

From Fandom to Social Movement: Indonesian NCTzen's Reception of the NCT x Starbucks Boycott

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

K-Pop, NCT, NCTzen, Starbucks,
Collaboration, Boycott, Fan Reception

This research aims to analyze the reception of NCT fans (NCTzen) in Indonesia towards the boycott of the collaboration between K-pop idol NCT and Starbucks, which occurred in the context of the boycott movement of products affiliated with Israel. The collaboration is seen as ignoring the ongoing social context. Where K-pop fans, especially NCTzen, show a high level of sensitivity to social issues and have high expectations of their idols and the brands they collaborate with. This research used a qualitative approach with an in-depth interview with NCT fans in Indonesia. The snowball sampling technique was used to select respondents based on certain criteria, such as religious background, status as a student or worker, and fandom community involvement. The research used Stuart Hall's theory of reception analysis, which includes three leading positions: dominant hegemonic position, negotiated position, and oppositional position. The interviews showed the dominance of positive reactions from fans to the boycott movement and the dominance of negative reactions to the collaboration, as well as changes in supporting their idols after the collaboration contract ended. The results of this study indicate that fans' reception of individual backgrounds can influence their attitudes towards idols and collaborating brands. This confirms that K-pop fandom is not just an entertainment community, but also has a high social awareness. This study also highlights the importance of considering social contexts in marketing strategies, especially in collaborations between celebrities and global brands.

1. Introduction

In today's interconnected world, fans can voice their opinions and make a difference. Especially in recent years, media technology has developed towards digitalization and intelligence, significantly changing people's living environment, circumstances, and consumption patterns. Liao (2021) says that the continuous advancement of media has made audiences no longer mere recipients; they have an active role in producing and disseminating texts. In terms of communication, the role of audiences has changed drastically. Through social media platforms and online communities, fans have transformed into influential agents of cultural discourse, capable of influencing collective action around causes they care about. Whether advocating for social justice, supporting their favorite artists, or challenging industry practices. Fan communities utilize their collective voice to shape cultural narratives and influence decision-making processes and causes. This phenomenon is particularly evident in K-pop fandom, where dedicated fans celebrate their idols and wisely utilize their influence to drive meaningful societal change. Especially in the current boycotts of Israeli-affiliated products, which are not just an individual action, but a collective movement influenced by various social and cultural factors. We can see the actions taken by K-pop fans in response to their idol groups working with companies affiliated with Israel.

Over time, various reasons for people to boycott arise. Mokobombang et al. (2023) emphasize that boycott actions can occur as a response to dissatisfaction with certain actions that violate moral

and ethical principles, and social and religious norms that apply in society. This shows that moral, ethical, social, and religious reasons are very influential in the decision to boycott. As we can see now, the movement to boycott products affiliated with Israel in support of Palestine has been going on for the last few years. The boycott movement began in response to Israel's attacks on Palestine and in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Farah & Newman (2010) investigated consumer responses to boycott calls based on brand attitudes towards the Gaza war in 2023. This study investigated the effect of boycotts on three variables: the Palestinian liberation movement, lessons learned from past boycotts, and boycotted companies. Another discussion on boycotts in the journal is the study of the strategies by boycotted companies or brands to attract back their customers during or after the war in Gaza. Based on the news about the boycotted companies, the companies are looking for ways to restore the trust of buyers or consumers in their companies, and as researched by Farah & Newman (2010), one of the strategies used is to collaborate with or associate with a well-known brand ambassador.

By implementing a collaboration strategy, companies can reach a broader target market. Muharman & Felicia (2023) state that businesses can identify the collaboration strategies currently favored by other entrepreneurs. Lotian & Kartawinata (2023) state that collaboration impacts consumer buying interest. With the rise of Korean culture, or the hallyu wave, in Indonesia, collaboration featuring K-pop idols has become increasingly popular among businesspeople. Many Indonesian companies or brands have partnered with K-pop idols, such as the Ultra Milk x ITZY collaboration, Tokopedia x BTS, Oreo x BLACKPINK, Scarlett Whitening x TWICE, BNI x SM Entertainment. These partnerships demonstrate how the Indonesian consumer market has been influenced, particularly by the significant number of K-pop fans eager for such collaboration. Knowing the power of K-pop idols to target their fans, Starbucks has also collaborated with K-pop idols in recent years. Since 2020, Starbucks has collaborated with BTS, followed by a collaboration with Blackpink in 2023 (Mranani, 2023). In 2024, Starbucks collaborated with NCT from 30 May 2024 to 4 July 2024 (Ayu, 2024). This collaboration strategy with NCT in 2024 is a strategic move, taking advantage of NCT's rising popularity to improve the image of both brands. However, the collaboration has elicited mixed reactions from NCT fans, who perceived the collaboration as ignoring the importance of social and political context, especially amid the ongoing movement to boycott Israeli-affiliated products. Companies must take such matters into account. Rizqita & Nurhaqiqi (2024) concluded that the co-branding strategy between celebrities and brands should be sensitive to relevant social and political issues to avoid a significant negative impact. K-pop fans tend to display a heightened awareness of social issues and hold considerable expectations for both their idols and the brands they collaborate with.

