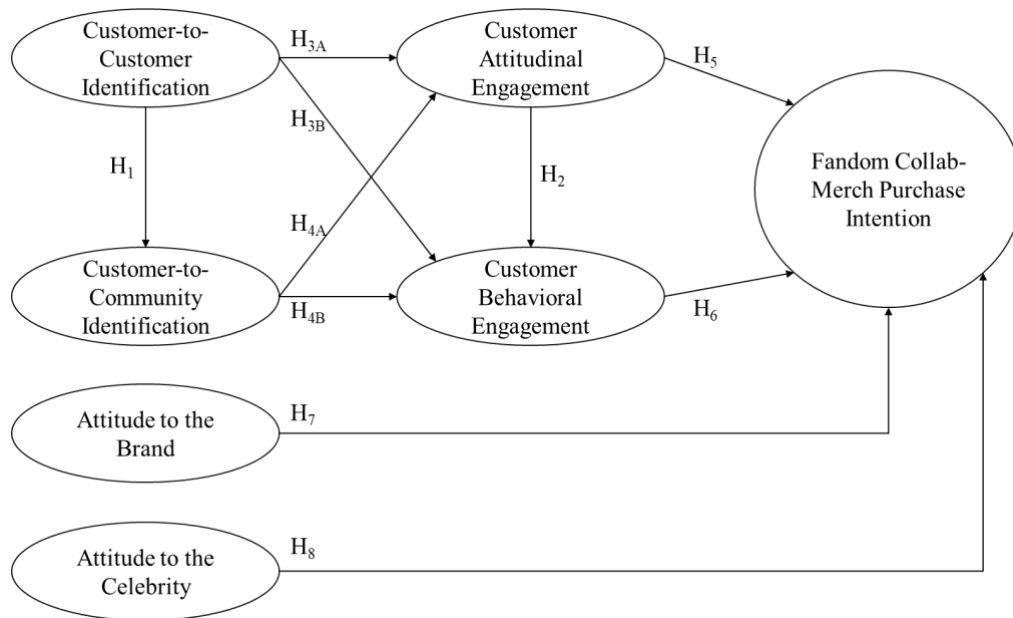


Figure 1. Research Model

Within the dynamic landscape of online communities, individuals are drawn to platforms for communication, information exchange, and mutual support (Armstrong & Hagel, 1996; Prentice et al., 2018). Embedded within this realm, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) offers insights into the intricate interplay of consumer identification, engagement, and purchase intentions. As we navigate this terrain, shared identification within communities plays a prominent role, underpinning the evolution of relationships between customers and brands.

CCT underscores the power of shared identification in bolstering connections and affiliations within communities. Kozinets (2002) adds to this narrative by highlighting

the potency of information shared within these spaces and the inherent trust it carries. Recognition within such communities becomes the hallmark of consistent provision of genuine support and information, fostering self-identification and reinforcing connections with the community. Building upon this backdrop, the current study contends that strong customer identification within communities extends its influence beyond individuals to encompass a broader identification with the community. This perspective culminates in the formulation of the hypothesis:

H1: Customer-to-customer identification (CCI) will positively impact Customer-to-community identification (CMI).

Within the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) landscape, customer engagement emerges as a multifaceted phenomenon necessitating cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement with brands and businesses. Brodie et al. (2011) harmonise with this view, defining customer engagement that aligns with CCT's foundational principles. They present engagement as a dynamic psychological process shaped by interactive exchanges between customers and businesses. This process, characterised by co-creative experiences under contextual conditions, resonates with CCT's emphasis on the co-construction of meanings and values.

This CCT perspective underscores the need for authentic engagement, transcending surface interactions to manifest in observable attitudes and behaviours. In the context of CCT, psychological engagement extends beyond immediate interactions, promising enduring benefits for companies (Fehrer et al., 2018). The study delves into two dimensions of customer engagement—attitudinal and behavioural—both entrenched within CCT's premises. Attitudinal engagement encapsulates cognitive and affective connections, while behavioural engagement, rooted in cognitive and affective processes (Porter et al., 2011), extends beyond transactions. These dimensions operate synergistically, with attitudinal engagement as the foundation for subsequent behavioural engagement. Thus, the hypothesis asserts:

H2: Customer Attitudinal Engagement (CAE) will positively impact Customer Behavioral Engagement (CBE).

The spectrum of customer-customer identification (CCI) is pivotal within Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), intensifying the interplay between customers, brands, and their affiliations. CCI signifies the fulfilment of relational needs through associations with fellow community members (Prentice et al., 2019), aligning with CCT's emphasis on shared cultural narratives. This identification fulfils relational needs and propels engagement, as co-creation and interactions with community members solidify connections. This interaction fosters attitudes and behaviours resonating with CCT's cultural dynamics, influencing psychological engagement (CAE) and behavioural interactions (CBE). Thus, two hypotheses crystallise within CCT's framework:

H3a: Customer-customer identification (CCI) will positively impact Customer Attitudinal Engagement (CAE).

