

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

K-Pop as a music industry has something different to stand out among the others. The K-Pop industry has its own unique ways to keep their popularity in the eyes of their fans. Other than their different concept of idol groups, the K-Pop industry is also known for their interesting merchandise that comes along with the albums of the idol groups. K-Pop albums and merchandise have become unique traits and characteristics that only belong to the K-Pop industry. Normally, K-Pop albums would consist of the CD, a photobook, a lyric booklet, a thanks-to letter from the artist, photocards, and additional merchandise like bookmarks, posters, or additional photocards. The accessory that comes with the album was not meant to be sold so K-Pop fans would only keep it for themselves at first. And the most popular items to collect were posters and the whole package of the album itself.

For the last 5 years, K-Pop fans have been intrigued to collect photocards that come along with the purchase of the music album. They would buy, trade, and sell photocards from fans to fans in order to get the photocards of their desired member. This situation has also become popular among K-Pop fans in Indonesia for the past few years that a new community has been formed on Twitter. On *Twitter* there are some unwritten rules that are adopted by the users. Each account usually has its own type depending on its use and purpose. It also affects who each account

is interacting with, for example a fan account on *Twitter* usually will only interact with other fan accounts. It's not an obligation whether they want to interact with what kind of accounts, but most Twitter users made their account by purpose so they want to interact with the same kind of accounts most of the time.

The new community that has been going around on *Twitter* relating to the activities of collecting photocards identify themselves as SBT accounts. SBT is short for sell, buy, and trade, which means the purpose of the account is to sell, buy, and trade photocards with other fans. Usually, SBT accounts will only interact with other SBT accounts, they will share their photocard wishlist, their mails from purchasing photocards, and so on. The beginning of the SBT account is also impossible to trace since it's basically just an initiative from one person followed by another one, to the point it gets bigger and bigger by time. The popularity of SBT accounts on *Twitter* in Indonesia users began to rise during the year of 2020. Especially with the whole pandemic and lockdown situation going on in Indonesia, K-Pop fans who used to go out and hang out or go to concerts with other fans are now in search of new fan activity at home. Therefore, collecting photocards and the use of SBT accounts on *Twitter* begin to gain more enthusiasts.

This study is going to focus on what is happening with this situation of photocard collectors in Jakarta, especially photocard collectors of the korean boyband, NCT. NCT is a group with 23 members divided into several units, and their popularity in Indonesia has begun to grow in the past few years. NCT Dream, a subunit of NCT, held their first world tour concert in Jakarta in March 2020. The concert was held in Istora Senayan, Jakarta with the capacity of 7.200 seats, not to

mention the standing section capacity. The ticket for the concert sold out in just 10 seconds after being open for sale on the website. The excitement of NCT fans in Indonesia represent the growing popularity of NCT in Indonesia.

Another K-Pop boy group that is also popular in Indonesia is BTS. BTS gained their popularity in 2016 as their song *Blood, Sweat, and Tears* got more recognition worldwide. Ever since then, BTS' popularity keeps growing bigger both in Korea and worldwide as BTS received their first Billboard Music Awards in 2017. BTS fans are quickly getting bigger all around the world, especially in Indonesia. BTS fans keep getting bigger as BTS keep getting offers as brand ambassadors of many local brands in Indonesia. BTS popularity in Indonesia reached its peak during the year of 2021 as BTS was appointed to be the brand ambassador of Tokopedia. But then BTS focuses more on the western music industry, so the events that they attend are mostly in the USA and most of it was off-air schedules.

Other than NCT and BTS, Seventeen also has a lot of fans in Indonesia. Seventeen is a Korean boy group with 13 members in it, Seventeen charmed their fans with their catchy and fun songs. Seventeen also started their own variety show called *Going Seventeen* aired on Youtube in 2020. From then on, Seventeen gained more popularity as more people noticed their playful charms. Indonesia has always been one of Seventeen's destinations when having a world tour.

In terms of popularity and fans in Indonesia, NCT can also compete alongside BTS and Seventeen. NCT has got a lot of offers from local brands in

Indonesia for the past two years. NCT has been featured in a lot of advertisements for local products in Indonesia, such as Nu Green Tea, Lemonilo, and many more. NCT has also been getting offers by local brands to perform as a guest star in Indonesia, it marks how NCT's popularity keeps growing bigger and bigger. SM Entertainment, NCT's company, established their first office in Indonesia. The offices were located in FX Sudirman, Jakarta. The lobby of the office is open to the public as it is filled with a lot of merchandise and fans keep coming there to take pictures at the office's lobby.

The SM Entertainment's office in Jakarta is a representative office for Indonesia. SM Entertainment sees the excitement of Indonesian fans of their artist which results in the establishment of the representative office in Jakarta. With this, NCT is getting more popular in Indonesia as it will be easier for Indonesian local brands and media to work with NCT with the help of the representative office. The SM Entertainment representative office in Jakarta facilitates fans with several collections and interactive activities. With this, fans keep coming to visit the SM Entertainment representative office in Jakarta. Most concerts were also held in Jakarta. Jakarta, as the capital city of Indonesia, turns out to also be the center of K-Pop culture in Indonesia.

