

## Research Article

# Amplifying Influence: The Role of Brand Ambassadors in the Relationship Between Korean Wave and K-Pop Merchandise Purchase Decisions

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to ascertain how brand image, electronic word-of-mouth, and the Korean wave affect consumer choices for K-pop merchandise with Brand Ambassadors as moderator variables for the case study at X in East Jakarta. This research uses an associative research strategy. The data collection technique is through a questionnaire with a simple random sampling technique. The SEM-PLS method was used to analyze the data. All customers who have bought NCT K-Pop items make up the research population. There were 260 samples in total, chosen by multiplying the number of indicators by 10. The study's findings indicate that buying decisions are significantly influenced by the Korean Wave, brand image, and brand ambassadors. Electronic word-of-mouth has no discernible impact on purchasing decisions. Other than that a Brand Ambassador is able to moderate the significant influence of the Korean Wave. At the same time, Brand Image and Electronic word of mouth are indirectly unable to moderate Purchase Decisions.

Keywords: Korean Wave, Brand Ambassador, Brand Image, electronic word of mouth, buying decision

JEL Classification: M31, L82, M14

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## 1. Introduction

K-pop has become among Indonesia's most well-liked pop songs. Indonesia is the nation with the most K-Pop fans online in 2021, followed by Japan in second position and the Philippines in third, according to Figure 1.1. According to the Twitter report, which has since rebranded itself as X, Indonesia is listed as the nation with the greatest number of K-pop lovers as well as the that talks about K-Pop the most on social media, with 6.7 billion. K-Pop is an abbreviation of Korean Pop which is associated with pop music originating from South Korea (Attan and Natsir, 2023).

K-pop fans are also known as "K-poppers" or "K-fans." K-Pop fans will be very enthusiastic about supporting their favorite music groups. There are many activities that a fan does to support their K-Pop idols, from searching for idols on the internet, streaming music and videos from their idol's work on various platforms to purchasing official albums and merchandise as a form of support for the idol (Attan and Natsir, 2023). In addition, the presence of K-pop music events and concerts also contributes to the spread of K-pop culture. This contribution is because K-pop concerts and performances are an event for fans to meet and interact with their idol K-pop artists directly, which makes the bond between fans and their idols stronger. K-Pop is an abbreviation of Korean Pop which is associated with pop music originating from South Korea (Attan and Natsir, 2023).

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One of the K-pop that is currently popular worldwide is NCT. NCT (Neo Culture Technology) is a music group from South Korea. NCT is a K-pop boy group that is famous for its unique concept, namely the concept of "infinite members," which means that the group members are unlimited. This culture means that NCT members can increase or change depending on the concept and sub-units that are active at the time determined. For the past few years, the K-pop group NCT has been a part of SM Entertainment (Star Museum Entertainment) and has gained a lot of fame both domestically and internationally. With five sub-units, NCT debuted in 2016 with 26 boys: Taeil, Johnny, Taeyong, Yuta, Kun, Doyoung, Ten, Jaehyun, Winwin, Jungwoo, Mark Lee, Xiaojun, Hendery, Renjun, Jeno, Haechan, Jaemin, Yangyang, Chenle, Jisung, Sion, Riku, Yushi, Daeyoung, Ryo, and Sakuya. Through electronic word-of-mouth, the five sub-units NCT U, NCT 127, NCT Dream, NCTnewteam, and WayV are making their debut in the Chinese market.

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) can also influence the decision to purchase K-pop merchandise in two ways. First, e-WOM can provide information and recommendations to consumers about K-pop merchandise. Second, e-WOM can also shape consumer opinions about K-pop merchandise. Positive e-WOM can increase purchasing decisions to buy K-pop merchandise (Putra & Budiman, 2024). This way is because consumers will trust more in the information and recommendations given by others, especially if the individual is well-regarded. Oral communication conducted electronically via blogs, forums, social media, retail websites, review websites, and bulletin boards is known as electronic word of mouth, or e-WOM. E-WOM has a positive and significant impact on purchasing decisions. Kotler and Keller (2016) define e-WOM as marketing that uses the internet to generate a word-of-mouth effect to support marketing efforts and goals. Fajriyah and Karnowati, however, claimed that brand image had a favorable and negligible impact on buying decisions based on the study's findings.

Based on the findings of earlier research and the backdrop conditions mentioned above, it is worthwhile to investigate the influence of the Korean wave, brand image, electronic word-of-mouth, and brand ambassadors on consumer choices because the results are still varied. The purpose of research that has been modified to the above-described context is where this study differs from earlier research in that it hasn't been done much. Consequently, it may be a gap that offers researchers a chance to integrate the four factors Korean wave, brand image, electronic word-of-mouth, and brand ambassador in a review study with a fresh research question that has been covered in earlier studies never explored.