H3b: Customer-customer identification (CCI) will positively impact Customer Behavioral Engagement (CBE).

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) sheds light on the symbiotic relationship between communities and ownership, magnifying the profound impact on customer engagement. Organisations orchestrate interactions among like-minded individuals, fostering membership and shared identity within these communities. CCT's principles echo within customer-community identification (CMI), whereby strengthened identification nurtures a willingness to communicate and forms the basis for friendships within these communities. Community identification

emerges as a social benefit as individuals align with cultural norms, driving participation within CCT's broader narrative of shared cultural dynamics. A reciprocal exchange among community members further solidifies this affiliation, fueling community identification and intention to engage with the brand or group. This process, deeply rooted in CCT's principles, prompts the formulation of two hypotheses:

H4a: Customer-community identification (CMI) will positively impact Customer Attitudinal Engagement (CAE).

H4b: Customer-community identification (CMI) will positively impact Customer Behavioral Engagement (CBE).

Fandom communities stand as a testament to the interwoven fabric of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and the dynamics of customer engagement. These communities cultivate interactions that transcend transactions, nurturing profound connections and loyalty. The foundation for the proposed hypothesis is laid within prior research highlighting the direct relationship between customer engagement and purchase behaviour (Brodie et al., 2011; Gummerus et al., 2012; Hollebeek, 2011; Prentice et al., 2018; Vivek et al., 2012). These dynamics underscore CCT's emphasis on cultural meanings and interactions, culminating in the notion that engagement intentions toward communities translate into tangible purchase intentions. Thus, the hypothesis crystallises within CCT's tapestry:

H5: Customer Attitudinal Engagement (CAE) will positively impact Purchase Intention (PI).

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) elevates customer engagement beyond transactions, revealing an intricate dance between behaviours and brand interactions. Within CCT, customer behavioural engagement (CBE) signifies actions beyond purchases, mirroring cultural expressions and shaping consumer identity. Prentice et al. (2019) define CBE as behaviours born from dynamic brand interactions, manifesting through engagements with brands, identities, and fellow consumers. This intersection resonates with CCT's foundation, where consumer behaviours are symbolic interactions embedded within cultural dynamics.

In CCT's purview, these behaviours are woven into consumer loyalty and repeat purchases. This association converges with prior research highlighting the nexus between engagement and loyalty (Brodie et al., 2011; Gummerus et al., 2012). Within this context, the hypothesis emerges as a natural extension of CCT's principles, illuminating the pathway from behavioural engagement to purchase intentions:

H6: Customer Behavioral Engagement (CBE) will positively impact Purchase Intention (PI).

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) focuses on the interplay between consumer attitudes, celebrity endorsements, and purchase intentions. The confluence of these elements unfolds within CCT's arena of cultural meanings and symbolic interactions. Marketers leverage these dynamics to fortify brand positions by channelling positive celebrity sentiments (Choi & Rifon, 2007).

CCT's lens embraces consumer attitudes as multidimensional constructs encompassing cognitive, affective, and cultural dimensions. Insights from Chetoui et al. (2021) echo within CCT's context, highlighting the role of attitudes as precursors to heightened purchase intentions. Correspondingly, the premises of Spears and Singh (2004) and Solomon et al. (2012) seamlessly align with CCT, establishing the reciprocal relationship between cultural meanings, consumer identity, and brand preferences.

Against this backdrop, hypotheses H7 and H8 embody the intricate dance between attitudes and intentions, etching CCT's perspective onto consumer behaviours:

H7: Attitude toward Brand (ATB) will positively impact Purchase Intention (PI).

H8: Attitude toward Celebrity (ATC) will positively impact Purchase Intention (PI).

In synthesis, the hypotheses epitomise the symbiotic relationship between consumer attitudes, celebrity endorsements, and purchase intentions. The narrative woven through CCT's lens reinforces the dynamic interplay between these constructs, underscoring the cultural and symbolic underpinnings of consumer-brand interactions.

RESEARCH METHODS

Measures

The data collection for this study was conducted through an online questionnaire administered via Google Form and distributed across various social media platforms. To gauge participants' perceptions, the questionnaire utilised a

Likert 1-7 Scale, enabling respondents to express their levels of agreement with specific statements. Employing a self-administered questionnaire approach, participants independently completed the survey, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their viewpoints. The selection of a 7-point Likert scale aims to capture a more nuanced range of agreement than a traditional 5-point scale would provide.

