



## Understanding the motivation of purchase decision making of KPOP Seventeen's merchandise in Weverse Shop

Elke Alexandrina<sup>1</sup>, Latifa Ramonita<sup>2</sup>, Arnika Anindita<sup>3</sup>  
<sup>1,2,3</sup>LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Jakarta, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

In the midst of society and the economy gradually recovering after COVID-19, there is one group that seems to be continuing to strengthen: Korean Idol lovers. In Jakarta alone, the Blackpink concert which was held on March 11-12, 2023, was a huge success, including other K-Idol concerts. Fans not only chase the concert tickets, but also buy up all available merchandise. Gaon Music Chart data sales on the katadata page even record sales of K-Pop physical albums reaching 53.73 million albums in 2021. This is the first-time physical album sales have exceeded 50 million since 2011. Weverse Shop currently is the largest e-commerce intermediary business, selling K-Pop-themed merchandise through applications and websites, based in South Korea. This shop is the go-to place for fans who want to collect merchandise from K-Pop artists, especially those under Pledis Entertainment, one of which is "Seventeen". The pattern of purchases by fans is so massive, that they are willing to pre-order because they want to be the first to have the merchandise. Several production errors and merchandise delivery problems that had occurred with Seventeen's merchandise did not reduce the number of buyers, instead they were still sold out. The theory used in this study is the ERG Theory from Clayton Alderfer which states that motivation is based on three needs, namely Existence, Relatedness, and Growth.

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### Corresponding Author:

Elke Alexandrina  
Faculty of Communication,  
LSPR Institute of Communication and Business,  
Sudirman Park Campus, Jl. K.H. Mas Mansyur Kav. 35, RT.12/RW.11, Karet Tengsin, Kecamatan Tanah Abang, Kota Jakarta Pusat, Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta 10220, Indonesia.  
Email: [elke.a@lspr.edu](mailto:elke.a@lspr.edu)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The interest of Indonesian people in Korean idols can be traced back to the early 2000s with the rising popularity of K-pop in Asia (Glodev et al., 2023), (Jayanti et al., 2022), (Mulyaman et al., 2023). K-pop groups like Super Junior, Girls Generation, and TVXQ gained significant popularity in Indonesia during this time. However, it wasn't until the mid-2010s that K-pop truly exploded in Indonesia, with groups like BTS, EXO, Blackpink, and Seventeen.

Surprisingly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it turned out that the public's love for K-idol had not decreased. While everyone was at home, based on news on CNN Indonesia (*Drama Korea, Hiburan Favorit Kala Pandemi Melanda.*, 2020) and (Agustina,

2020), one of the entertainment they were looking for was enjoying various Korean-themed shows, such as K-Drama and K-Pop. The consumption of these type of entertainment increased significantly through digital platforms and streaming media (Chandra, 2022). Factors contributing to this escalation include extensive lockdowns, which resulted in more time spent at home, and the strategic growth of streaming services such as Netflix, Viu, and other pay-per-view services into Korean content. These platforms have actively marketed K-Dramas, capitalizing on the expanding global demand for diverse content while also filling entertainment shortages left by delayed or canceled productions in other countries. Furthermore, other factors that causes this fandom to arise are easy access, interesting stories and visuals, and cultural factors.

Then, after the pandemic subsided, Korean-themed performances, such as music concerts, were immediately stormed by fans and the tickets were sold out immediately. In Jakarta alone, the Blackpink concert which was held on March 11-12, 2023 was a huge success, including other K-Idol concerts that were held afterwards.

One of the forms of support given by K-Idol fans, not only from appreciating their music, downloading their songs, but also collecting merchandise items related to their idol (Kartikasari & Sudrajat, 2022; Nurjanah & Ikhsan, 2022; Qadri et al., 2024; Ulya et al., 2022). The music albums (CDs, vinyls, and other collectibles), light sticks, fashion items, photo books, stickers, are some of the merchandise that are collected by the fans. Not only bought during concerts, the merchandise was collected by the fans through many shops, locally and internationally. Regarding consumer motivation and behavior within Korean fandom, some research has shown that K-Idol fans believe that following K-Pop culture can boost their confidence. They perceived the Idols as references and mentors in their daily life. Die-hard fans even willing to arrange extra budget to buy fashion items and merchandise of their idols (Dalimunthe et al., 2022; Dinningrum et al., 2021). Other research that studying fanaticism and consumerism of students shows that fans of K-Pop not only purchase K-Idol merchandise for the function of the items; instead, the merchandise has symbolic meaning to them, as a validation from the K-Pop community that they are die-hard fans (Fadillah & Ratnasari, 2023). In broader perspective, a research in China shows that K-Pop culture has been influencing young Chinese people's consuming behavior as well. Not only drives economic growth in the Korean entertainment industry, the fans' spending behavior evidently promotes their personal growth and enhances social skills. Becoming a K-Idol fan over time helps create a global fan network and a feeling of identity and belonging, all of which are crucial for Chinese youth. (Chen, 2023).

