

Impact of NCT Dream's Endorsement and Parasocial Interaction in Driving Purchase Decisions via Brand Awareness

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the influence of Brand Ambassador, in this case NCT Dream, and Parasocial Interaction on the purchasing decision of Tos Tos Tortilla Chips through the mediation of Brand Awareness. In the marketing context, Brand Ambassador serves to introduce and build brand image in the minds of consumers, while parasocial interaction deepens the emotional closeness between fans and idols, which can influence purchasing behavior. Data were collected through a survey involving 150 respondents who are NCT Dream fans and consumers of Tos Tos products. The results of the analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) show that Brand Ambassador and Parasocial Interaction have a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness. Brand Awareness itself has a significant influence on purchasing decisions. Although Brand Ambassador does not have a direct effect on purchasing decisions, its influence can be felt through increased Brand Awareness which then drives purchasing decisions. Conversely, Parasocial Interaction has a direct and indirect effect on purchasing decisions through Brand Awareness. These findings provide insight that celebrity influence in marketing, especially through parasocial interaction, plays an important role in building brand awareness which ultimately influences consumer purchasing decisions.

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of The development of the global entertainment industry, particularly the Korean Wave (Hallyu), has brought significant changes to the

consumption behavior of young people in various countries, including Indonesia. This phenomenon not only influences popular culture preferences but also shapes consumption patterns and purchasing decisions, especially for products associated with public figures from the K-Pop industry (Aditia & Taufiq, 2024). In modern marketing, companies are increasingly leveraging the popularity of K-Pop idols as brand ambassadors to strengthen brand communication and increase product appeal in the eyes of consumers. This strategy is considered effective because K-Pop idols have a loyal fan base, high emotional engagement, and the ability to build a positive image for the brands they represent. (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019).

Brand ambassadors act as symbolic representations of brands, capable of conveying values, images, and marketing messages persuasively to consumers. The presence of public figures as brand ambassadors has been shown to increase brand awareness, strengthen positive attitudes toward the brand, and ultimately drive purchasing decisions (Spry et al., 2011). In the highly competitive snack food industry, the strategy of using brand ambassadors is relevant because consumers are faced with many product choices with similar characteristics. Therefore, differentiation through emotional associations with popular figures is one of the strategic approaches widely used by companies. (Nugroho et al., 2024).

One of the K-Pop idol groups that has a major global influence is NCT Dream. NCT Dream's popularity is reflected not only in their album sales and international music achievements, but also in the strength of their active and emotionally engaged fandom. PT Dua Kelinci has capitalized on this by appointing NCT Dream as the brand ambassador for Tos Tos Tortilla Chips, with the aim of expanding market reach and increasing brand awareness among K-Pop fans. This collaboration features NCT Dream in various promotional materials and special edition product packaging, strategically designed to attract attention and increase consumers' emotional closeness to the brand.

Several previous studies have shown that using K-Pop idols as brand ambassadors has a positive impact on brand awareness and purchasing decisions. Research by Spry et al., 2011 confirms that the credibility and attractiveness of celebrity endorsers play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes toward a brand. A study by Lacap et al., 2024 found that K-Pop idols as endorsers can increase brand awareness and purchase intention through emotional engagement with fans. Several studies also show that K-Pop idol brand ambassadors have a significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions, both directly and through increased brand awareness (A'izza & Salisah, 2025; Febrian et al., 2024).

However, most previous studies still emphasize the role of brand ambassadors as cognitive and symbolic marketing stimuli, while the psychological aspect of parasocial interactions has not been explored in depth. Parasocial interactions refer to a one-way pseudo-relationship felt by individuals towards public figures, where fans feel emotional closeness, intimacy, and personal involvement even though there is no real interaction (Horton & Richard Wohl, 1956). For K-Pop fans, parasocial interactions are becoming stronger due to the intensity of exposure through social media, digital content, and

fandom activities, which have the potential to influence fans' attitudes and consumption behavior (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2018) .

Several recent studies have shown that parasocial interactions play a significant role in shaping brand attitudes and purchase intentions. (Ashraf et al., 2023; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) found that fans' emotional closeness to celebrities can increase trust in advertised products . Furthermore, (Chung & Cho, 2017) emphasized that parasocial interactions can strengthen the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements by encouraging consumers' emotional engagement with the brand. However, studies integrating brand ambassadors, parasocial interactions , brand awareness, and purchase decisions into a single research model, particularly on snack products in Indonesia, are still very limited.