Neo Culture Technology, or more commonly known as NCT, is a South Korean boy band formed by SM Entertainment, which was officially introduced in January 2016. It has a unique group concept, allowing an unlimited number of members who can debut in various sub-units, thus creating a flexible and dynamic structure in the K-pop industry. As for now, NCT is divided into six sub-units: NCT U, NCT 127, NCT Dream, WayV, NCT DoJaeJung, and NCT Wish. Having a long history, NCT often becomes a sub-unit brand ambassador. As in 2017, cited from Wikipedia (2024) NCT Dream served as brand ambassadors for the FIFA U-20 World Cup held in South Korea. In another sub-unit, NCT 127 officially became the brand ambassador for Nature Republic in April 2020 (Wulandari, 2020). Furthermore, in 2024, Starbucks Korea collaborated with the NCT Dream sub-unit with a contract from 30 May 2024 to 4 July 2024.

The collaboration between NCT x Starbucks features exclusive NCT x Starbucks merchandise, including members' keychains, concert bags, stirrers, photo card holders, keyrings, and tumblers. This initiative is part of Starbucks' strategy to attract consumers, particularly in light of several store closures resulting from financial loss. By partnering with NCT, which has up to 16.3 million followers on Instagram, Starbucks (@starbucks-korea) aimed to create a buzz around their collaboration, promoting it under the hashtag #RechargeNeoEnergy in four content posts on Instagram. However, many comments on these posts were seen to be negative, reflecting fans' disappointment and resistance to the collaboration.

This research builds upon the previous study conducted by Rizqita & Nurhaqiqi (2024) by providing a more in-depth analysis of fan response to the boycotts related to the NCT x Starbucks collaboration. Their research indicates that fans predominantly react negatively, largely due to

sensitive social and political issues. This finding suggests that co-branding strategies involving K-pop idols can elicit mixed reactions, particularly when the collaborating brand has a controversial reputation among fans. While their study primarily examined fans' reactions to the collaboration itself, this research will focus specifically on how fans respond to the boycott of the collaboration. Moreover, previous studies have tended to address fan reactions in a general sense without delving into the factors that influence fans' decisions to either support or reject boycotts. In contrast, this study will explore how factors such as occupation and individual background shape fans' attitudes towards boycotts, an area that has not been extensively investigated in earlier research.

This study aims to explore how NCT fans in Indonesia perceive the boycott of the NCT x Starbucks collaboration, using Stuart Hall's reception analysis theory. The demographic aspect of fans plays a crucial role in how this collaboration is received. Fans from various religious backgrounds, ages, and levels of involvement in the fandom community may interpret the collaboration differently. Therefore, the importance of this research lies in understanding how these varying interpretations among fans shape collective action within the fandom. This, in turn, impacts NCT's reputation and affects Starbucks' image as a global brand.

1.2 BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) Movement

The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement is a social initiative aimed at ending Israel's acts of colonialism and apartheid against Palestine. It serves as a form of support for the Palestinians by encouraging the withdrawal of companies associated with Israel. Younes (2019) explains that the BDS movement emerged in response to the strong international reaction following the second Palestinian uprising, which began in July 2002. It involves over 170 Palestinian civil society groups worldwide to draw attention to the "collective responsibility of the international community." Barghouti (2011) in fighting injustice, similar to the South African indigenous movement during the apartheid era. This coalition of civil society groups has compiled a list of companies and products that provide funding to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) or contribute to the normalization of settlements, which are illegal under international law, in the West Bank. In CNN Indonesia (2023) according to the official BDS movement website, BDS is now a global movement initiated by various layers of society, including labor unions, academic associations, and organizations advocating for Palestinian rights. The movement employs three primary strategies:

1. Boycott

Garrett (1987) in Gates (2015) A boycott can be defined as a planned refusal to do business with a particular entity. Be it a business, brand, country, or group, to obtain concessions or express discontent. With several goals and consequences, boycotts can be triggered by moral, ethical, social, political, environmental, and religious reasons.