The study adapted and validated measurements from established sources. The measures for the constructs of Customer-to-Customer Identification, Customer-to-Community Identification, Customer Attitudinal Engagement, Customer Behavioral Engagement, and Purchase Intention were adapted from the work of Prentice et al. (2019). These measures were selected for their alignment with the research context and their robustness in capturing the intricacies of consumer identification and engagement.

Additionally, the constructs of Attitudes toward the Brand and Attitudes toward the Celebrity were measured using items adapted from the research of Min et al. (2019). The choice of these measures stems from their demonstrated efficacy in assessing consumer attitudes towards brands and celebrity endorsements, making them a suitable fit for this study's scope.

In essence, the employed measures were thoughtfully selected to ensure their relevance and reliability within the context of this research. By adapting established

measurement tools from reputable sources, the study aims to maintain the integrity of its findings and contribute to the broader understanding of consumer engagement and attitudes within online communities.

Samples

This study employs a non-probabilistic purposive sampling method to select participants. Before answering the core survey questions, respondents must engage with several screening questions to ascertain their alignment with the intended target group. This approach ensures that only individuals who meet the predetermined criteria participate in the questionnaire, thereby improving the research's validity and reliability. The screening questions include:

- a. Are you a citizen of Indonesia (WNI)?
- b. Are you at least 18 years old?
- c. Do you identify as a member of the NCTzen fandom within the past six months or longer?
- d. Are you familiar with the Lemonilo × NCT Dream campaign?

This screening process aims to refine the sample group to those individuals whose characteristics align closely with the research's objectives. By focusing on respondents who meet these predefined criteria, the study seeks to enhance the accuracy and consistency of its outcomes.

The intended sample size for this research was set at a minimum of 300 participants. The survey responses collected exceeded this target, reaching 1165 responses—more than three times the desired number. However, 149 did not fulfil the pre-established

purposive sampling criteria among these responses. Most invalidated responses are due to age limitations, with underaged fandom members responding to recruitment despite the minimum age requirement clearly stated in the posts. Consequently, the final valid dataset for analysis comprises 1016 responses, ensuring that the chosen sample accurately reflects the desired target population and contributes to the study's robustness.

Statistics

This study employed a covariance-based structural equation model (CB-SEM) with the maximum likelihood estimation method, conducted using Lisrel 8.8.0 software. Both absolute and comparative fit indices were utilised to evaluate the goodness of fit (GFI) of the proposed structural equation model (SEM). GFI measures the degree to which the specified SEM can accurately represent the data. SEM, as advocated by Jöreskog and Sörbom (1993), offers enhanced analytical rigour compared to simultaneous equation regression models.

The maximum likelihood estimation method requires the data to follow a multivariate normal distribution (Hair et al., 2014). Thus, before using this method, we tested the multivariate normality of the data distribution and found that all parameters (i.e. Skewness and Kurtosis) are within the multivariate normality requirement.

The fitness of the SEM was evaluated using the Root Mean Square Residual (RMSR) criterion, with a threshold set at less than 0.05, and the Root Mean Square Error of

Approximation (RMSEA) criterion, with a threshold set at less than 0.08. This evaluation approach aligns with the methodology of Bagozzi and Yi (1988).

In examining the causal relationships among latent variables, t-values were employed to determine the statistical significance of these relationships. The study formulated one-directional hypotheses at a 95% confidence level, with a significance level 0.05. The t-values were compared to a threshold of 1.645 to discern significance, as established by reference to the t-value distribution table. Thus, a latent variable is considered to be positively influenced by another latent variable in a statistically significant manner when its associated t-value is greater than or equal to 1.645. Conversely, if the t-value falls below 1.645, the relationship is considered statistically insignificant, following the approach outlined by Hair et al. (2014).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondent Profiles

This study identified any personal information collected through the survey. However, the participant demographics in this study illustrate the respondent characteristics, particularly the respondent's age, occupation, and domicile. Of the 1,165 collected questionnaire responses, 149 were incongruent with the sampling criteria, resulting in 1,016 valid responses for further analysis.

Most of the study's participants fall within the 18 - 20 age bracket (57.3%) and identify as students (79.1%) in terms of occupation. The

domicile data indicated a prevalent concentration in the Greater Jakarta Area (34.8%).

Age-related participant data is presented in Table 1, showcasing descending frequency patterns. The most prominently represented age group was 18 - 20 years, comprising 582 respondents (57.3%), followed by those aged 21 - 23 with 355 respondents (34.9%), individuals aged 24 - 26 with 63 respondents (6.2%), and those over 26 years old with 16 respondents (1.6%).