Based on the research gap, this study was conducted to comprehensively examine the influence of NCT Dream brand ambassadors and parasocial interactions on the purchasing decision of Tos Tos Tortilla Chips with brand awareness as a mediating variable. The selection of NCT fans as respondents was based on their characteristics of having a high level of emotional involvement with their idols, making it relevant to test the role of parasocial interactions in the context of fandom-based marketing. This study aims to provide an empirical understanding of the mechanisms of emotional and cognitive influence in celebrity endorsement strategies, while providing theoretical and practical contributions to the development of more effective marketing strategies in the era of popular culture and the creative economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Ambassador

In marketing, a brand ambassador is understood as a public figure chosen by a brand to represent its identity, values, and product message, thereby helping the company build a psychological connection with its target market. The effectiveness of a brand ambassador is often explained by the credibility of the source and their attractiveness, which ultimately shape consumers' assessment of the endorsed brand. (Spry et al., 2011) . When the chosen figure has a strong fan base, high exposure to the figure's activities and image can accelerate the brand recognition process and increase the intensity of consumer attention to the promoted product. The Korean Wave phenomenon, the use of K-Pop idols as brand ambassadors is also widely chosen because it can attract attention and expand the reach of brand communication in the digital youth segment (Amalia Hendarsin et al., 2024). Empirically, research results show that brand ambassadors can drive purchasing decisions in various product categories and often work more strongly when consumer perceptions of the brand become more familiar (Ghifari et al., 2025) . Other findings that are in line also show that brand ambassadors play a role in strengthening purchasing decisions through psychological brand variables, such as brand awareness as a mediating pathway (Osak & Pasharibu, 2020) .

Parasocial Interaction

Parasocial interaction is a concept that explains the pseudo-one-way closeness between audiences and media figures, where individuals feel familiar, close, and emotionally connected to public figures even though the relationship is not reciprocal

(Wardah & Uyun, 2025) . In the digital era, parasocial interactions have become increasingly intense as fans are constantly exposed to idol content (videos, live broadcasts, social media posts, variety shows, and fandom community interactions). Parasocial closeness can increase the acceptance of promotional messages because fans perceive the figure as more familiar, trustworthy, and relevant to them. A study (Chung & Cho, 2017) shows that parasocial relationships formed through interactions on social media are associated with increased trustworthiness and ultimately strengthen consumer responses to endorsements. At the behavioral level, empirical evidence also suggests that parasocial interactions can increase purchase intention or the tendency to make purchases because consumers feel compelled to support the figures they follow. Research results found that parasocial interactions are related to purchase intention and online shopping behavior in digital marketing (Muktianis & Harianto, 2022) .

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to the strength of a brand's presence in consumers' minds, namely the extent to which consumers are able to recognize, remember, and place the brand at the top of mind when faced with a particular product category (Kurniawan et al., 2023) . Brand awareness is a component of customer-based brand equity because it determines whether consumers respond more positively to marketing activities than to unfamiliar brands (Kotler & Keller, 2021) . Brand awareness is explained through the stages of unawareness of the brand, brand recognition, brand recall, and top of mind. Previous research also shows that brand ambassadors can drive brand awareness by increasing exposure, forming associations, and strengthening brand memory (Osak & Pasharibu, 2020) . Furthermore, studies that specifically highlight the use of K-Pop idols as brand ambassadors on social media show an influence on brand awareness, especially in reaching cross-border consumers and fan segments (Amalia Hendarsin et al., 2024) .

Buying decision

Purchasing decisions are the final result of a consumer's evaluation process in choosing a product, including confidence in the product, purchasing behavior, the tendency to make repeat purchases, and the willingness to recommend to others (Kumbara.Vicky, 2021) . This process is not a single action, but rather a series of stages starting from recognizing needs, searching for information from various sources, evaluating alternatives, making purchasing decisions, and post-purchase behavior that determines the level of consumer satisfaction (Damaledo et al., 2023) . The realization of this purchasing decision can be measured through four indicators according to (Santuso et al., 2024) , namely the existence of stability in a product, purchasing habits, willingness to provide recommendations to others, and the action of making repeat purchases.

Hypothesis Development

Brand ambassadors with a strong fan base can create buzz in the media, making consumers more familiar with the logo, name, and benefits of the product (Aprillia & Yoestini, 2024) . Research by (Toresa & Yuswono, 2025) shows that celebrity endorsements have a significant positive effect on increasing consumer brand awareness. Similar findings were reported in a study (Zipporah & Mberia, 2014) where advertisements with famous endorsers successfully increased brand awareness and consumer engagement.