The purchasing of NCT K-pop products at X in East Jakarta is the focus of this investigation. As a result, the researcher is eager to examine "The Influence of Korean Wave, Brand Image, and

Electronic Word of Mouth on K-Pop Merchandise Purchase Decisions with Brand Ambassador as a moderator variable at X in East Jakarta." This study adds to the expanding corpus of research on consumer behavior in relation to the Hallyu (Korean Wave) and the globalization of K-pop culture, especially in Indonesia. By emphasizing how brand perception, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and the Korean Wave affect purchasing decisions as well as the moderating effect of brand ambassadors this research provides valuable insights into the specific factors driving merchandise consumption among K-pop fans. It highlights how emotional connection, digital influence, and celebrity endorsement shape consumer choices in niche entertainment markets. Practically, the findings can help local businesses and marketers at X in East Jakarta develop more targeted and culturally relevant promotional strategies to increase sales and customer engagement in the K-pop merchandise sector.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

### Korean Wave

Korean Wave or Korean Wave is a popular cultural phenomenon in South Korea that has spread throughout the world through social media. The term Korean Wave refers to Korean popular culture that has spread to various countries since the 1990s (Siskhawati and Maulana, 2020). Initially, the Korean Wave only focused on television dramas, while pop music K-, pop and films had no significant influence. However, now music and K-pop are widespread in society. The Korean wave is a sudden rise in South Korean popular culture that includes television dramas, films, pop music (K-pop) and the presence of online games in many Asian countries, including Japan, which emerged around the end of the 1990s. The result of the influence of the Korean wave through dramas and songs is that most people in Indonesia, especially women, like Korean artists and singers.

### Brand Image

Arianthi and Sampurna (2020) state that image is influenced by data about previous brand experiences related to the brand, actions about beliefs and empathy towards the brand. Products with positive brand image will encourage consumers to make purchases. According to Sutisna (2003), there are three ways to describe brand image. In the corporate image, it is used as a collection of consumer perceptions of the company's features. Before buying a product, consumers usually see the company producing the goods they want or not. Consumers will be more confident and make purchases if they have a positive impression of the company (Yuaniko & Caniogo, 2024).

### Electronic Word of Mouth

Electronic Word of Mouth is a process using internet media. With the activity in e-wom, consumers will get a high level of market transparency, meaning that consumers have a higher active role in the value chain cycle so that consumers are able to influence products and prices based on individual preferences (Putra & Budiman, 2024). Kurniawan & Effendi (2020) Consumers tend to accept advice from various sources through relatives, colleagues and friends. Customers usually use online media with the aim of sharing their own experiences of a product, brand or service that they have experienced themselves, besides consumers also take advantage of other people's experiences when they want to buy something before thinking about and finally deciding to purchase a good or service (Evans and Mekee, 2010).

### Brand Ambassador

A brand ambassador is a company's effort to influence a consumer using celebrities as endorsements in marketing a product image to increase consumer purchases of a product (Maghfur et al., 2023). According to research by Wang & Hariandja (2016), brand ambassadors are used to provide information about products, services, or ideas to others, creating widespread word-of-mouth marketing. A brand ambassador is a public figure who many people know and trust as a distributor, speaker, and liaison in an advertisement to introduce a product or service to consumers and is able to influence consumer attitudes and beliefs about the product.

### Purchase decision

Kotler and Armstrong (2001) state that the purchasing decision is at the stage of the buyer's decision-making process where the consumer actually buys. Laksana and Engkur (2021). Decision-making is an individual who is directly involved in obtaining and using the goods offered. Purchasing decisions are activities in which individuals are involved in making decisions to make purchases of a product offered. This The process of making a purchase involves consumers identifying their issues, researching specific brands or items, and assessing how effectively each option may address their issues. This results in a purchasing decision (Mustafa & Santosa, 2024).