Table 1 further organises participant data based on occupation, following descending frequency. The prevalent occupational category among participants was students, totalling 804 respondents (79.1%). Other occupations include employees (111 respondents, 11.0%), individuals with diverse roles (58 respondents, 5.7%), entrepreneurs (35 respondents, 3.4%), and civil servants (8 respondents, 0.8%).

Additionally, Table 1 illustrates the distribution of participants according to their domicile, arranged in descending frequency. The predominant domicile was the Greater Jakarta Area, encompassing 354 respondents (34.8%). This was followed by Central Java (210 respondents, 20.7%), East Java (173 respondents, 17.0%), West Java (137 respondents, 13.5%), Sumatra (81 respondents, 8.0%), Kalimantan (25 respondents, 2.5%), Sulawesi (18 respondents, 1.8%), Nusa Tenggara (10 respondents, 1.0%), Bali (6 respondents, 0.6%), and Papua (1 respondent, 0.1%).

Table 1. Respondent Demographic Profile

Age	Total	Percentage
18 - 20	582	57.3%
21 - 23	355	34.9%
24 - 26	63	6.2%
>26	16	1.6%
Occupation	Total	Percentage
Students (High School / University)	804	79.1%
Employees	111	11.0%
Self-Employed	35	3.4%
Public Servants	8	0.8%
Others	58	5.7%
Domicile	Total	Percentage
Greater Jakarta	354	34.8%
West Java	137	13.5%
Central Java	210	20.7%
East Java	173	17.0%
Sumatera	81	8.0%
Kalimantan	25	2.5%
Sulawesi	18	1.8%
Nusa Tenggara	10	1.0%
Bali	6	0.6%

Measurement Validation

The measurements used in this study were validated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis, included in the LISREL SEM package. The measurement model result showed an overall good fit. The Absolute Fit Test shows a Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) of 0.91 and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.064, indicating a good fit.

The Incremental Fit Test demonstrates favourable results as well: Normed Fit Index (NFI) at 0.91, Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI) at 0.97, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) at 0.97, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) at 0.97, and Relative Fit Index (RFI) at 0.96, all surpassing the recommended 0.90 thresholds. These indices suggest that the model is in line

with the observed data and accurately represents relationships between variables. The model exhibits robust fit, underscoring its reliability in explaining the associations within the context.

The study's measurement validation results highlight the robustness of the indicators used to measure the latent variables. The indicators exhibit strong reliability and statistical significance, with all individual indicators displaying significant t-values (≥ 1.645). The standardised loading factors (SLF) surpass the recommended threshold of 0.5, indicating reliable indicators. Error-values for all indicators fall within acceptable limits, affirming their reliability.

The Composite Reliability (CR) values for all latent variables exceed the recommended 0.7 threshold, signifying solid internal consistency. Moreover, the Variance Extracted (VE) values exceed 50%, suggesting that the indicators effectively capture a significant portion of the variance within each latent variable.

In conclusion, the indicators used for measuring the latent variables in the study demonstrate strong reliability, statistical significance, internal consistency, and convergent validity. The findings validate the effectiveness of these indicators in accurately representing the underlying constructs. The total result of measurement validation is shown in Appendix 1.