H1: NCT Dream Brand Ambassador has a positive influence on Tos Tos Tortilla Chips Brand Awareness.

Parasocial interactions refer to a one-way pseudo-relationship between consumers and public figures (e.g., fans and K-Pop idols) that can strengthen consumers' emotional attachments. These parasocial bonds lead consumers to pay more attention to the figure's content and recommendations, potentially increasing brand awareness of the associated brand. (Lou & Yuan, 2019) state that influencer marketing strategies that leverage parasocial closeness aim to boost brand awareness while shaping consumer purchasing decisions. Mechanistically, strong parasocial relationships encourage electronic word-of-mouth among fans, which in turn increases brand awareness and sales opportunities. (Nadroo et al., 2024) found that parasocial interactions between influencers and followers trigger an electronic word-of-mouth effect that expands consumer brand awareness. Furthermore, personal content from public figures perceived as parasocially close tends to be more memorable for consumers, contributing to brand awareness (Zhou et al., 2024).

H2: Parasocial interaction has a positive effect on Tos Tos Tortilla Chips Brand Awareness.

A high level of brand awareness among consumers makes it easier for brands to be considered in purchasing decisions. In theory, consumers tend to choose more well-known brands because they are perceived as more trustworthy or familiar (Aaker & Biel, 2013). Empirical research supports this: strong brand awareness has been shown to positively influence purchasing decisions (Dewi et al., 2020). (Dewi et al., 2020) found that increased brand awareness was significantly associated with increased purchasing decisions for products in the shampoo category. Similarly, a study (Wahyu et al., 2020) showed that brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on consumer purchasing decisions. This means that consumers tend to purchase products whose brands are immediately recognized and remembered. High brand awareness is also often a prerequisite for forming brand preferences in consumers' minds (Mustikasari & Widaningsih, 2019).

H3: Brand awareness has a positive influence on the purchasing decision of Tos Tos Tortilla Chips.

Brand ambassadors play a role in building brand image and credibility, which can ultimately drive consumer purchasing decisions. Celebrities or idol groups who serve as brand ambassadors can transfer their influence to consumer behavior. A study (Permana & Hidayat, 2024) found that brand ambassadors have a significant positive influence on consumer purchasing decisions for beauty products. This means that the presence of a famous figure (e.g., a member of NCT Dream) in a product promotion can increase the likelihood of consumers choosing that product. Similar findings were reported by (Nur; & Saputro, 2024) where selecting the right brand ambassador was proven to increase purchasing decisions in the snack product category. This is consistent with the view that the attractiveness and popularity of a brand ambassador can influence consumer attitudes and trust, thereby driving actual purchasing decisions.

H4: NCT Dream Brand Ambassador has a positive influence on the Purchase Decision of Tos Tos Tortilla Chips.

The pseudo-closeness established through parasocial interactions can influence the purchasing behavior of fans or consumers. Strong parasocial relationships make consumers feel more emotionally attached and trusting of influencers, making them more likely to act on their product recommendations. Numerous studies have shown that parasocial relationships drive consumer purchase intentions. For example, (Yudha, 2023) confirmed that the strength of parasocial relationships has a significant direct impact on digital consumers' purchase intentions. (It should be noted that purchase intention is the intention that precedes the actual purchase decision.) (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) also found something similar: the stronger the parasocial interaction between influencers and followers, the higher the purchase intention of the products recommended by the influencer. In fact, recent studies have shown that parasocial effects extend beyond intention and can extend to actual purchasing behavior. (Taher et al., 2022) reported that parasocial closeness serves as an important mediator that strengthens the influence of influencer reputation on beauty product purchasing behavior. Therefore, it can be expected that consumers with high parasocial interactions with NCT Dream are more likely to purchase the products they promote.

H5: Parasocial interaction has a positive influence on the Purchase Decision of Tos Tos Tortilla Chips.