### Conceptual Framework of Research

In the following framework of thought, there is a description of the influence of the role of Brand Ambassador as (Z), which moderates the Korean wave (H1), brand image (H2), Electronic Word of Mouth (H3) on purchasing decisions (Y), which is described as follows:

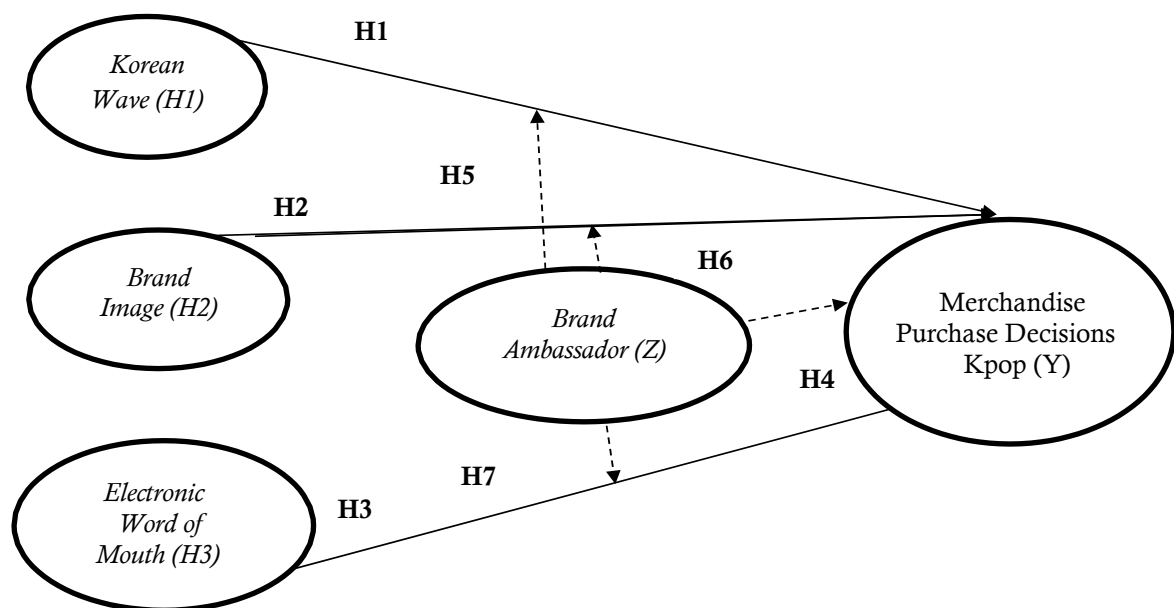


Figure 1. Research Concept Framework

### Research Hypothesis

#### The Influence of the Korean Wave on KPOP Merchandise Purchase Decision

The influence of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) on the decision to purchase K-pop merchandise is very significant, especially since this cultural phenomenon has created a strong wave of influence throughout the world, including in Indonesia. The Korean Wave refers to the spread of Korean culture including music, drama, fashion, and food, which is widely accepted by many fans outside Korea, especially K-pop fans. In this context, K-pop fans are not only influenced by their music or idol groups but also engage in the consumption of related products such as official merchandise, which includes clothing, accessories, and other collectibles. The decision to purchase K-pop merchandise is influenced by the emotional attachment and self-identification of fans to a particular group or idol they like, which is further strengthened by the influence of the Korean Wave.

This study the study is consistent with studies by Andriani et al. (2023), who discovered that the Korean Wave significantly influences DKI Jakarta residents' decisions to buy NCT products on social media platform Twitter. According to research by Pamungkas & Minulyawati (2023), social media users' decisions to buy K-Pop group SEVENTEEN items are significantly influenced by the Korean Wave, while Rachman & Yusuf (2022) found that the Korean Wave significantly and favorably influences these decisions BLACKPINK's official album in Garut Regency.

**H1: It is suspected that the Korean Wave has a significant influence on the Purchase Decision of NCT K-pop on social media Twitter/X in East Jakarta.**



**The Influence of Brand Image on KPOP Merchandise Purchase Decision**

The hypothesis in this study states that Brand Image has a significant influence on the decision to purchase K-pop merchandise through social media Twitter/X in the East Jakarta area. In this context, Brand Image refers to fans' perceptions of the image and quality of a K-pop brand, which can be formed through various factors such as experience, promotion, and interaction on social media. A strong and positive Brand Image, whether related to a K-pop group or their agency, is expected to strengthen fans' trust and preference for the merchandise offered. On the other hand, the decision to purchase K-pop merchandise is influenced by various external factors, one of which is the interaction that occurs on platforms such as Twitter/X, where fans can discuss, see promotions, and get information directly from the group or influencer concerned. This study seeks to test whether the brand image built on social media can influence K-pop fans' decisions to purchase merchandise, especially among fans who are active in the East Jakarta area. This study is supported by Jamil et al. (2020), Kim et al. (2019), and Choi & Lee (2021), who state that Brand Image has a significant influence on the decision to purchase K-pop merchandise.