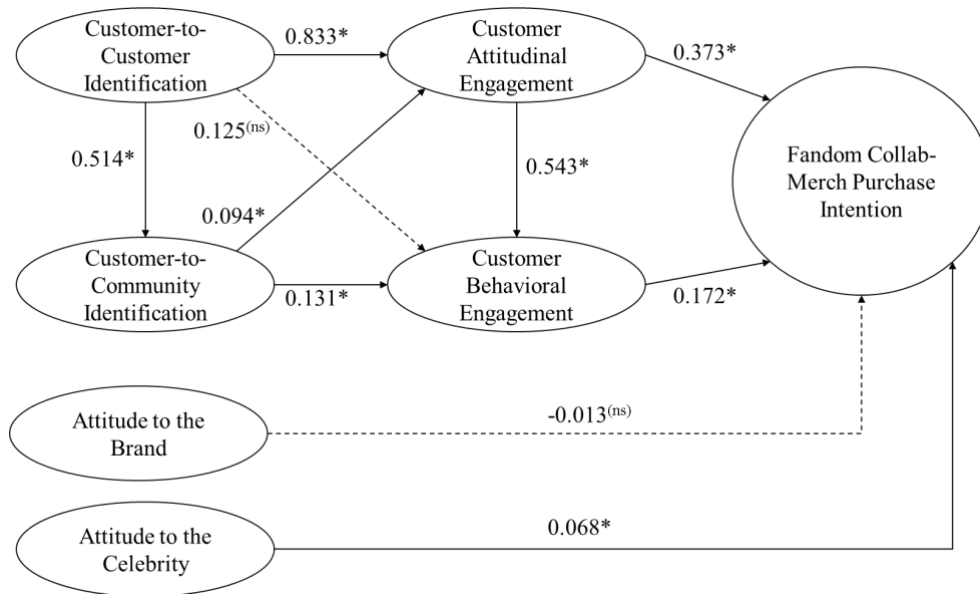


Figure 2. Result of the Hypotheses Tests

Main Test

The subsequent analysis focused on the 1016 valid responses that underwent rigorous screening and data refinement. The assessment of the structural model's fit revealed strong alignment in absolute and incremental measures. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) registered at 0.90, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.067.

In the incremental fit evaluation, key indices demonstrated robust results: Normed Fit Index (NFI) and Non-Normed Fit Index

(NNFI) scored 0.96. At the same time, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Incremental Fit Index (IFI) achieved 0.97, signifying a high level of fit. The Relative Fit Index (RFI) stood at 0.96, confirming the strong alignment, with all values surpassing the 0.90 threshold.

To summarise, the structural model attains a commendable level of fit, as evident from both absolute and incremental fit evaluations. These indices, encompassing GFI, RMSEA, NFI, NNFI, CFI, IFI, and RFI, consistently meet or exceed established standards,

underscoring the model's effective representation of observed data.

The structural model encompasses ten paths, of which eight exhibit statistical significance while two do not. Significance is determined

through one-tailed testing, employing a critical t-value of 1.645 for all hypotheses. The outcomes of the causal relationship analysis conducted within this study are shown in Figure 2 and presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Result of Causal Relationship Testing

Hypotheses	Paths	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Summary
1	CCI -> CMI	0.514	11.365	0.000	Significant
2	CAE -> CBE	0.543	6.677	0.000	Significant
3a	CCI -> CAE	0.833	20.667	0.000	Significant
3b	CCI -> CBE	0.125	1.506	0.066	Not Significant
4a	CMI -> CAE	0.094	2.645	0.004	Significant
4b	CMI -> CBE	0.131	3.614	0.000	Significant
5	CAE -> PI	0.373	7.063	0.000	Significant
6	CBE -> PI	0.172	3.462	0.000	Significant

Discussion

The study's findings unveil compelling insights into the relationships among various constructs, shedding light on the dynamics within the NCTzen fandom community and its impact on consumer behaviour.

The investigation first demonstrates a substantial association between Customer-to-customer identification (CCI) and Customer-to-community identification (CMI). This result underscores the notion that as consumers identify more with fellow consumers, their overall connection with the NCTzen fandom community deepens. This finding is reinforced by Heath et al. (2017), who emphasise that strong community identification fosters engagement in activities that benefit the community. Within online communities, individuals are motivated to communicate, share, and seek information

and support (Armstrong & Hagel, 1996; Prentice et al., 2018). Consequently, the cumulative actions of community members contribute to each individual's sense of community identification.

Furthermore, the research uncovers a significant correlation between Customer Attitudinal Engagement (CAE) and Customer Behavioral Engagement (CBE). This indicates that higher levels of consumer engagement at the attitudinal level translate into increased behavioural engagement within the NCTzen fandom community. This insight aligns with Bailey et al. (2020), who reinforced the link between attitudinal, intentions, and behavioural engagement. This suggests that attitudes lay the foundation for subsequent behavioural engagement—an assertion proposed earlier by Brodie et al.

(2011), who stress the importance of multifaceted engagement encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements.

The study also unearths a noteworthy association between Customer-customer identification (CCI) and customer-attitudinal engagement (CAE). This implies that heightened identification among consumers positively influences their attitudinal engagement within the NCTzen fandom community. This aligns with the observations of Black et al. (2021), who highlight the impact of Customer-Customer Identification on Intercustomer Social Support and the sense of belonging.

Nevertheless, the study does not find a significant link between Customer-customer identification (CCI) and Customer Behavioral Engagement (CBE). This insignificance might be attributed to individuals who have not exhibited behaviours beyond transactional exchanges. Those who have yet to integrate within the community fully may have yet to engage extensively with other community members.

Moving forward, the research establishes a compelling connection between Customer-community identification (CMI) and Customer Attitudinal Engagement (CAE). This suggests that a more robust identification with the NCTzen fandom community positively influences consumers' attitudinal engagement within the community. Furthermore, a robust relationship surfaces between Customer-community identification (CMI) and

Customer Behavioral Engagement (CBE). This emphasises that a heightened identification with the community amplifies behavioural engagement. These findings resonate with Black et al. (2021), who assert the significance of Customer-Community Identification in fostering inter-customer social Support and engagement.