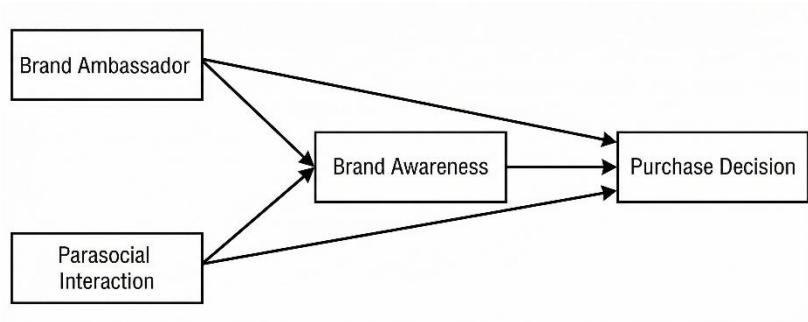
Brand awareness is thought to act as a mediating variable that bridges the influence of brand ambassadors on consumer purchasing decisions. This means that the presence of NCT Dream as brand ambassadors is thought to first increase brand awareness of Tos Tos, which then drives purchase decisions. Empirical support for this mediation mechanism has been found in several studies. Research (Toresa & Yuswono, 2025) concluded that brand awareness mediates the relationship between celebrity endorsers and purchase decisions; celebrities increase consumer awareness, and this awareness ultimately drives purchases. Similarly, a study (Yanti & Zamrudi, 2025) on cosmetic products showed that brand awareness significantly mediates the influence of celebrity endorsements on purchase decisions. In other words, the indirect impact through increased consumer awareness strengthens the positive influence of brand ambassadors on purchase decisions.

H6: NCT Dream Brand Ambassador has a positive influence on the Purchase Decision of Tos Tos Tortilla Chips through Brand Awareness.

Consumers who have high parasocial interactions with NCT Dream tend to be more aware of products associated with their idols, thus increasing brand awareness and, in turn, driving purchase decisions. Theoretically, parasocial emotional relationships make consumers more receptive to product information conveyed by idols, increasing brand recall and ultimately influencing purchase decisions. Although direct studies on this mediation are still limited, indirect support can be drawn from related findings. (Nadroo et al., 2024) showed that parasocial bonds encourage positive word-of-mouth, which increases consumer brand awareness. Meanwhile, as discussed in H3, higher brand awareness significantly drives product purchase decisions. Thus, it can be concluded that parasocial interactions influence purchase decisions by first increasing brand awareness.

H7: Parasocial interaction has a positive influence on the Purchase Decision of Tos Tos Tortilla Chips through Brand Awareness.

Based on the literature review and hypothesis development above, this conceptual framework describes the relationship between the variables Brand Ambassador, Parasocial Interaction, Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision.



RESEARCH METHODS

The study used a quantitative method with a causal associative design to test the causal relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables. The exogenous variables in the study were Brand Ambassador (X1) and Parasocial Interaction (X2), with Brand Awareness (Z) as the mediating variable, and Purchase Decision (Y) as the endogenous variable. Primary data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire survey distributed online, using a 5-point Likert scale. The study population included all Tos Tos consumers. Tortolia Chips who have consumed the product and are aware of the promotional campaign with the brand ambassador NCT Dream. Since the actual population size is unknown, the sample size determination follows the SEM guidelines, namely a minimum of 10 respondents per indicator (Memon et al., 2020). This research model has 15 indicators, so 150 respondents are required. The study involved 150 respondents selected using a purposive sampling technique (non-probability sampling) based on predetermined criteria. The respondent criteria include: aged ≥ 12 years, having seen an NCT Dream x Tos Tos advertisement/promotion, liking or knowing NCT Dream, and having purchased a Tos Tos product.

Brand Ambassador is operationalized through indicators of attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, and power (Firmansyah, 2019). Parasocial interaction is measured using cognitive, affective, and conative indicators (Horton & Richard Wohl, 1956). The Brand Awareness dimension uses unaware of the brand, brand recognition, brand recall, and top of mind. (Desiani, 2023). Purchasing decisions are indicators of product stability, product purchasing habits, providing recommendations to others, and repeat purchases (Santuso et al., 2024). Analysis Technique: The collected data were analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling – Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method with the help of SmartPLS software (version 4.0). The model evaluation stage was carried out in two stages, namely the evaluation of the outer model (measurement model) and the inner model (structural model). In the outer model evaluation stage, construct validity and reliability tests were conducted to ensure the instrument measures the

intended concept well. Validity tests include convergent validity with the criteria of loading factor values ≥ 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.50 , as well as cross-loading examination of indicators. Construct reliability is assessed through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values, each of which must exceed 0.70 (Hair Jr. et al., 2017) . Furthermore, in the inner model evaluation, the R^2 and f^2 values are analyzed. Hypothesis testing of the influence between variables is carried out by examining the path coefficients and their significance:

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Description

The number of respondents in this study was 150 people. The majority of respondents were female, namely 132 people (88.0%), while 18 were male (12.0%). The respondents' ages ranged from 15 to 28 years, with an average of around 21.6 years. The majority of respondents were in the 20–25 age group, namely 137 people (91.3%). There were 10 respondents under 20 years old (6.7%), while there were 3 people over 25 years old (2.0%).