**H2: Brand image is suspected of significantly influencing K-pop Purchase Decisions on Twitter/X in East Jakarta.**

**The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth on KPOP Merchandise Purchase Decisions**

This hypothesis states that Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) is suspected to have a significant influence on the decision to purchase K-pop merchandise through social media Twitter/X in the East Jakarta area. e-WOM refers to the dissemination of information, reviews, and recommendations made by consumers online, either through comments, retweets, or discussion threads on social media. In the context of the K-pop industry, e-WOM greatly influences consumer behavior because fans rely heavily on the opinions and experiences of others before deciding to buy merchandise. Information spread on Twitter/X, especially from fellow fans or influencers, can increase trust, shape product perceptions, and influence the purchasing interest of K-pop fans. This research is in line with Cheung & Thadani (2012), Ismail & Rahman (2021), and Erkan & Evans (2016), who stated that it is suspected to have a significant influence on purchasing decisions.

**H3: Electronic Word of Mouth is suspected of significantly influencing K-pop Purchase Decisions on Twitter/X in East Jakarta.**

**The Influence of Brand Ambassadors on KPOP Merchandise Purchase Decisions**

A brand ambassador is an individual, such as a K-pop idol, who officially represents a brand and plays a significant role in influencing consumer perceptions and behavior. In the K-pop industry, idols who become brand ambassadors have a strong influence on fans due to their high emotional attachment and loyalty. Fans' decisions to buy merchandise are often driven by who is promoting the product. When the brand ambassador comes from a favorite K-pop group, this can strengthen fans' beliefs, interests, and final decisions to buy the product through social media, especially Twitter, which is one of the main platforms for K-pop communication and promotion. Park & Lin (2020), in the context of K-pop, found that idols who become brand ambassadors create emotional attachments that drive impulsive purchases by fans, especially through promotions on social media such as Twitter.

**H4: It is suspected that Brand Ambassadors can moderate K-pop Purchase Decisions on Twitter/X in East Jakarta.**

**The Moderating Role of Brand Ambassadors on the Influence of the Korean Wave on K-Pop Purchase Decisions**

Korean Wave or Hallyu reflects the popularity of Korean culture, especially K-pop music, which has spread globally and has an impact on the consumer behavior of its fans. However, the impact of the Korean Wave on purchasing decisions can be strengthened if product promotion is carried out through brand ambassador figures, especially if the brand ambassador is a K-pop idol who is also part of the Hallyu phenomenon. The direct involvement of idols as brand ambassadors creates higher trust and emotional affiliation from fans, so they are more motivated to make purchases. Thus, brand ambassadors act as a moderating variable that can strengthen the influence of the Korean Wave on K-pop merchandise purchasing decisions, especially on social media such as

Twitter/X. Lee & Kim (2022), Yoo, Choi, & Park (2023), and Ryu & Cho (2021) stated that the influence of the Korean Wave on K-pop merchandise purchases increased significantly when the brand ambassador was a famous K-pop artist who was actively involved in social media.

**H5: It is suspected that Brand Ambassadors are able to moderate the Korean Wave toward K-Pop Purchase Decisions on social media Twitter/X in East Jakarta.**

### **The Role of Brand Ambassador as a Moderator Variable in the Influence of Brand Image on K-Pop Merchandise Purchase Decisions**

In the context of the K-pop industry, a strong brand image such as a positive association with a particular K-pop group or agency can drive merchandise purchasing decisions. However, the strength of this brand image will be even more effective if supported by the presence of a relevant and influential Brand Ambassador, such as a K-pop idol loved by fans. Brand ambassadors not only strengthen the brand's appeal but also increase the credibility and emotional attachment of consumers to the product so that the influence of brand image on purchasing decisions becomes stronger. Therefore, brand ambassadors act as an important moderating variable in the relationship between brand image and purchasing decisions among K-pop fans, especially those active on Twitter/X. This study is in line with Alamsyah et al. (2023) and Kim & Im (2021), who stated that emotionally and culturally relevant brand ambassadors can strengthen consumers' perceptions of brand image, which leads to increased purchase intentions, especially in the context of entertainment and lifestyle products.

**H6: It is suspected that the Brand Ambassador is able to moderate Brand Image towards K-Pop Purchase Decisions on Twitter/X in East Jakarta.**

## **3. Data and Method**

The quantitative method aims to test the established hypothesis that will be used to research certain populations and samples, data collection using research instruments, and quantitative data analysis. The survey research method is used in quantitative research. Using the Google forms questionnaire As a data collection tool, the research strategy with a survey methodology is carried out on large and small populations. Respondents are given a questionnaire. This method is used to find out how much the Korean wave, brand image, electronic word of mouth, and brand ambassadors influence the purchase of K-pop nct merchandise products.