Even though the idols are based in South Korea, with current technological developments, the global community can access and purchase these original merchandise easily by today's e-commerce industry. Based on e-commerce research conducted by iPrice, it is assumed that K-Idol fans own at least one type of merchandise from many categories and attend at least one concert per year (Lantican, 2020). Thanks to its fans, according to data from Hyundai Motor Securities (Hasibuan, 2022), approximately 9.96 million K-Pop albums were sold in just a month in May 2022, and this shows an increase from May 2021.

One of the biggest platforms for buying K-Pop artist merchandise today is Weverse Shop (Luthfina & Irwansyah, 2020; Syafikarani, 2021; Zahirah et al., 2023). Weverse Shop is an online shop that has the objective to make it easier for fan groups, or what is commonly known as fandom (fan kingdom), to buy and collect merchandise for the groups they like. According to UX Competitive Analysis (Kumar, 2021), Weverse Shop currently is positioned in the second place of the top online shops that K-Pop fans choose to buy K-Pop merchandise. Weverse Shop is operated in the Weverse application, which is an intermediary application for communicating between K-Pop artists and their fans. Weverse Shop only provides official and special merchandise from artists who are part of HYBE Labels and other agencies that collaborated with Weverse.

One of the K-Pop musicians supported by Weverse Shop is boy band Seventeen. Seventeen is a boy band from South Korea which is under the management of Pledis Entertainment, HYBE Label (Fidayani et al., 2023), (Tofani, 2023). Seventeen's members consist of 13 people, namely S.Coups, Jeonghan, Joshua, Jun, Hoshi, Wonwoo, Woozi, The8, Mingyu, DK, Seungkwan, Vernon, and Dino. To make it more interesting and exciting to their fans, the Seventeen has developed a fandom called CARAT, symbolized with diamond. In correlation with the meaning of the gemstone, CARAT is not considered merely as a fan club. More than that, CARAT is a predicate or a value for fans who are fully supporting Seventeen's music, the activities, up to following any projects that are supported by Seventeen. In short, CARAT is a status for hard-core fans.

Through the Weverse Shop, K-Pop fans in various countries find it easier to buy K-Pop group merchandise that they like. Of course, promoting certain products to customers so that they can make decisions is a challenging thing (Syaekhoni et al., 2017). Therefore, an analysis of consumer buying behavior is needed to determine which customers can be targeted for a promotion, because the shopping pattern of a customer contains important information for sellers that describes how customers interact with their environment when making decisions (Syaekhoni et al., 2017). Weverse Shop provides notifications on its social media via Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, and the Weverse Shop application itself so that fans can easily receive information about products from Weverse Shop.

This study aims to explore the reasons behind consumers' decisions to buy K-Pop Seventeen items from Weverse Shop, while previous studies mostly concentrate on the motivations and actions of fans towards K-Idols in drama series or motion pictures. Weverse, which specializes in selling both new and thrifted products, has grown highly popular among K-Idol enthusiasts.

There are several consumer behaviors that can be seen when deciding to purchase this merchandise product. There are those who immediately provide ready stock products, pre-order or order products before they are released to the market, also not a few who wait for reviews on social media to make sure the product to be purchased gets recommendations from other fans on social media.

However, there are other things that hinder consumers' decision making in purchasing Seventeen merchandise at the Weverse Shop. As an example, several times HYBE and Weverse Company made production errors, such as writing errors on albums and photo credits, negligence in packaging which caused damage to goods during delivery, or other production problems which caused the quality of merchandise to be judged by fans as poor.