In terms of occupation, the majority of respondents were students or college students as many as 136 people (90.7%). In addition, there were 10 people (6.7%) who worked as private employees, 2 people (1.3%) were entrepreneurs, 1 person (0.7%) worked as a State Civil Apparatus (ASN), and 1 person (0.7%) worked as a tailor. Based on the last level of education, the majority of respondents had a Bachelor's degree (S1) as many as 97 people (64.7%). Other respondents had a Senior High School (SMA) education as many as 44 people (29.3%), Diploma 3 (D3) as many as 8 people (5.3%), and Junior High School (SMP) as many as 1 person (0.7%).

Table 1. Respondent Description

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Man	18	12.0%
	Woman	132	88.0%
Age	15–19 years	10	6.7%
	20–25 years	137	91.3%
	>25 years	3	2.0%
Work	Students	136	90.7%
	Private employees	10	6.7%
	Self-employed	2	1.3%
	ASN	1	0.7%
	Seamstress	1	0.7%
Education	JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL	1	0.7%
	SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	44	29.3%
	D3	8	5.3%
	S1	97	64.7%

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The outer model testing is presented in Table 2, which shows the outer model values. loading of each indicator on its construct. All indicators used have outer loading > 0.70, thus meeting the convergent validity criteria.

Table 2. Outer Loadings

Variables	Item	Outer Loading	Information
Brand Ambassador (X1)	BA4 – “NCT Dream provides clear and accurate information.”	0.880	Valid
	BA5 – “I believe NCT Dream is honestly promoting.”	0.800	Valid
Brand Awareness (X2)	BA5 – “Chiki Tos Tos comes to mind when you think of snacks .”	0.844	Valid
	BA8 – “Chiki Tos Tos is my top choice.”	0.916	Valid
Parasocial Interaction (Z)	IP1 – “NCT Dream’s content is like spending time with friends.”	0.870	Valid
	IP2 – “I really understand NCT Dream’s personality .”	0.823	Valid
	IP3 – “I’m looking for the latest info about NCT Dream .”	0.808	Valid
Purchase Decision (Y)	KP1 – “Buying Chiki Tos Tos is part of the routine.”	0.727	Valid
	KP4 – “Always buy Chiki Tos Tos when shopping for snacks .”	0.827	Valid
	KP6 – “I will continue to buy Chiki Tos Tos in the future.”	0.746	Valid
	KP8 – “I will continue to buy when I want snacks .”	0.800	Valid

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Next, the construct reliability was tested through the Composite Reliability (CR) value for internal consistency, as well as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for convergence. Table 3 shows that all constructs have CR values above the threshold of 0.70, as well as AVE above 0.50, meeting the criteria for reliability and convergent validity. The discriminant validity test has also been met; the results of the cross-sectional analysis are consistent with the results of the cross-sectional analysis. Loading shows that each indicator has the highest loading on its own construct compared to other constructs, which indicates that each construct is unique and different from each other as seen in Table 4.

Table 3. Construct Reliability Test and Convergent Validity

Variables	Composite Reliability	AVE
Brand Ambassador (X1)	0.828	0.707
Parasocial Interaction (X2)	0.872	0.695
Brand Awareness (Z)	0.873	0.775

Variables	Composite Reliability	AVE
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.858	0.602

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Table 4. Discriminant Test Validity

Item	BRAND			
	AMBASSADO R	BRAND AWARENESS	SOCIAL INTERACTION	BUYING DECISION
X1.2.1	0.800	0.256	0.395	0.247
X1.3.1	0.880	0.287	0.334	0.346
X2.1.1	0.340	0.316	0.823	0.475
X2.2.2	0.399	0.270	0.870	0.430
X2.3.1	0.330	0.228	0.808	0.397
Y1.3.1	0.329	0.844	0.205	0.455
Y1.4.1	0.255	0.916	0.356	0.642
Y2.1.1	0.347	0.486	0.376	0.727
Y2.2.1	0.236	0.541	0.420	0.800
Y2.3.1	0.205	0.401	0.397	0.746
Y2.4.1	0.317	0.529	0.431	0.827