### **Population and Sample**

A population, according to Sugiyono (2019), is an entire group of objects that have the same traits. Broadly speaking, a population is a category for generalization made up of individuals and items with specific quantities and attributes chosen by researchers to be examined in order to draw conclusions. A population is a collection of individuals, items, or occurrences from which researchers hope to draw conclusions. The study's population consists of all customers who have ever purchased K-pop nct merchandise.

Stated that the sample is a component of the population's totality and attributes. Purposive sampling, a sample strategy with certain requirements, is the method employed (Sugiyono 2018: 83). The research sample consisted of customers who had previously bought K-pop NCT products. If the population is unknown, the number of samples can be determined by multiplying the number of variables by the number of indicators, then by 10 (Hair et al., 2020). According to these rules, there are 260 samples in this study, which is equal to indicators (21) plus variables (5) multiplied by 10. Based on the computation above, this research will adopt a sample of 260 respondents.

### **Measurement**

According to Sugiyono (2019), the Likert scale is a scale used to measure opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of a person or group of people about social phenomena. Variables are used to create an instrument that can be in the form of statements or questions on a Likert scale. Answers to each question using a Likert scale. There is a gradient from very positive to very negative results on the Likert scale. The questionnaire instrument used in this research is a checklist with a weighting value

given to each source based on the assumptions of the respondents. The Likert scale weights are broken down in the table below.

#### Data analysis

State that Structural Equation Modeling is a statistical method that is a data analysis technique to test and develop simultaneously a relationship formed from one or more independent variables or unmeasured variables. SEM is a multivariate analysis method that can simultaneously analyze several variables in it, one of the analysis methods used in quantitative research that can be utilized in various scientific and economic fields. Smart PLS 4.0 software is used to process the PLS (Partial Least Square) technique in this research method. PLS is a statistical analysis method used in SEM for a flexible and useful approach, especially in situations where the data does not meet the assumption of normality or when the research sample is relatively small. PLS is useful for simultaneously testing and developing the relationship between causality from latent variables to indicators. There are two stages in PLS-SEM: evaluation of the measurement model used, namely, the inner model (structural model) and the outer model (measurement model).

#### 4. Results

**Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability and AVE Values in the Outer Model**

Construct Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE (Average Variance Extracted)
Korean Wave (H1)	0.714	0.827	0.616
Brand Image (H2)	0.856	0.897	0.635
Electronic Word of Mouth (XH3)	0.822	0.882	0.652
Brand Ambassador (Z)	0.910	0.927	0.613
Buying decision	0.940	0.948	0.604
Kpop Merchandise (Y)			

Source: Data processed (2024)

Table 1 shows that the construct variables (Korean Wave, Brand Image, Electronic Word Of Mouth, Brand Ambassador, Purchasing Decision) have good values and are valid and reliable. For all construct variables, Cronbach's Alpha value is  $> 0.60$ , the Composite Reliability value is  $> 0.70$ , and the AVE value is  $> 0.50$  for the construct variable.

#### Path Coefficients

**Table 2. Path Coefficient (Direct Effects)**

Variables	Original Sample	P-Value	Level Significance	Information
KW-> KP	0.054	0.001	0.05	Significant
BI -> KP	0.136	0.000	0.05	Significant
EWOM->KP	0.036	0.051	0.05	Not Significant
BA -> KP	0.791	0.000	0.05	Significant

Source: Data processed (2024)

According to the results of the path evaluation, as shown in Table 2 above, only three independent variables have a relationship with the dependent variable that is mutually influential. These are the relationship between the Korean wave (H1) and the Kpop merchandise purchase decision (Y), the relationship between the Kpop merchandise purchase decision (Y) and the Brand Ambassador (Z), and the relationship between the Kpop merchandise purchase decision (Y) and the Brand Image (H2). In the meanwhile, electronic word-of-mouth (X3) variable does not affect the Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decision (Y). (Sastri, 2023)

### Evaluation of Moderating Relationships

**Table 3. Results of Moderating Relationship Evaluation (Indirect Effect)**

Variables	Original Sample	P-Value	Level Significance	Information
BA x KW -> KP	-0.057	0.022	0.05	Significant
BA x BI -> KP	0.006	0.800	0.05	Not Significant
BA x EWOM -> KP	0.037	0.150	0.05	Not Significant

Source: Data processed (2024)

Based on the table above, the Brand Ambassador variable measured as a moderating variable is able to strengthen the relationship between the Korean Wave and Purchasing Decisions. Meanwhile, Brand Ambassador as a moderating variable is not able to strengthen the relationship between Brand Image and Purchasing Decisions, Electronic Word of Mouth and Kpop Merchandise Purchasing Decisions.