The study's revelations extend to the impact of Customer Attitudinal Engagement (CAE) on Purchase Intention (PI), illuminating a positive connection. This implies enhanced attitudinal engagement within the NCTzen fandom community, correlating with a heightened desire to purchase Lemonilo products with NCT Dream member photo cards. These results align with prior research that underscores the favourable impact of customer engagement on purchase intentions (Brodie et al., 2011; Gummerus et al., 2012; Hollebeek, 2011; Prentice et al., 2018; Vivek et al., 2012).

Additionally, the research unveils a similar positive link between Customer Behavioral Engagement (CBE) and Purchase Intention (PI). This suggests robust behavioural engagement within the NCTzen fandom community translates into a greater intention to purchase Lemonilo products featuring NCT Dream member Photocards. Prentice et al. (2018) support this observation, affirming that Customer Behavioral Engagement (CBE) arises from interactive experiences with the brand and subsequently influences purchase behaviour.

However, the study does not find a significant association between Attitude

toward Brand (ATB) and Purchase Intention (PI). This insignificance may stem from respondents harbouring neutral attitudes towards the Lemonilo brand. Participants in this study were members of the NCTzen fandom community, primarily focused on collecting Kpop merchandise Photocards included in Lemonilo instant noodle packages.

In summary, this study's findings unravel the intricate interactions within the NCTzen fandom community, highlighting the interplay between identification, engagement, and purchase intentions. These insights contribute to the growing understanding of consumer behaviour within online communities and provide valuable implications for theoretical and practical domains.

Managerial Implications

This study offers valuable insights for companies seeking to optimise consumer engagement and influence purchase intentions cost-effectively. By leveraging the dynamics of customer identification, companies can foster genuine connections among consumers and their communities, ultimately driving interest in their products. The strategic implications derived from this research encompass a range of approaches to engage consumers more deeply and effectively.

First, companies can harness the power of customer identification within the community by allowing consumers to interact freely with like-minded individuals. This organic interaction can amplify

engagement and stimulate interest in purchasing company products. Allowing customers to express themselves, share ideas, and provide mutual support can cultivate a sense of belonging and drive their enthusiasm for the brand.

Second, initiating activities that trigger customer identification can lead to the generation of fresh ideas from consumer interactions. Encouraging user-generated content and crowd-sourced suggestions can boost consumer identification and engagement and provide the company with novel insights and innovative concepts. Companies can incorporate these ideas into their business strategies, thus enhancing their offerings based on direct consumer input.

Third, companies engaging in endorsements with artists possessing dedicated fan bases can strategically leverage these communities to amplify their marketing efforts. Companies can transform fan engagement into a powerful marketing tool by fostering interactions among fan members through events and online platforms. Encouraging fan members to share feedback, insights, and ideas allows for more meaningful connections and feedback loops.

Fourth, companies can introduce incentives for consumers who contribute significantly to engagement activities to enhance engagement. Implementing a points or rewards program for consumers who actively participate in company-sponsored events can motivate them to become community leaders. This initiative recognises and rewards active

participants and encourages them to influence others to join in these interactions.

The study highlights that consumer attitude towards celebrities significantly impacts purchase intentions. Therefore, companies should consider collaborating with artists with a dedicated and supportive fan base. Prioritising collaborations with artists with solid and engaged fandoms can yield higher returns on marketing investments, as their fan communities are more likely to align their purchase intentions with their positive perceptions of the artist.

Finally, while brand attitude alone might not directly influence fandom's purchase intentions, the study underscores the importance of building positive relationships between the company and consumers and among consumers themselves. Companies should strive to create a holistic environment where consumers feel valued, supported, and connected. This approach can amplify the overall impact of marketing activities and contribute to sustained consumer loyalty.

In conclusion, this study's insights provide companies with actionable strategies to enhance consumer engagement, influence purchase intentions, and optimise marketing efforts. By nurturing identification, fostering interactions, and leveraging the power of fan communities, companies can establish stronger connections with consumers and create a more vibrant and engaged customer base.

Theoretical Implications

This study significantly contributes to the burgeoning field of Korean pop research within the Indonesian context, particularly within fandom studies. As the influence of the Hallyu wave continues to gain momentum in Indonesia, it has emerged as a compelling social phenomenon with far-reaching implications. This research addresses a notable gap in the existing literature by delving into the dynamics of Indonesian K-pop fandoms, thus advancing the understanding of the Hallyu Wave's impact on the local culture.