Looking at the number of NCT members, with that much of a member, it is harder for NCT's fans to collect the photocard of their desired member since every album only consists of 1 photocard. Among these 23 members, there are the more famous and popular members other than the rest. The photocards of the popular members are called the high demand photocards, since the market demand for these

photocards is higher than the less popular members' photocards. This then creates different prices of the photocards for each member of the group.

Other than the different prices for each member of the group, sometimes the company would also release special edition or limited photocards that will make it even more rare and the price will be more expensive for those rare photocards. With the different prices and the rarity of the photocards, a social strata emerges among the community of NCT photocard collectors. More recognition and respect will be shown to the one who collects the high demand photocards, because usually the high demand photocards are way more expensive than the rest. The main reason for collecting photocards that was originally only for leisure and hobby now shifted into gaining fame and recognition among the community of NCT SBT account.

Henry Jenkins (2018) presented a definition of what it means to be a fan and to be a part of a fandom. Fans, in his opinion, are sometimes just people who appreciate what they see or consume. Fandom, on the other hand, refers to those who identify with the same term and share the same culture as other fans. Fandom may also be defined as a large subculture that interacts with a variety of media outputs and shares common customs and traditions that date back many years. Jenkins (1992) in his book entitled *Textual Poachers* also argues that buying merchandise is one of the stereotypical fandom behavior. It is nothing new for fans to spend on their desired idol. But with this situation of photocard collectors in Indonesia, the definition of fans is not right anymore, since fans are now able to create their own products from the materials of the media text or someone they adore.

A study conducted by Nazuha Binti Ezani explored the online identity of K-Pop Fandom. Using identity theory, Ezani found that online identity does affect real-life identity. Another study examined how fans present their online identity on Twitter through their tweets and retweets. Ignatia Ratna Padmaningtyas conducted a study entitled Photocard Collecting dan Representasi Identitas Virtual Studi Netnografi Collection Account NCTzen Indonesia di Instagram in 2021. The result of this study showed that, for NCTzens, Instagram turns into a practice area for consumption and production.

Another study conducted by Atiqah Abd-Rahim examines K-Pop fans' constructions of their own identities as well as the formation of social hierarchies through multiple digital actions. This research is based on virtual ethnographic fieldwork and is published in the Journal of Applied Social Psychology. The majority of the literature focuses on fan behavior and the creation of a fandom's identity. This study will pay closer attention to how a fandom might give the text provided by the artist or the idol new interpretations.

The interactions between NCT's fans while buying, selling, and trading photocards through SBT accounts on *Twitter* will be observed in order to find evidence of the existence of social hierarchy among NCT photocard collectors in Indonesia. Most of the studies analyzing K-Pop fandom behavior mainly focuses only on the consumerism behavior of the fandom and the fanaticism of the fandom. Usually, the main reason for their consumerist behavior is to show support to the idol and for their leisure. This study aims to determine how NCT Photocard

collectors use their collections to establish their social identities using SBT accounts on Twitter by applying Featherstone's consumer culture theory.

Therefore, this study is filling the gap by analyzing social hierarchy among NCT's photocard collectors while presenting how the fandom's consumerist behavior has shifted and used as a tool to gain their desired social identity.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

Looking at the issue presented in the background of the study, the writer of this research decided to conduct further research on this issue. The research would cover this issue:

1. How do NCT photocard collectors on their SBT in Jakarta consume their collections?
2. How does this construct their social identity in their SBT *Twitter* accounts and society?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

After stating the research question of this study, the writer's main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To observe how NCT photocard collectors in Jakarta consume their collections.
2. To identify how the issue constructs their social identity as a photocard collector and in society.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As this study is focused on the social hierarchy and the social identity of NCT's photocard collectors in Indonesia as a result of their consumption, this study will be beneficial to give a further understanding on how NCT photocard collectors in Jakarta consume their collections in terms of being a fan of NCT. The writer intended to explore more on the issue and find new meaning on the fandom behavior, where in this case will focus on the behavior of collecting NCT photocards. By conducting this study, the writer also plans to prove how social hierarchy helps construct one's social identity, both virtual or real life identity while capturing how K-Pop fandom culture in Indonesia proceeds to evolve and develop as time goes by.

1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITATION

To conduct an effective and practical research, the writer has scope and limitations regarding the object of the study. This study will focus on SBT *Twitter* accounts owned by NCT's photocard collectors in Jakarta. Those accounts then will be observed regarding their interactions with other collectors in order to find signs of social hierarchy among the NCT's photocard collectors community and to observe how NCT photocard collectors in Jakarta consume their collection.

1.6 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

a. Consumer Culture

“Refers to a social structure where markets serve as a medium for the relationships between social resources and lived culture, as well as between meaningful ways of living and the resources on which they depend.” (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

b. SBT accounts

“Sell, Buy, Trade account on twitter. Used only for selling, buying, and trading photocards.”

c. Social Hierarchy

“Systems of social organization in which people are grouped according to their membership in a group and have different access to material and social resources.” (Axte et al. 2014; Jost et al. 2004; Sidanius and Pratto 1999)

d. Social Identity

“Social identity is the way in which people's self-concepts are derived from their association with social groups.” (Tajfel 1978)