2. Divestment

This strategy encourages banks, arms manufacturers, and academic institutions to withdraw investments from companies affiliated with Israel. The goal is to apply economic pressure on entities involved in the conflict in Palestine.

3. Sanctions

Sanctions involve campaigns that aim to pressure governments to cease military trade and free trade agreements with Israel. They also seek to influence the United Nations (UN) to suspend Israel's membership.

1.3 Reception Analysis Theory

Aligwe et al. (2018) describe reception analysis theory by Stuart Hall on how media messages are encoded by producers and decoded by audiences, who may interpret them in dominant, negotiated, or oppositional ways. In this research, media messages are encoded by producers, specifically Starbucks and NCT, who convey messages through their collaboration by posting on @starbucks-korea Instagram. The audience, consisting of NCT fans, then decodes these messages based on their personal experience and social background. Interpretations can fall into three categories: dominant hegemonic position, negotiated position, and oppositional position. This encoding and decoding approach illustrates how messages produced by senders are received by

audiences, leading to different effects on individual background experience and cultural environment.

Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model provides a structure for understanding meaning production in the media, which includes the following components:

a. Frame of knowledge

The frame of knowledge encompasses the meaning that arises from a message, influenced by the recipient's knowledge. The broader the recipient's knowledge, the more nuanced their interpretation will be. This variability arises from human nature, which is dynamic and always evolving. Factors such as norms, culture, values, and perspectives on the world shape the context for receiving messages. NCT fans possess diverse knowledge frameworks based on their experiences as K-pop fans, their cultural values, and their understanding of relevant socio-political issues, such as the boycott of Starbucks. The broader their knowledge of the socio-political context behind the boycott, the more varied their interpretations of the collaboration will be.

b. Relation of production

The relationship of production concerns how fans understand the dynamics involved in content production. This research involves how fans perceive the relationship between NCT and Starbucks in the context of content production and cooperation, including how fans perceive the economic and ideological interests involved. Fans may interpret the decision to collaborate with Starbucks as solely driven by business considerations, overlooking the social implications or fan reactions. This perception can influence how fans respond to the collaboration, whether they embrace, negotiate, or reject the message.

c. Technical infrastructure

Technical infrastructure refers to the technical means utilized in the communication process. It includes the tools, devices, and technologies that facilitate the delivery and receipt of messages. This infrastructure is crucial since it affects how fans produce, share, and understand the message. In this collaboration, Starbucks and NCT conveyed their message through a post on Instagram @starbucks-korea. The comment section of this post enables interaction among fans, creating a space for discussion and negotiation of meanings related to the collaboration.

The encoding and decoding process then produces three distinct forms: Dominant Hegemonic Position, Negotiated Position, and Oppositional Position.

a. Dominant Hegemonic Position

This position occurs when the audience accepts the message delivered by the media or institution without question, as the message aligns with the prevailing dominant ideology. In this case, there is no difference in interpretation between the media and the audience; they agree with the message without challenging its underlying assumptions. In the context of the boycott against the NCT and Starbucks collaboration, fans in this position are likely to agree with the boycott narrative and actively support and engage in boycott actions. This may involve refraining from purchasing Starbucks products and unfollowing NCT's Instagram account to avoid any promotions during the boycott period. Additionally, these fans often share information that supports the boycott on social media.

b. Negotiated Position

In this position, the audience recognizes the dominant meaning of the media message but also incorporates their own experiences and beliefs into their interpretation. As a result, they may agree with certain aspects of the message while rejecting or modifying others based on their personal views. In the research context, fans may accept most of the messages, understanding that the collaboration aims to boost popularity and sales. However, they may also express dissatisfaction with the decision on ethical or social grounds, such as concerns over Starbucks' support for controversial issues.

c. Oppositional Position

In this position, viewers resist and reject the dominant meanings conveyed in media messages. Their views often contradict those presented by the media, stemming from differences in ideology, values, or personal experiences. In the research context, fans in this position actively oppose the boycott and support the collaboration by continuing to purchase

NCT's limited edition Starbucks products, promoting the collaboration as something positive for their idol's career.