The study's significance extends to research methodology and scholarly approach. By successfully adapting research models from articles that may not explicitly focus on K-pop, this study showcases the flexibility and applicability of academic frameworks across diverse cultural contexts. This implies that researchers exploring K-Pop-related phenomena can draw inspiration from various sources beyond the narrow confines of K-Pop-specific literature. This research thus serves as a precedent for scholars who may be navigating the challenge of finding directly relevant reference journals, offering them an avenue to adapt and apply existing models to their K-Pop-related investigations.

The outcomes of the hypotheses in this research enrich the domain of K-pop fandom research within Indonesia. A particularly noteworthy finding is that Customer-Customer Identification (CCI) does not positively impact Customer Behavioral Engagement (CBE). This counterintuitive result adds nuance to our understanding of

how fan identification translates into actual behaviours within Indonesian K-pop fandoms.

In a striking departure from prior studies, this research demonstrates that Attitude toward Celebrity (ATC) significantly influences Purchase Intention (PI), contrary to previous expectations. This finding presents a significant theoretical shift in the context of celebrity endorsements involving Korean idols. The study highlights that an individual's favourable attitude toward the endorser can positively impact their intention to purchase the endorsed products. This observation underscores the complexity of the endorsement process, suggesting that consumers' emotional connections and perceptions of celebrities play a pivotal role in shaping their purchasing decisions.

In conclusion, this study's theoretical implications resonate within K-pop fandom studies in Indonesia and extend to broader research methodologies and cultural adaptability. By unravelling the intricacies of Indonesian K-pop fandoms and shedding light on unexpected relationships, this research paves the way for future explorations that delve deeper into the multifaceted interactions between culture, fandom, and consumer behaviour.

Limitations of the Study

While this study sheds light on the complex interplay between K-pop fandoms, consumer engagement, and purchase intentions, it is essential to acknowledge its inherent limitations. These limitations underscore the contextual boundaries within which the

findings can be interpreted and the potential biases that may influence certain variables.

First, the study's scope is inherently confined to Indonesia, limiting the generalizability of its results to other countries. Cultural nuances, economic disparities, and diverse sociodemographic factors in different regions could yield distinct outcomes if similar investigations were conducted in alternative contexts.

Second, the exclusive focus on a single fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) brand, Lemonilo, lends precision to the study but simultaneously restricts the universality of its implications. The brand's specific attributes and market positioning may differ from the dynamics across all industries, which could have varied consumer behaviours and engagement patterns.

Third, the choice to analyse only the NCTzen fandom, while insightful for managerial strategies related to NCT collaborations, introduces limitations concerning the applicability of the findings to other fandoms. The distinctive characteristics of each fandom, driven by demographic variations and unique cultural influences, might lead to divergent consumer behaviours and engagement dynamics.

Fourth, while using self-administered online questionnaires streamlined data collection, it also introduced the challenge of ensuring the respondents met the predefined criteria. Despite employing an attention test to filter out random responses, there remains an inherent inability to guarantee the validity of

respondents' claims regarding their eligibility with absolute certainty.

Finally, the study's reliance on self-identified NCTzen fandom members might introduce bias to the Attitude Toward Celebrity (ATC) variable. Respondents' affinity for NCT Dream, as the focal point of their fandom, could lead to an exaggerated positive attitude towards the celebrity, potentially influencing the observed impact on purchase intentions. This could also elucidate the insignificance of Attitude Toward Brand (ATB), as respondents' primary concern might be their connection to NCT Dream rather than Lemonilo.

In navigating these limitations, researchers and practitioners should approach the findings as valuable insights inherently situated within the Indonesian K-pop fandom landscape. To extend the applicability of the study's implications, future research could encompass diverse geographic regions, incorporate a broader range of brands and fandoms, and adopt varied data collection methodologies to mitigate biases.

Recommendations for Future Research

As this study delves into the dynamic world of K-pop fandoms and their intricate relationships with consumer behaviour, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations and the opportunities they present for future research. By addressing these limitations and building upon the findings, researchers can unlock new dimensions of understanding within this captivating realm. The following suggestions pave the way for future investigations:

First, to deepen the understanding of the factors driving Purchase Intention within K-pop merchandise, future studies could introduce additional variables such as Income, Perceived Value, Perceived Quality, and Trust. Exploring these factors would provide a more comprehensive perspective on consumer decision-making processes, enriching the research landscape.

Second, expanding the scope beyond a singular brand or fandom is pivotal. Envisioning research encompassing an entire industry sector or the broader spectrum of Korean fandoms within Indonesia would elucidate whether the observed patterns hold on a larger scale. This panoramic view could unveil novel insights into the dynamics of consumer engagement and purchase intentions.