### Hypothesis Testing

#### First Hypothesis Testing: Korean Wave Influences Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions

**Table 4. Direct Effect Hypothesis 1**

Value Criteria	Korean Wave-> Decision Purchase
p-value	0.001
t-statistics	3.212
Original sample	0.054

Source: Data processed (2024)

Based on Table 4, it can be stated that the p-value of the Korean Wave on Purchasing Decisions is  $0.001 > 0.05$  with a t-statistics value of  $3.212 < 1.96$ , and for the original sample value, the influence is 0.054, then H1 is rejected, and Ha1 is accepted which means that the Korean Wave has a direct influence on Buyer Decisions.

#### Second Hypothesis Testing: Brand Image Influences Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions

**Table 5. Direct Effect Hypothesis 2**

Value Criteria	Brand Image -> Decision Purchase
P-value	0.000
T-statistics	6.220
Original Sample	0.136

Source: Data processed (2024)

Based on Table 5, it can be stated that the p-value of Brand Image on Purchasing Decision is  $0.000 < 0.05$  with a t-statistics value of  $6.220 < 1.96$ , and for the original sample value, the influence is 0.136, then H2 is rejected, and Ha2 is accepted which means that Brand Image has a direct influence on Kpop Merchandise Purchasing Decision.



**Third Hypothesis Testing: Electronic Word of Mouth Influences Kpop Merchandise Purchases.****Table 6. Direct Effect Hypothesis 3**

Value Criteria	Electronic Word of Mouth-> Buying decision
p-value	0.051
t-statistics	1,952
<b>Original sample</b>	<b>0.036</b>

Source: Data processed (2024)

Based on Table 6, it can be stated that the p-value of Electronic Word of Mouth on Purchasing Decisions is  $0.051 < 0.05$  with a t-statistics value of  $1.952 > 1.96$ , and for the original sample value, the influence is 0.036, then H3 is rejected, and Ha3 is accepted which means that Electronic Word of Mouth does not have a direct influence on Kpop Merchandise Purchasing Decisions.

**Fourth Hypothesis Testing: Brand Ambassador Influences Kpop Merchandise Purchases.****Table 7. Direct Effect Hypothesis 4**

Value Criteria	Brand Ambassador -> Decision Purchase
p-value	0.000
t-statistics	31,659
Original sample	0.791

Source: Data processed (2024)

Based on Table 7, it can be stated that the p-value of Brand Ambassador towards Korean Wave is  $0.000 > 0.05$  with a t-statistics value of  $31.659 < 1.96$ , and for the original sample value, the influence is 0.791 or 79.1%, then H4 is rejected and Ha4 is accepted which means that Brand Ambassador has a direct influence on Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions.

Fifth Hypothesis Testing: Brand Ambassador Moderates the Relationship between Korean Wave and Kpop Merchandise Purchases.

**Table 8. Indirect Effect Hypothesis 5**

Value Criteria	Brand Ambassador x Korean Wave -> Purchase Decision
p-value	0.022
t-statistics	2.285
Original sample	-0.057

Source: Data processed (2024)

Based on Table 8, it can be stated that the p-value of Brand Ambassador towards the Korean Wave is  $0.022 > 0.05$  with a t-statistics value of  $2.285 < 1.96$ . For the original sample value, the influence is -0.057 or 5.7%, then H5 is rejected, and Ha5 is accepted, which means that the Brand Ambassador is able to moderate or strengthen the relationship between Korean Wave and Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions.

### Sixth Hypothesis Testing: Brand Ambassador Moderates the Relationship between Brand Image and Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions.

**Table 9. Indirect Effect Hypothesis 6**

Value Criteria	Brand Ambassador x Brand Image-> Purchase Decision
p-value	0.800
t-statistics	0.254
Original sample	0.006

Source: Data processed (2024)

Based on Table 9, it can be stated that the p-value of Brand Ambassador on Brand Image is 0.800  $< 0.05$  with a t-statistics value of 0.254  $> 1.96$ , and for the original sample value, the influence is 0.006 or 0.6%, then H6 is accepted, and Ha6 is rejected which means that Brand Ambassador is not able to moderate or strengthen the relationship between Brand Image and Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions.