Normally, people will complain or feeling disappointed when getting damaged merchandise; but the situation is surprisingly different in this case. It turns out that even though damaged and contains errors, the sales numbers of Seventeen merchandise at the Weverse Shop have not decreased. The products are sold out; the fans have no problem in buying them. This study aims to analyze the motivation for buying Seventeen merchandise products by fans who are influenced by the "Idol Effect" and understand the motivation behind the purchase decision-making process of K-pop Seventeen's merchandise.

In marketing a product, an understanding of the consumer's purchase decision is a basic requirement that must be met by a company. According to Kotler and Armstrong, purchasing decisions are defined as consumer decisions in choosing which brand to buy (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017; Sugiyama & Andree, 2011). Therefore, it is expected that a company must produce products or services that consumers want.

Meanwhile in decision making, there is an internal influence from the motivation, perception, personality, and attitudes of consumers that influence the decision-making process about what they need or want, their awareness of various product choices, information gathering activities, and their evaluation of alternatives (Rajagopal, 2019; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019; Solomon, 2017).

In general, (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017) define the Buyer Decision Process or a consumer decision-making process which goes through 5 stages, namely (1) Need recognition, at this stage the consumer recognizes the problem or need; (2) Information search, where at this stage consumers are interested, they may be looking for further information, but they may not; (3) Evaluation of alternatives, after determining to collect information, consumers decide to buy the chosen brand among other brand alternatives; (4) Purchase decision, namely the evaluation stage where consumers make ratings on several alternative brands and form purchase intentions; (5) Postpurchase behavior, at the last stage of the purchase decision process, consumers take further action based on their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their purchase.

However, according to (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017), in routine purchases, consumers usually go through several stages of the decision-making process and immediately make a purchase decision without seeking information about the product. In relevance to this study, we also need to understand the motivation and the psychology in the mind of a consumer who idolizes someone or being a part of a fandom.

Furthermore, when discussing about purchasing decision indicators, (Kotler & Keller, 2016) added that purchasing decisions have several indicators to measure a process used by consumers to decide whether to buy a product or not. Purchasing decision indicators according to (Kotler & Keller, 2016) include (1) Product choice, in making decisions, consumers can buy an item or service, or use their money for other purposes; (2) Brand choice, each brand has its own differences and uniqueness. Consumers must be able to make decisions about which brands they choose to make purchases; (3) Dealer choice. Each consumer has their own choice in determining dealers based on close location, low prices, complete inventory, shopping convenience, and so on; (4) Purchase amount (amount of purchase or quantity), consumers can make decisions about how many purchases to make. Purchases made by consumers can be in the form of more than one type of product; (5) Purchase timing, consumers can choose when to buy, such as every day, once a week, or once a month; (6) Payment method, consumers determine which payment method they choose in making their decision to use a product or service.

To understand motivation, the ERG theory, developed by Clayton Alderfer in 1969, as mentioned by Wilson (Sulastri, 2021), is a motivation theory that categorizes human needs into three levels: existence, relatedness, and growth. It is an alternative to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, as mentioned by (Eftimov & Ristovska, 2016), as follows: (a) Existence Needs, these are the most basic needs for survival and physical well-being. They include the need for food, water, air, shelter, and other basic necessities. When these needs are not fulfilled, they become a strong motivator, (b) Relatedness Needs, these needs refer to social interactions and relationships with others. They include the need for love, friendship, affiliation, and a sense of belonging. People seek meaningful relationships and social support to fulfill these needs, and (c) Growth Needs, these needs relate to an individual's personal development and self-esteem. They involve the desire for personal growth, achievement, self-confidence, independence, and creativity. People pursue opportunities that allow them to learn, grow, and reach their full potential.

According to the ERG theory, these three needs are not linear, unlike Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Alderfer proposed that individuals can strive to fulfill needs at multiple levels simultaneously. Additionally, if individuals are unable to fulfill higher-level needs, they may regress to lower-level needs as a way to satisfy their motivational needs.

Later on, Alderfer also introduced the frustration-regression principle, which suggests that when higher-level needs are not met, individuals may intensify their efforts to fulfill lower-level needs. For example, if growth needs are not met in the workplace, individuals may seek stronger social connections (relatedness needs) or simply focus on their physical well-being (existence needs).

The ERG theory recognizes that individuals' needs are dynamic and can change over time. It provides a framework for understanding and addressing employee motivation in the workplace by considering multiple levels of needs and allowing for regression and adaptation to changing circumstances.