Third, implementing rigorous screening questions is advisable to ensure a more accurate reflection of respondents' true affiliations. These inquiries could evaluate respondents' in-depth knowledge of the fandom and related trivia. A more stringent screening process would enhance the validity of the study results.

Fourth, exploring high-involvement products adds a new layer of complexity to the research landscape. Investigating products that require more profound consumer consideration and commitment, such as those endorsed by prominent K-pop groups like BTS, could lead to different hypothesis outcomes due to heightened consumer motivation and decision-making stakes.

By embracing these recommendations, future researchers can illuminate uncharted territories within K-pop fandoms, engagement, and consumer behaviour. Each investigation serves as a stepping stone, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of this captivating phenomenon and its implications for industries, academia, and the cultural fabric of society at large.

CONCLUSION

The resounding echo of the Korean Wave has fostered a landscape where K-pop celebrities wield substantial influence over consumer behaviours. In this pursuit, the conventional approach often centres on how celebrities sway their dedicated fan base to endorse products and services. However, this study embarked on a unique trajectory, unveiling the intricate tapestry of fan-to-fan interactions and their resonance in shaping purchase intentions.

By delving into the dynamic interplay of identification, engagement, and attitude within the NCTzen fandom, this research has unearthed compelling insights illuminating the path ahead for businesses seeking to harness fandom fervour. A nuanced understanding of the intricate web of influences reveals the following pivotal takeaways:

First, the study underscores that fostering Customer-to-customer identification (CCI) paves the way for enhanced Customer Attitudinal Engagement (CAE). The individual threads of connection among fans contribute to the emotional and cognitive engagement within the NCTzen community. However, the tapestry of influence expands further with Customer-community identification (CMI). This broader sense of belonging significantly boosts Customer Attitudinal Engagement (CAE) and Customer Behavioral Engagement (CBE), accentuating the potential for more profound engagement beyond mere transactions.

Second, the findings illuminate the dual nature of engagement. Attitudinal and Behavioral customer engagement is pivotal in shaping Purchase Intentions for Lemonilo products. Fan interactions, which foster a strong affinity with fellow enthusiasts and the collective identity, emerge as a potent catalyst for purchasing decisions.

Finally, in the context of attitudes, the findings challenge preconceived notions. It becomes evident that Attitude Toward Celebrity, exemplified by the revered NCT Dream, is the bedrock of influence on purchase intentions. This revelation propels the importance of crafting a solid bond between fans and their idols, whereas the influence of the brand itself takes a secondary role.

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Appendix 1. Validity and Reliability of the Main Test Measurements

Variables	Indicators	T-value ≥ 1.645	SLF ≥ 0.5	Error	CR > 0.7	VE > 50%	Summary
Customer to Customer Identification	CCI				0.784	0.553	Reliable
	CCI1	20.10	0.61	0.63			Valid
	CCI3	27.04	0.74	0.42			Valid
	CCI4	31.40	0.85	0.28			Valid
Customer to Community Identification	CMI				0.766	0.529	Reliable
	CMI1	17.16	0.55	0.70			Valid
	CMI2	25.50	0.77	0.40			Valid
	CMI3	27.62	0.83	0.31			Valid
Customer Attitudinal Engagement	CAE				0.893	0.515	Reliable
	CAE1	27.90	0.76	0.42			Valid
	CAE2	33.17	0.85	0.27			Valid
	CAE3	31.45	0.83	0.32			Valid
	CAE4	29.08	0.78	0.39			Valid
	CAE5	26.22	0.73	0.47			Valid
Customer Behavioral Engagement	CBE				0.885	0.587	Reliable
	CBE1	29.09	0.79	0.38			Valid
	CBE2	33.45	0.87	0.25			Valid
	CBE3	27.23	0.75	0.43			Valid
	CBE4	31.30	0.83	0.31			Valid
Attitude Toward Brand	ATB				0.910	0.661	Reliable
	ATB1	30.80	0.82	0.34			Valid
	ATB2	35.53	0.89	0.2			Valid
	ATB3	33.87	0.87	0.25			Valid
	ATB4	30.21	0.81	0.35			Valid

Variables	Indicators	T-value ≥ 1.645	SLF ≥ 0.5	Error	CR > 0.7	VE > 50%	Summary
Attitude Toward Celebrity	ATC				0.902	0.755	Reliable
	ATC1	33.08	0.86	0.26			Valid
	ATC3	38.801	0.95	0.09			Valid
	ATC4	29.74	0.8	0.39			Valid
Purchase Intention	PI				0.789	0.572	Reliable
	PI1	30.71	0.87	0.23			Valid
	PI2	30.00	0.86	0.26			Valid
	PI4	14.46	0.46	0.79			Valid

Source: LISREL Output