### Seventh Hypothesis Testing: Brand Ambassador Moderates the Relationship between Electronic Word of Mouth and Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions.

**Table 10. Indirect Effect Hypothesis 7**

Value Criteria	Brand Ambassador x Electronic Word of Mouth -> Decision purchase
p-value	0.150
t-statistics	1,441
Original sample	0.037

Source: Data processed (2024)

Table 10 indicates that the influence of Brand Ambassador on Electronic Word of Mouth is 0.037, the p-value of Brand Ambassador on Electronic Word of Mouth is 0.150  $< 0.05$ , and the t-statistics value is 1.441  $> 1.96$ . H7 is accepted and Ha7 is rejected, indicating that Brand Ambassador is unable to moderate or strengthen the relationship between the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth and on Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions.

## 5. Discussion

### Influence Korean Wave(X1) on Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions (Y)

After data processing was carried out, it was found that the Korean wave had a significant influence on the decision to purchase NCT K-pop merchandise with a p-value of 0.001  $> 0.05$  (research significance level). From these results, other factors may be more dominant in influencing the purchasing decisions of NCT K-pop merchandise for Twitter/X users domiciled in East Jakarta. For example, economic factors such as merchandise prices, preferences for other K-pop groups, or other urgent needs may be a higher priority for respondents than participation in the Korean Wave. In addition to economic factors, preferences for other K-pop groups can also influence purchasing decisions. If respondents have an interest or tendency to buy merchandise from other K-pop groups that they prefer, they may be more likely to divert their funds to buy merchandise from that group.

Not only that, but other urgent needs can also be a determining factor. Respondents' spending priorities may be influenced by daily needs, education, or health that are more urgent or important than the desire to have K-pop merchandise. Therefore, although Korean The results of this study indicate that it is in accordance with the research conducted, the Korean wave has no effect. This finding is supported by previous research conducted, which states that partially, the Hallyu wave phenomenon variable does not have a significant effect on Purchasing Decisions.

**The Influence of Brand Image(X2) on Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions (Y).**

Based on the data processing that has been carried out, it was found that Brand Image has a significant influence on Purchasing Decisions with a significant value of  $0.000 > 0.05$  (research significance level). In addition, personal preferences and environmental influences can also play a big role in purchasing decisions. Factors such as consumer culture, current trends, or recommendations from friends and family can be more dominant factors in influencing purchasing decisions. Thus, although Brand Image is important in building brand image, other factors such as product quality, price, promotion, brand trust, and personal preferences also have a significant influence in shaping consumer purchasing decisions (Supriyanita, 2021).

Brand trust also plays an important role in purchasing decisions. This trust is more personal and can be influenced by direct experience or recommendations from others. Promotions that attract consumers' attention, such as big discounts or value-added bundling packages, can also influence purchasing decisions more than Brand Image.

The influence of electronic word of mouth (X3) on Kpop merchandise purchasing decisions (Y). The results of the analysis show that the p-value for variable X3 (Electronic Word of Mouth) is 0.051, which is greater than the significance level ( $\alpha$ ) set, which is 0.05. This result indicates that there is sufficient statistical evidence to support the relationship between eWOM and purchasing decisions (variable Y). Thus, it can be concluded that eWOM does not influence Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions (Y). These results indicate the importance of the role of eWOM in influencing consumer behavior so that companies can consider marketing strategies that utilize eWOM effectively to increase sales and consumer loyalty.

In addition, e-WOM also has a strong social influence because recommendations from friends or family on social media can motivate consumers to follow these recommendations. Additional information provided through e-WOM can also help consumers make more informed and planned purchasing decisions. With the potential to have a long-term influence, e-WOM can be an important factor in product or service marketing and sales strategies. (Sastri, 2023). The results of the study show consistency with the research conducted by Arianthi, Dessy Eka and Sampurna Dian Surya (2020), which also stated that electronic word of mouth has a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions.

**The Influence of Brand Ambassador (Z) on Purchase Decisions of Nct K-pop Merchandise (Y)**

The results of the analysis show that the p-value is 0.000, which is smaller than the significance level ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.05 and indicates that there is sufficient statistical evidence to support the alternative hypothesis, which states that Brand Ambassador has an influence and is significant on Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions. In addition, the t-statistics of 31.659 also exceeds the critical value of 1.96, indicating that Brand Ambassador has a significant influence on Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions (Y). In line with the research conducted, which stated that NCT Dream has various experiences as brand ambassadors so that they can be relied on. The use of Korean artists as brand ambassadors also makes fans enthusiastic and willing to spend money to buy the goods.