In correlation to this study in understanding K-pop fans' way of life and mind, first we need to comprehend their psychology (McGinnis, 2020). The psychology of a fan is rooted in the concept of fandom, which refers to the intense, passionate, and dedicated support or interest in a particular person, team, or form of entertainment.

Fans are characterized by their strong emotional connection and identification with the object of their fandom. Here are some key aspects of the psychology of a fan: (a) Identity and Belonging, being a fan often becomes a part of an individual's identity. Fans derive personal meaning and a sense of belonging through their affiliation with a specific fandom. It provides a way to connect with like-minded individuals and feel a sense of community, (b) Emotional Attachment, fans develop deep emotional bonds with the object of their fandom. They experience a range of emotions, such as joy, excitement, sadness, and frustration, depending on the success or failure of their team or idol. This emotional investment contributes to the intensity of their fandom, (c) Social Support, fans often actively engage with other fans through social networks, forums, or in-person gatherings. This communal aspect of fandom provides social support, validation, and shared experiences with others who understand and share their passion, (d) Self-Expression and Identity Exploration, fandom can serve as a vehicle for self-expression and exploration. Fans may incorporate elements of their fandom into their own identity, such as by adopting a specific fashion style, memorabilia collection, or participating in fan-created content. It allows them to express their creativity and connect with others who share similar interests, (e) Escapism and Entertainment, fandom provides a form of escapism and entertainment. It allows fans to temporarily immerse themselves in the world of their favorite team, artist, or fictional universe, providing a break from the stresses of daily life and a source of enjoyment and excitement, and (f) Sense of Purpose and Meaning, fandom can give fans a sense of purpose and meaning. Supporting their favorite team or celebrity gives them a sense of direction and focus, and they often contribute to the success and achievements of their fandom through various ways, such as attending events or promoting the object of their fandom.

It's important to note that the level of fandom can vary greatly from casual interest to obsessive behavior, and fans' motivations and behaviors can differ depending on the individual and the specific fandom. Nonetheless, the psychology of a fan is driven by the desire for connection, emotional fulfillment, and a sense of identity and purpose.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

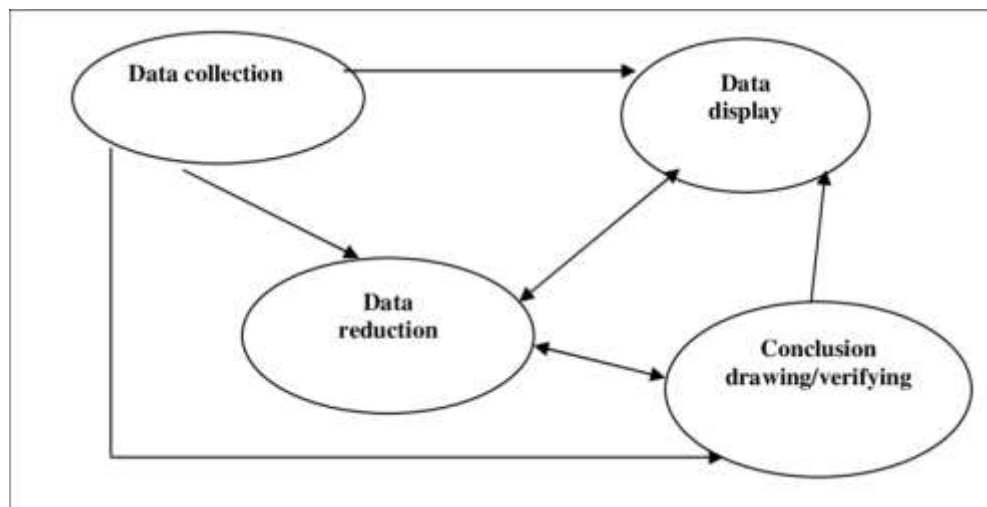
In order to get a complete comprehension of the phenomenon (Maison, 2019; Moleong, 2014; Sugiyono, 2015), this research was conducted using descriptive qualitative methods, with five (5) Seventeen fans in Jakarta, Indonesia, who bought merchandise through the Weverse Shop as informants, and one (1) informant for data triangulation. The purpose of the interviews was to investigate the emotional and psychological aspects that influence consumers' decisions to purchase the merchandise from Weverse Shop and how they regard the products. The interviews were conducted through online and offline meetings to all informants. The informants' criteria are described in Table 1, as follows:

Table 1. Informants' criteria

No.	Informants	Description
1.	Informant 1	An employee who is a die-hard fan of Seventeen. Apart from her habit in buying Seventeen merchandise on the Weverse Shop for private collections, she also resells the Seventeen merchandise and other K-Pop items in her

		online shop.
2.	Informant 2	University student of marketing communications who has been a fan of Seventeen for more than a year. She often buys various Seventeen merchandise through the Weverse Shop to add to her collection.
3.	Informant 3	University student of Indonesian literature, has been a Seventeen fan for a year. She likes collecting Seventeen merchandise from the Weverse Shop, especially the albums and photocards.
4.	Informant 4	University student who has been a Seventeen fan since 2021. She often buys Seventeen merchandise at the Weverse Shop, selectively for special items.
5.	Informant 5	University student but also work as an employee. She has been a Seventeen fan since 2016. She often purchases Seventeen merchandise from Weverse Shop, but not only Seventeen, she also likes to collect other groups' merchandise.
6.	Informant 6 (for triangulation)	A strategic transformation and innovation researcher with more than 21 years of experience as a consultant, trainer and lecturer in the field of management. Some of his research is in the field of consumer behavior, especially related to behavioral theory.

Data collected then analyzed using Miles and Huberman technique, which outlined the four main steps involved in their method: Data Collection, Data Reduction, Data Display, and Conclusion Drawing/Verification. Each step was connected in a cyclic flow to emphasize the iterative nature of the analysis process (Miles et al., 2019), as shown by Picture 1 below:



Picture 1. Data Analysis Technique by Miles and Huberman (2019)

Furthermore, to develop a theoretical framework that incorporates multiple motivational elements impacting customers' buying decisions in the context of K-pop items, a thorough literature analysis was carried out. Social identity, fan loyalty, emotional attachment, perceived value, and the impact of online communities were among the variables taken into account.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The ERG theory is primarily focused on human motivation; so we can draw some connections between the theory and the psychology of a fan. Here's an interpretation of how the ERG theory applies to fans: (1) Existence Needs. In the context of being a fan,

existence needs could refer to the basic necessities required to engage in fandom. For example, having access to the necessary resources like the internet or television to follow and support their favorite team or artist. It could also involve physical needs such as attending live events or purchasing merchandise related to their fandom, (2) Relatedness Needs. Relatedness needs in a fan context would involve the social aspect of being a fan. Fans often seek a sense of connection and belonging with fellow fans. This could include engaging in online communities, attending fan conventions or meet-ups, or participating in fan discussions. Fans fulfill their relatedness needs by forming relationships and sharing their passion with others who understand and appreciate their fandom, and (3) Growth Needs. The growth needs of a fan can be related to their personal development and the desire to deepen their knowledge, engagement, and understanding within their chosen fandom. This may involve actively seeking out information, learning more about the team or artist, and engaging in activities that allow them to develop and express their fan identity. It could also include contributing to the fandom, such as by creating fan art, writing fanfiction, or participating in fan events and competitions.

In the context of the ERG theory, being a fan can be seen as a way for individuals to fulfill their relatedness and growth needs. Fans feel a strong connection and sense of belonging with other fans while also finding personal growth and self-expression through their engagement with their chosen fandom.

KPOP fans usually have a variety of factors that influence their buying behavior. The motivations that drive the behavior of KPOP fans are somehow similar among the loyal fan base. Seventeen, however, is now one of the most popular KPOP boy bands, well known for its members' appearances, talented music skills, and catchy and distinguished music.