1.4 K-pop Fan Culture

In popular culture, fans are individuals or groups who have a deep interest in cultural products, such as music, movies, or artists. In the context of K-pop, K-fans are often referred to as “K-popers”. This term describes individuals who share a common interest in an idol group, leading to the formation of dedicated communities known as “fandoms”. In addition, fan culture refers to a community of highly dedicated consumers who actively support and follow the development of their idols, such as collecting merchandise and attending concerts. K-pop fan culture is characterized by a community of highly dedicated supporters who actively engage with and follow the development of their idols. K-pop fans frequently interact on various social media platforms, leaving supportive comments, creating dance covers, making reaction videos, and other types of content.

1.5 Parasocial Relationships

Horton & Wohl (1956) explained parasocial as a one-way relationship formed between the audience and media characters. Despite the absence of direct interaction, they explain that this relationship creates the illusion of face-to-face interaction and intimacy with media characters. This can lead to developing feelings of closeness and emotional attachment to the characters they see in the media. This is particularly relevant in parasocial relationships between fans and their idols. Fans often perceive their idols as close to them because they feel a strong emotional bond with their idols, such as celebrities or fictional characters, even though they have never interacted directly. The characteristics of parasocial relationships in everyday life include wanting to know more about the idol's personal life. This is done by spending time on social media to follow the latest news and follow updates on their idol's daily life through social media, thus feeling a deep personal closeness. Thus, parasocial relationships allow fans to feel a strong emotional connection with their idols, even though the relationship is one-sided and they do not know each other directly.

2. Method

This study used a qualitative method to explore the reactions of K-pop fans, particularly those of the music group NCT, regarding the collaboration between NCT and Starbucks. Utilizing Stuart Hall's theory of reception analysis, which is based on the concepts of encoding and decoding, this research was collected through in-depth interviews with NCT fans. Given the diverse backgrounds of NCT fans, spanning from ages and religions, the study used a snowball sampling technique. The criteria for informants in this study are: (1) The participant must be a fan of the Korean boy band NCT and currently reside in Indonesia, (2) they can be either Muslim or non-Muslim, (3) they must have status as either a student or a worker, (4) they should actively use social media to follow discussion about the boycott of Israeli-affiliated brands and be aware of the collaboration between NCT and Starbucks Korea (30 May-4 July, 2024). To ensure relevance in the data collected, the study involved four informants: an Islamic student, an Islamic worker, a non-Islamic student, and a non-Islamic worker. This will allow for an exploration of how demographic factors such as religion, background status, and age affect their attitude towards the boycott. Below is a table of respondents:

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Informants

No	Informant	Gender	Religion	Occupation
1	A	F	Islam	Student
2	B	F	Islam	Worker
3	C	F	Protestant Christian	Student
4	D	F	Catholic	Worker

The data was analyzed to provide insights into the subjective experiences and perspectives of fans. This study used Miles & Huberman (1994) qualitative data analysis framework, consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The data reduction stage involves simplifying and selecting important information from the interview results by summarizing informants' answers, identifying key themes, and grouping information based on emerging patterns. In the data presentation stage, the data are presented in a clear and systematic format, such as in the form of a table and descriptive narratives. In the last stage, namely drawing conclusions/verification, the analysis results are interpreted, and conclusions are drawn based on the patterns found in the data.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

a. Encoding

Through Stuart Hall's reception analysis theory, encoding data were collected from media messages conveyed by the parties running the collaboration, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Data Collected from Social Media

Date	Account	Context
23 May 2024	Instagram @starbucksKorea and Twitter @StarbucksKorea	A post in the form of a video trailer, NCT + Starbucks coming soon, with a caption: NCT + STARBUCKS 네오 에너지로 가득 찰 여름⚡ Coming soon 올여름이 더욱 기대된다면 댓글을 남겨주세요💬 #RechargeNeoEnergy #5월30일부터 #Starbucks #StarbucksKorea #스타벅스 #스타벅스그램 (NCT + STARBUCKS will be full of neo energy 여름⚡ Coming soon Let us know if you're looking forward to this summer even more💬 #RechargeNeoEnergy #From May 30 #Starbucks #StarbucksKorea #Starbucks #StarbucksGram)
23 May 2024	STARBUCKS STORIES ASIA Website	News with the title “Starbucks Korea teams up with NCT to bring the summer fizz” explains what menus and merchandise are in the collaboration that is only available for a limited time.
28 May 2024	Instagram @starbucksKorea and Twitter @StarbucksKorea	A post in the form of a short video introducing the collaboration drink menu “Neo Cool Tasty Plum Fizzio” with a caption: Neo, Cool, Tasty 그리고 NCT FIZ⚡ 네오한 빛의 #네오쿨레이스티매실피지오 에 하트 쥬리가 풍당💖