**Brand Ambassador(Z) Moderating the Relationship Between Korean Wave (X1) and Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions (Y).**

From these results, other factors may be more dominant in influencing the relationship between Korean Wave and Purchasing Decisions than Brand Ambassadors. For example, according to Waluyan (2023), factors such as product quality, price, promotion, and consumer preferences for certain K-pop groups or merchandise may have a greater influence on their purchasing decisions. Good product quality can increase consumer satisfaction and strengthen brand loyalty, while affordable prices can affect consumer purchasing power. In addition, effective promotions can increase consumer awareness of the product and create a desire to buy. Consumer preferences for K-pop groups or merchandise can also be key factors in their purchasing decisions. Therefore, in developing a marketing strategy, companies need to consider these factors holistically to increase the influence of the Korean Wave and Brand Ambassador in influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

**Brand Ambassador(Z) Moderating the Relationship Between Brand Image (X2) and Kpop**

**Merchandise Purchase Decisions (Y).**

The results of the analysis show that the p-value is 0.525, which is greater than the significance level ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.05. This indicates that there is insufficient statistical evidence to support the alternative hypothesis, which states that Brand Ambassador successfully moderates the influence of Brand Image on Purchasing Decisions. In addition, the t-statistics of 0.635 also do not exceed the critical value of 1.96, indicating that the interaction between Brand Ambassador and Brand Image does not significantly influence Purchasing Decisions.

The results of the study showed that the interaction between Brand Ambassador and Brand Image did not moderate purchasing decisions, suggesting that other factors may be more dominant in influencing consumer behavior. According to Izzaturrahmah (2023), one of the main factors that can influence purchasing decisions is product quality. Consumers tend to prefer high-quality products that can meet their needs or desires. For the variation model regarding the mediation of brand ambassadors for brand image on purchasing decisions, researchers have not found other research results that are separate between brand ambassadors and brand image. This is because this variable is not indicated as a direct influence but rather an indirect variable that has not been studied thoroughly.

**Brand Ambassador(Z) Moderating the Relationship Between Electronic Word Of Mouth (X3) and Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decisions (Y).**

Suppose the p-value for the interaction between Brand Ambassador and Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) is 0.150 (p-value < 0.05) and the t-statistics is 1.441 (t-statistics > 1.96). In that case, the Brand Ambassador fails to moderate the influence between EWOM and the Purchase Decision. In this context, a high p-value and a low t-statistics indicate that the interaction between Brand Ambassador and EWOM is not statistically significant, so there is no evidence that Brand Ambassador influences the relationship between EWOM and Kpop Merchandise Purchase Decision. The failure of Brand Ambassadors to moderate the influence between EWOM and Purchase Decisions can be caused by various complex factors. One of them is the lack of consumer involvement or interest in the Brand Ambassador in question.

Consumers may not feel emotionally connected or have a strong interest in the Brand Ambassador, so the message conveyed has less influence on their purchasing decisions. In addition, the message delivered by the Brand Ambassador can also be a determining factor in the success of moderation. If the message delivered does not match the consumer's perception or expectations of the product or brand, then the impact of moderation can be minimal. For example, if the Brand Ambassador is positioned as an authoritative and exclusive figure, but the message delivered is too general or irrelevant to the target market, consumers may not respond positively.

**6. Conclusion**

After eliminating several indicators, the validity results of each variable were declared good, with a loading factor value of > 0.6 on each indicator item. For the Korean Wave variable (H1), the highest value is in indicator H1.3, which states that Korean culture, films, and songs are interesting and unique. In the Brand Image variable (H2), the highest value is in H2.3 with the statement, "My perception of Nature Republic x NCT products is positive." For Electronic Word of Mouth (H3), the highest value is in H3.3, which states the influence of brand impressions on product perception. In the Brand Ambassador variable (Z), indicator Z.4 shows that NCT's promotion motivates me to try the product. Finally, in the K-Pop Merchandise Purchase Decision variable (Y), the highest value is in Y.4, which states that NCT merchandise meets my needs as a fan.

**Recommendation**

The suggestion for this research is that related parties, such as NCT promoters or management, continue to increase promotions that highlight the uniqueness of Korean culture, especially through social media, to strengthen the appeal of their merchandise. In addition, it is important to strengthen collaboration with brand ambassadors who have a positive influence on consumer perception, as well as expand the reach of promotions to fans of various ages. Also focus on

improving customer experience through direct interaction on social media to strengthen merchandise purchasing decisions.

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