Source: Primary Data, 2025

After the measurement model meets the requirements, the analysis continues with the structural model. The results of the inner model evaluation are indicated by the R^2 value for the endogenous variable, path coefficient for the relationship between latent variables, as well as the f^2 effect which measures the relative contribution of each relationship. Table 3 presents the coefficient of determination R^2 for Brand Awareness (Z) and Purchase Decision (Y). The R^2 value for Brand Awareness = 0.238, which means approximately 23.8% of the brand variability Awareness can be explained jointly by Brand Ambassador and Parasocial Interaction, while the rest (76.2%) is influenced by other factors outside the model. Meanwhile, R^2 Purchase Decision = 0.536, indicating that the combination of the influence of Brand Ambassador, Parasocial Interaction, and Brand Awareness is able to explain 53.6% of the variation in consumer purchasing decisions for Tos Tos products. Tortilla Chips. With an R^2 value of around 0.5, this model is considered to have moderate predictive ability in explaining purchasing decisions.

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R^2) of the Inner Model

Endogen	R^2	Information
Brand Awareness (Z)	0.238	23.8% influenced by X1 and X2 (moderate)
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.536	53.6% influenced by X1, X2, and Z (moderate)

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The magnitude of the contribution of each relationship is presented in Table 6 through the f^2 effect size. It can be seen that Brand Awareness has the most dominant influence on Purchasing Decisions ($f^2 \approx 0.43$), which is considered high. This means that

changes in the brand level awareness has a very strong impact on changes in consumer purchasing decisions. Parasocial interaction has a moderate direct effect on purchasing decisions ($f^2 \approx 0.15$), while Brand Ambassador directly has almost no impact ($f^2 \approx 0.00$, very small). Meanwhile, in influencing Brand Awareness, Brand Ambassador shows a moderate effect ($f^2 \approx 0.16$), greater than Parasocial Interaction which has a small effect ($f^2 \approx 0.03$).

Table 6. Effect Values Size (f^2)

Connection	f^2	Classification
Brand Ambassador → Brand Awareness	0.16	Moderate
Parasocial Interaction → Brand Awareness	0.03	Small
Brand Ambassador → Purchase Decision (direct)	0.00	Small
Parasocial Interaction → Purchase Decision (direct)	0.15	Moderate
Brand Awareness → Purchase Decision	0.43	Large

Table 7. Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Influence (Variable → Variable)	β (Coef .)	t	p	Result
H1	Brand Ambassador (X1) → Brand Awareness (Z)	0.224	2,138	0.034	Supported
H2	Parasocial Interaction (X2) → Brand Awareness (Z)	0.233	2,256	0.025	Supported
H3	Brand Ambassador (X1) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.050	0.447	0.655	Not supported
H4	Parasocial Interaction (X2) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.335	3,010	0.003	Supported
H5	Brand Awareness (Z) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.509	5,947	0,000	Supported
H6	Brand Ambassador (X1) → Purchase Decision (Y) via Brand Awareness (Z)	0.114	2,502	0.013	Supported
H7	Parasocial Interaction (X2) → Purchase Decision (Y) via Brand Awareness (Z)	0.119	2,089	0.037	Supported

Inner model analysis evaluates the causal influence between latent variables. Table 7 displays the path coefficient. In H1, the test results show that Brand Ambassador has a significant positive influence on Brand Awareness with a path coefficient of 0.224 and a significance value of 0.034. This means that H1 is accepted. This finding indicates that the stronger the appeal and credibility of NCT Dream as a brand ambassador, the higher the consumer awareness of the Tos Tos brand. The results of H2, Parasocial Interaction is proven to have a significant positive effect on Brand Awareness with a coefficient value of 0.233 and a significance value of 0.025. Thus, H2 is accepted. This shows that the emotional closeness felt by fans towards NCT Dream contributes significantly in making them more aware and remember the promoted brand.

The results of H3, testing on this direct path, showed a very small coefficient value of 0.050 with a significance value of 0.655. Because the p value > 0.05, the effect is not significant. This means that H3 is rejected. The findings indicate that NCT Dream's popularity alone is not enough to drive direct purchases. Consumers do not buy products just because there is an idol's face on the packaging; they require further cognitive

processing. The results of H4, in contrast to H3, Parasocial Interaction has a significant direct influence on Purchase Decisions with a coefficient value of 0.335 and a significance value of 0.003. Therefore, H4 is accepted. This indicates an affective drive where fans buy products as a form of support or validation of their emotional relationship with idols, regardless of brand recognition factors. The results of the H5 test, the Brand Awareness variable shows the strongest influence on Purchase Decisions with a coefficient value of 0.509 and a significance value of 0.000. Therefore, H5 is accepted. These results confirm that brand awareness is the main predictor of sales; consumers tend to buy products that already occupy their top-of- mind position.