		✅ 매실의 달콤함과 스타벅스 피지오가 만난 네오 쿨 레이스티 매실 피지오는 5월 30일 출시합니다. #RechargeNeoEnergy #네오쿨레이스티매실피지오 #2024서머e프리퀀시 #2024summerefrequency #Starbucks #StarbucksKorea #스타벅스 #스타벅스그램 (Neo, Cool, Tasty, and NCT FIZ ⚡ Neo Cool Tasty Plum Fizio with heart jelly fondant 💖 ✅ Neo Cool Tasty Plum Fizio, the sweetness of plum and Starbucks Fizio, will be available on May 30 #RechargeNeoEnergy #NeoCoolTastyPlumFizio #2024SummerEfrequency #2024summerefrequency #Starbucks #StarbucksKorea #Starbucks #StarbucksGram)
29 May 2024	Instagram @starbucksKorea and Twitter @StarbucksKorea	A post in the form of photos showing the exclusive collaboration merchandise: NCT concert bag, NCT x Starbucks tumbler, NCT bearista doll keyring, NCT photo card holder keyring, and NCT removable sticker set with a caption: 취향으로 가득 채운 시즈니 버디의 캐비닛 💚 ✅ NCT + STARBUCKS MD는 5월 30일 출시합니다. #RechargeNeoEnergy #2024서머e프리퀀시 #2024summerefrequency #Starbucks #StarbucksKorea #스타벅스 #스타벅스그램 (Sizzling Buddy's cabinet filled with your favorites 💚 ✅ NCT + STARBUCKS MD launches May 30 #RechargeNeoEnergy #2024summerefrequency #Starbucks #StarbucksKorea #Starbucks #StarbucksGram)
30 May 2024	Instagram @starbucksKorea and Twitter @StarbucksKorea	A post in the form of a video showing the menu collaboration “Neo Croissant Turntable” with a caption: 오늘부터 NCT와 함께 💚 Let's play #네오크루아상턴테이블 🎵 ✅ 달콤 바삭한 네오 크루아상 턴테이블은

		플레인과 자몽 허니 2가지 맛으로 만나볼 수 있습니다. #RechargeNeoEnergy #네오크루아상턴테이블 #2024서머e프리퀀시 #2024summerefrequency #Starbucks #StarbucksKorea #스타벅스 #스타벅스그램 (Starting today with NCT  Let's play #NeoCroissantTurntable   The sweet and crunchy NeoCroissant Turntable is available in two flavors: plain and grapefruit honey. #RechargeNeoEnergy #NeoCroissantTable #2024summerefrequency #2024summerefrequency #Starbucks #StarbucksKorea #Starbucks #StarbucksGram)
21 May 2024	Twitter @nctzenbase, @nct_menfess, @jungshasa, @nanadoongifess, @nanaicecweam, @cremejrlee, @lalalafindyou, @nominrush, @chocohyck, @haesthaetic, @sunhaefs and other NCT fans' fanbase or personal accounts.	The response from international fans who voiced their disapproval of the NCT x Starbucks collaboration by posting the same tweet contained: Hello SM, We do NOT want NCT or any of your artists to associate or promote S**BUC*KS or any companies that are financing a genocide in Palestine. Please take note of our concerns. @SMTOWNGLOBAL @SMTOWN_Idn @NCTsmtown #SM_BOYCOTT_GENOCIDE And the same tweet in the Korean language: 안녕하세요 SM님, 우리는 NCT 또는 귀하의 아티스트가 S**BUC*KS 또는 팔레스타인에서 대량 학살 자금을 조달하는 회사를 연관시키거나 홍보하는 것을 원하지 않습니다. 저희의 우려 사항을 주목해 주십시오. @SMTOWNGLOBAL @SMTOWN_Idn @NCTsmtown #sm_보이콧_제노사이드
23 May 2024	Comment section on Instagram posts @starbucksKorea	Reactions from Indonesian fans voicing boycott and disapproval of the NCT x Starbucks collaboration took the form of comments on the collaboration post. Some of them are:

		“KENAPA HARUS NCT SI???” (“WHY DOES IT HAVE TO BE NCT???”) “BISA BANGET NYURI KESEMPATAN LO, MENTANG² NCT LAGI TRENDING, PENGEN KU KASIH JARI TENGAH 🤔🤔🤔” (“WHAT A WAY TO STEAL AN OPPORTUNITY, WHILE THEY’RE ON TRENDING RIGHT NOW, I WANT TO GIVE MY MIDDLE FINGER 🤔🤔🤔”) “GILAAAA BATALINN KONTRAKNYAA CEPEETTTTTTT” (“CRAZYYYYY CANCELL THE CONTRACTT NOWWWWWWW”) “MINUMAN DARAH.” (“BLOOD DRINK”) “Ini minuman yang bikin meninggal anak di palestina” (“This is the drink that killed children in Palestine”) “Ngefans boleh karena karyanya. Tapi please untuk kali ini gunakan hati nurani kalian untuk tidak membeli produk zionis.” (“You can love them for their work. But please, for once use your conscience not to buy zionist products.”) “Pliss pada unfol nct dong gue awalnya juga ngefans bgt sama mereka tapi setelah tau boikot gue langsung unfol, pliss dong buat kalian yg belum unfol cpt unfol biar mereka sadar” (“Please do unfollow NCT as i’m also a big fan of them in the beginning, but after knowing the boycott, I unfollow them straight away, please, for those who haven’t unfollowed, do unfollow so they realize”) “kalo masih punya rasa kemanusiaan cabut kontrak nyaa, kalo masihh, tapi kaya ga yaa?” (“If you still have a sense of humanity, revoke the contract, if you still do, but don’t seem like it?”)
23 May 2024	Twitter @NCTdreamFr, @NCTDREAMCEN TER, @LJNFEED, @jaehyunpetals, @FILESJN, @LMKFEED, @feedarchive, @ZCLFEED, @HRJFEED, @bbyminyongie and other NCT fans' fanbase or personal accounts.	The response from international fans who voiced their disapproval of the NCT x Starbucks collaboration in the form of returning tweets: Hello SM, We do NOT want NCT or any of your artists to associate or promote STARBUCKS or any companies that are financing a genocide in Palestine. Please take note of our concerns. @SMTOWNGLOBAL @SMTOWN_Idn @NCTsmtown #SM_BOYCOTT_GENOCIDE
30 May 2024	Twitter @lastnameevy	In support of the NCT x Starbucks collaboration boycott, NCT fans announced the postponement of four NCT project events in a tweet: Selamat Pagi Semuanya..

		<i>Sehubungan dengan adanya gerakan boikot NCT dan SM Entertainment, aku memutuskan untuk menunda ke-empat Event Project:</i> <i>“Asteroids Anniv - Jisung Event” 02.06.24</i> <i>“Autumn Beauty! Haechan Birthday” 09.06.24</i> <i>“Taeil Birthday Event” 16.06.24</i> <i>“NCT 127 Anniversary & Ty Birthday” 07.07.24</i> <i>sampai waktu yang tidak bisa ditentukan.</i> <i>Aku pribadi memohon maaf yang sebesar-besarnya jika ada kekurangan dengan persiapan ini dan aku berharap keputusan ini adalah keputusan terbaik untuk kita semua.</i> <i>Sampai bertemu di lain waktu,</i> <i>lastnameevy</i> <i>(Good morning Everyone.</i> Due to the boycott movement of NCT and SM Entertainment, I decided to postpone the fourth Event Project: “Asteroids Anniv - Jisung Event” 02.06.24 “Autumn Beauty! Haechan Birthday” 09.06.24 “Taeil Birthday Event” 16.06.24 “NCT 127 Anniversary & Ty Birthday” 07.07.24 for an indefinite period of time. I personally apologize profusely if there are any shortcomings with this preparation, and I hope this decision is the best decision for all of us. See you next time, lastnameevy)
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b. Decoding

After the encoding process, the decoding process follows. This involves receiving insights from NCT fans through interviews with informants from various backgrounds. The responses can be categorized into three leading positions: the Dominant Hegemonic Position, the Negotiated Position, and the Oppositional Position.