Furthermore, based on the research findings, herewith are several motivations that drive KPOP fans to purchase Seventeen's merchandise, particularly in the Weverse Shop: (1) Collectability and exclusivity. Seventeen's KPOP goods frequently feature limited runs, unique designs, and exclusive things. Fans are encouraged to buy the items because of the feeling of rarity and uniqueness created by these qualities. Particularly for collectors, they are motivated by the urge to complete their collections and demonstrate their devotion to the community, especially with their predicate as CARAT, (2) Concerts and Fan Gatherings. A big part of the KPOP fandom experience is going to Seventeen concerts and fan gatherings. To demonstrate their support during these events, fans frequently buy memorable items such as light sticks, banners, and clothing. These elements add to the general enthusiasm and vibe of live performances by fostering a sense of community among spectators, (3) Emotional Connection. Fans frequently experience an emotional and personal connection to Seventeen's music and lyrics. This connection often stems from the relatable themes and emotions conveyed through their songs. Seventeen's music addresses a wide range of experiences, from love and friendship to self-discovery and perseverance, which resonate deeply with many listeners. For instance, a fan might find solace and motivation in a song that speaks about overcoming challenges or feeling understood through lyrics that mirror their personal experiences. By buying goods, fans can show their love, respect, and thanks for the band's music and the positive effects it has had on their lives. Merchandise such as albums, clothing, and concert tickets are tangible ways for fans to express their appreciation and support for Seventeen. This support not only helps the band financially but also reinforces the bond between the fans and the artists. When fans wear Seventeen merchandise or attend their concerts, they are publicly displaying their connection to the band and their music. It turns into a way to connect emotionally and to offer assistance. Purchasing and using Seventeen's merchandise becomes more than just a transaction; it's a symbol of the fans' emotional investment in the band. It allows fans to feel closer to Seventeen and to other fans who share their passion. This sense of community can be particularly strong, providing fans with a shared identity and a network of support. Additionally, knowing that their purchases directly contribute to the band's success gives fans a sense of

agency and satisfaction, reinforcing their commitment and emotional connection to Seventeen, (4) Fashion and Style. K-pop stars like Seventeen have a significant impact on fashion trends. Fans can buy products to demonstrate their admiration for their favorite members or to copy the group's aesthetic. Fans can identify with and feel connected to Seventeen's image and aesthetics by wearing its goods, (5) Identity of Fans. Seventeen's followers frequently form a strong emotional bond and affinity with the band. They consider themselves to be part of the fandom and show it by buying stuff. Seventeen's merchandise can help fans feel more connected to their favorite band and more a part of the community, (6) Social Proof and Peer Influence. K-POP fans frequently take advice from their friends and on social media. The desire to own Seventeen merchandise mostly comes from other fans. The engagement of the fanbase with the band's products is prominently shown on social media sites, which further motivates fans to buy, and (7) Fan Engagement and Rewards. K-POP artists like Seventeen, frequently interact with their followers through social media, at fan events, and through fan clubs. Through these interactions, fans may be encouraged to buy items as a way to support the band and receive additional benefits, such as special discounts, pre-order advantages, or exclusive pricing.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In the purchasing behavior of a fandom, the process from one stage to another happens very quickly. Consumer behavior in a fandom cannot be equated with general consumer behavior because fandom has its own behavior when making purchasing decisions. For example, when it comes to sharing information among fandom members, they prioritize the need to collect merchandise, sometimes overlooking the quality and price of the products. From the perspective of experts and scholars, if we relate this to the theory used, the consumer behavior in the decision-making process exhibited by Carats (Seventeen's fandom) is unique compared to general consumer behavior. In general, an emotional connection, group identification, desire for collectability and exclusivity, fashion influences, attendance at concerts and events, and the influence of social networks and peer interactions are what drive fans to buy Seventeen merchandise on Weverse Shop. When it comes to purchasing their products, fans of Seventeen are motivated and make decisions based on the fandom culture and the distinctive experiences that come with being a fan.

This study adds to the body of knowledge regarding the underlying physical, sociological, and cultural aspects that impact fans' decisions to buy products from K-pop artists such as Seventeen on online retailers like Weverse Shop. Examining essential elements like fan identity, the impact of the community, the merchandise's perceived value, and the contribution of digital marketing tactics to sales growth are a few examples of what this could include. Furthermore, the results of this study may advance knowledge of consumer behavior in the setting of fan-based economies and offer marketers such as Weverse Shop, useful advice on how to interact with and profit from fan communities.

The findings of this study have implications for how digital platforms and marketers may improve their strategies by taking into account the motivation of customers' purchase decision, improve customers' engagement and sales through targeted marketing campaigns that resonate with fan's interests and behaviors.

The limitation of this research is that it has limited informants, therefore the result cannot be generalized. Therefore, it would be beneficial if this study can be expanded into further range of research in qualitative and quantitative, such as in product-specific factors or cultural and fan community aspects, such as analyzing consumer preferences for different type of merchandise, investigating fan identity and loyalty, or analyzing community engagements and events in influencing buying behavior.

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