In addition to the direct influence, an indirect (mediation) influence was tested through Brand Awareness. Based on Table 7, Brand Ambassador has a significant indirect influence on Purchasing Decisions through Brand Awareness with a mediation coefficient of $\beta = 0.114$; $t = 2.502$; $p = 0.013$, so H6 is accepted. This mediation effect is significant even though the direct path $X1 \rightarrow Y$ is not significant, which indicates the existence of full mediation. New Brand Ambassadors have a significant impact on consumer purchasing decisions through increasing brand awareness. awareness first. Parasocial Interaction also has a significant effect on Purchasing Decisions through Brand Awareness ($\beta = 0.119$; $t = 2.089$; $p = 0.037$), supporting H7. These results indicate partial mediation, because X2 (parasocial interaction) has a direct and indirect influence that are both significant on Y. Thus, Brand Awareness acts as a mediating variable that strengthens the influence of Brand Ambassadors and Parasocial Interactions on Purchasing Decisions. Specifically for Brand Ambassadors, the mediating role of brand Awareness is important considering its weak direct influence, consumers tend to be influenced by NCT Dream brand ambassadors in their decision to purchase a product only if the brand ambassador succeeds in first increasing consumer awareness or recognition of the product brand (Chiki Tos Tos). In contrast, for parasocial interactions, this variable, in addition to increasing brand awareness, also increases consumer recognition. Awareness can also directly encourage purchasing interest, indicating the existence of a dual influence path (direct and indirect) on consumer purchasing decisions.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that the use of NCT Dream as a Brand Ambassador has a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness of Tos Tos Tortilla Chips. These results indicate that the stronger the brand ambassador's visibility and appeal, the higher the level of consumer awareness of the brand they represent. This phenomenon can be explained through the theories of Source Credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) and Attentional Capture (Folk et al., 1994). In a competitive market, such as the snack food industry, the appeal of celebrities like NCT Dream serves as an effective attention grabber. When the faces of NCT Dream members appear in advertisements or product packaging, an attention transfer process occurs, triggering consumers to pay attention to the previously unknown brand. This phenomenon creates instant brand recognition, expanding brand awareness among a wider audience, even beyond their core fan base. The Meaning Transfer Model theory from (McCracken, 1989) is also relevant to the findings, where NCT

Dream carries cultural meanings such as youthful energy and dynamism that are transferred to the Tos Tos brand, increasing the brand's appeal compared to competitors that do not have celebrity brand ambassadors.

These findings align with a study by (Febrian et al., 2024) which showed that NCT 127, as part of the NCT group, also significantly impacted brand awareness of Nu Green Tea products. Furthermore, research by (Spry et al., 2011) which identified endorser credibility as a predictor of customer-based brand equity, as well as a study by (Amalia Hendarsin et al., 2024) which highlighted the effectiveness of K-Pop idols in increasing brand awareness across countries, also supports the research findings.

Parasocial interaction has been shown to have a positive and significant influence on Brand Awareness, meaning the deeper the feeling of knowing and being close to an idol, the higher the consumer's awareness of the brand associated with that idol. This can be explained by Involvement Theory (Assael, 1998), which shows that fans with high levels of parasocial interaction do not just consume content passively, but actively process information with a high level of elaboration. In a parasocial relationship, the idol is considered part of the fan's social circle, making all information related to the idol more relevant and important to store in memory. Promotional activities involving parasocial interaction trigger deeper attention, thereby strengthening brand recall and retention.

These findings align with research by (Nadroo et al., 2024), which shows that parasocial interactions trigger electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which expands brand awareness through discussions between fans. (Zhou et al., 2024) also explain that personalized content from figures who have a parasocial relationship with their audience tends to be more memorable, which strengthens memory and brand awareness. A study by (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) confirms that young audiences trust information from figures they perceive as parasocially close more than from conventional celebrities.