1. Religious identity as resistance to collaboration

In deciding to carry out a boycott movement, religious identity plays a significant role in influencing the way individuals interpret events and choose to take action. Lestari & Jazil (2024), states that Islamic beliefs significantly influence consumers to boycott products associated with Israel. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict serves as the main trigger for this action, with religious values encouraging individuals to take boycott actions as a form of solidarity with Palestine. The relationship between Islam and Jews, particularly regarding support for Palestine, is shaped by a complex of factors, including history, politics, and interpretation of sacred texts.

In the context of the collaboration between NCT and Starbucks, especially NCT fans in Indonesia, a country with the biggest Muslim population, Muslim fans feel that supporting a product that allegedly has an affiliation with Israel is against the principles of the religion. Interviews with informants A and B, both of whom share an Islamic background, revealed their support for boycotting the collaboration, with religious factors being the main reason. They believe that continuing to support the partnership with Starbucks, which is listed in the halal companies to be boycotted according to MUT's Irsyadat, will conflict with their religious values.

"Regarding Palestine, especially since Starbucks is a pro-Israel brand, it is like no, it is like, it is against me, like that, especially since Palestine is *"Islam banget"* (holds Islamic values)." (Informant A)

Informant B also highlighted the long-standing conflict between Palestine and Israel. As a Muslim, the participant feels a moral responsibility to defend Palestine. The participant believes that supporting the boycott is a significant way to show solidarity among Muslims.

2. Humanitarian factors in boycotting products affiliated with Israel

In addition to religious reasons, humanitarian factors are the main motivation for fans to participate in the boycott. It is emphasized by Hong & Li (2020) that boycotts are often based on strong social and emotional factors, especially in humanitarian issues. Interview results show that informants B, C, and D were motivated to join the boycott movement because of the sense of humanity upon witnessing, on social media, innocent children and parents losing their lives due to war, something that is morally unacceptable. They see the war between Palestine and Israel as undeserved. Informant B emphasized that human life should not be sacrificed in the context of war.

"Maybe it is more about humanity, and human life is not to be used as a means of war." (Informant B)

Informants C and D added that, although they are Protestant Christians and Catholics, they support the boycott. They believe that this conflict is not only about religion or ethnicity, but also about human rights. They are concerned about the lack of freedom and access that Palestinians have to essential needs like food and medical care. Despite not being Muslims, the values of their religion also oppose violence and the taking of human life.

"In fact, in religion, of course, it certainly does not allow taking people's lives. This is a very cruel act, not under any religion. So whatever religion it is, they are also there." (Informant C)

Informant C also added that she felt many people in her religious community did not understand this situation. To address this, she decided to share information on her social media platform in hopes of encouraging more individuals to participate in the boycott. In this context, it can be seen that the boycott against Starbucks is viewed not only as a form of political protest but also as a moral obligation based on the religious teachings of the fans.

The emotional impact of seeing the innocent lives lost and the Palestinians' daily struggle for survival then increases the fans' sense of humanity to continue to speak out regarding the boycott. The respondents' statements further strengthen the findings in the study of Hong & Li (2020), which shows that in many cases, boycotts are not only influenced by economic or political factors, but also by moral awareness and empathy for victims of conflict.

3. Unfollow strategy as a form of boycott

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement directed against Israel and companies affiliated with it has inspired various forms of boycott action around the world. Strategies used in BDS include not only boycotts of physical products but also pressure on entities perceived as supporting Israel, including global brands and public figures who work with them. In the context of K-pop, fans, besides boycotting by not buying Starbucks, also boycotted NCT by unfollowing NCT's account on Instagram.

In this study, it was found that informants A and C, who have similar backgrounds as students, unfollowed NCT's Instagram account as one of the boycott strategies. Informant A stated that they unfollowed not only NCT's Instagram but also NCT's other social media, such as X (Twitter) and YouTube. This was done as a form of expression of disappointment

and regret in terms of humanity. When the group's decision does not match the values or morals that fans believe in, they unfollow as a form of protest.

"Moreover, Starbucks is very well known to be one of the money suppliers for that side and has been on the boycott list for a long time, so when I found out that NCT had a collaboration with them, I was really disappointed." (Informant A)

The strategy of unfollowing as a form of boycott aims to show disapproval or as a form of symbolic punishment against NCT or the SM Entertainment agency. It attempts to influence the agency and idols' decisions, putting pressure on them to listen to fans' voices and reconsider their collaborations.