One of the most striking findings in this study is that brand ambassadors do not have a significant direct influence on purchasing decisions. This is because the strong appeal of celebrities can distract the audience from the product itself. Consumers may be captivated by celebrities appearing in advertisements, but do not process the urgency to buy the product. Furthermore, Consumer Skepticism and Attribution Theory explain that more rational consumers may not immediately associate product quality with the presence of celebrities. Generation Z consumers, who are increasingly savvy, may realize that endorsements are business contracts and do not necessarily convince them to buy a product. Research (Sahdanira, 2023) showing that NCT Dream has no significant influence on purchasing decisions for Lemonilo products supports these results.

Unlike brand ambassadors, parasocial interactions have been shown to have a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions. In parasocial relationships, product purchases are often viewed not as commercial transactions, but as affective acts reflecting support for the idol. Fans who have parasocial bonds with their idols tend to purchase products promoted by the idol as a form of loyalty or support. Furthermore, the phenomena of Identification and Imitation, as well as Trust Transfer, also explain why parasocial interactions drive purchasing decisions. Fans feel the need to imitate their idols' lifestyles, so the products consumed by the idols become something they desire to feel a

deeper emotional connection. Research by (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) and (Muktianis & Harianto, 2022) confirms that parasocial interactions have a stronger influence on purchase intentions than conventional celebrity credibility. Findings by (Taher et al., 2022) also suggest that parasocial closeness can transform followers into more active consumers.

The results of the study indicate that brand awareness has a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions. This finding confirms that brand popularity and recognition play a significant role in encouraging consumers to purchase a product. This occurs because brand awareness (cognition) precedes the act of purchasing (conation). In low-involvement product categories such as snacks, brand familiarity is key. Consumers tend to choose familiar products because they provide a perception of safety and quality assurance. When consumers are faced with many choices on the shelf, they tend to choose the brand that stands out most in their memory. Research by (Dewi et al., 2020) which found that increased brand awareness correlates with increased purchasing decisions also supports this finding. (Wahyu et al., 2020)

This study found that although Brand Ambassadors do not have a direct influence on purchasing decisions, the indirect influence through brand awareness proved significant. In this case, NCT Dream acts as a door opener to create brand awareness, which in turn influences consumer purchasing decisions. The presence of NCT Dream makes consumers more aware of the Tos Tos brand, and this brand familiarity ultimately encourages them to purchase the product when they decide to shop. Research (Toresa & Yuswono, 2025) also shows that brand awareness absolutely mediates the relationship between celebrities as brand ambassadors and purchasing decisions. This finding shows that brand awareness is a factor that must be passed by endorsements to be able to generate sales.

Parasocial interactions have been shown to influence purchasing decisions both directly and indirectly through brand awareness, demonstrating that parasocial interactions are a powerful variable. Fans not only purchase products as a form of affective support for their idols, but also because they have high brand awareness thanks to parasocial interactions. Both emotional and cognitive pathways play a role simultaneously in driving purchasing decisions. Research (Chung & Cho, 2017; Nadroo et al., 2024) supports these findings, showing that parasocial interactions strengthen the effectiveness of endorsements by encouraging emotional and cognitive engagement, ultimately increasing brand awareness and purchase intention.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully identified a significant influence of Brand Ambassador (NCT Dream) and Parasocial Interaction on Brand Awareness and Purchasing Decisions of Tos Tos Tortilla Chips. Specifically, the results of the study showed that the stronger the emotional involvement of fans towards NCT Dream, the higher the consumer awareness of the Tos Tos brand. Brand Ambassador, although not directly driving purchasing decisions, has a significant influence on brand awareness which in turn influences consumer purchasing decisions. Meanwhile, Parasocial Interaction was proven to have a direct and significant impact on purchasing decisions, indicating the importance of

emotional closeness in motivating fans to purchase products associated with their idols. The full mediation model found in this study, shows that Brand Awareness plays a key role in linking Brand Ambassador with consumer purchasing decisions.

SUGGESTION

Based on the research results, it is recommended that companies using brand ambassador strategies pay attention to the strength of the emotional bond between fans and their chosen idols. To increase the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, brands should prioritize developing strong parasocial relationships between idols and consumers, through digital platforms and social media, to strengthen brand awareness, which will ultimately impact purchasing decisions. Companies also need to understand that although brand ambassadors play an important role in increasing brand awareness, their direct influence on purchasing decisions may be more limited if not supported by consumers' understanding of the product's quality and value. In the future, further research can delve deeper into other variables that can strengthen the relationship between brand ambassadors, parasocial interactions, and purchasing decisions in various product categories.

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