4. Fan's understanding of the job's contract

Despite being disappointed with the collaboration, the parasocial approach leads fans to understanding, where not all fans unfollow as a form of boycott. This is the case with informants B and D, who have the same status, and both are working. Informants B and D have the same understanding of job demands, that the collaboration contract is an agency decision, where NCT doesn't have the authority to do much. They can understand that collaboration occurs because the agencies decide to approve the contract, so individual idols cannot do much, even though there is a possibility that individual idols know the issue and want to support the boycott, but are hindered by work demands, where they are forced to collaborate. This understanding mainly comes from fans who are already working.

"If you say you are disappointed, then we are too, but it is because of the demands of the job so inevitably you have to do it, so they are also like confused between whether to do it or not because this is also like that, surely if you do not do what is it called, where brand ambassadors must have what is the name... There is a contract right; if you break the contract, you must get a fine, right?" (Informant B)

Informant D also said,

"We think more about the agency, because if it is a group, they can only follow the policies of the agency. Even though they are, we also don't know whether they are aware of the issue or not." (Informant D)

This is supported by fans who are aware of small things. As they said, they had seen several idols who voiced their support for Palestine silently. The support was seen by the idols who posted watermelon emoticons, depicting support for Palestine. Although they do not unfollow, they still carry out boycott actions by not uploading anything related to collaborations that show that they are in the boycott action.

5. Understanding the purpose of collaboration as a business strategy to expand NCT's market

In the K-pop industry, working with major brands is often considered an indicator of success and recognition of a group's commercial value. Such collaborations with global brands can increase a group's popularity while strengthening their image as artists with international appeal. This can be seen in the BTS X McDonald's "BTS Meal" collaboration in May 2021, which was a huge success. The campaign was launched in over 50 countries. It featured a special menu consisting of Chicken McNuggets, fries, drinks, and two special sauces (Cajun and Sweet Chili) inspired by the South Korean McDonald's menu. The collaboration managed to increase BTS's popularity, especially among global audiences who may not have been familiar with the group before.

The perspective arises from fans familiar with K-pop since 2020, namely from informant B. There is a perspective where the cooperation between NCT and Starbucks is seen as a common step in building popularity and increasing the commercial value of the group. The agency SM Entertainment may also see this as a marketing opportunity to boost popularity and business, without considering the social and political repercussions it could have, especially in countries with a large Muslim fan base like Indonesia.

"Maybe for some reason, because SM itself is no longer like it used to be, led by Lee Soo Man, maybe now it is more like... now it is more like anything will be done to promote NCT to be more advanced." (Informant B)

However, the collaboration led to the negative side because it ignores the social context. Although informant B could understand the purpose of the collaboration as a business strategy to expand NCT's market, informant B still boycotted by not buying Starbucks and not supporting any promotions during the collaboration period.

3.2 Discussion

The findings from the research conducted by Rizqita & Nurhaqiqi (2024) reveal that co-branding strategies between celebrities and brands can have a significantly negative impact if they fail to consider the relevant social and political context. Their research indicates that collaboration between celebrities and brands can damage consumer image and loyalty if not approached carefully, particularly in light of ongoing social issues, such as the boycott against brands and companies associated with Israel. Whereas this study primarily examines fan reactions to the current social context of boycotts in response to artist collaborations with brands linked to Israel. In Rizqita & Nurhaqiqi (2024) research has revealed that the collaboration between NCT and Starbucks has elicited predominantly negative reactions from fans due to sensitive social and political concerns. However, the reason behind these negative reactions has not been thoroughly analyzed. Notably, some fans chose not to unfollow NCT on social media as a form of protest, even though they remain part of the broader boycott against brands affiliated with Israel. Utilizing Stuart Hall's reception analysis theory and conducting in-depth interviews with four respondents from diverse religious and occupational backgrounds, this study reveals several key findings.

Table 3. Categorization of Fan Reception Based on Hall's Theory

Position Type	Informant	Key Characteristic
Dominant Hegemonic	A, B	Fully support the boycott, motivated by religious and humanitarian values.
Negotiated Position	C, D	Acknowledge ethical issues but understand collaboration as a work duty.
Oppositional Position	-	Not found among respondents in this study.

From the interviews, several key findings emerged:

1. Religious and Humanitarian Motivation

Strong opposition was expressed by informants A and B, who have the same religious background, regarding the collaboration due to religious values, particularly related to Islamic teachings and solidarity with Palestine. Suherman et al. (2024) research indicates that for the majority of Muslim respondents, the decision to boycott Israel-related products is a manifestation of commitment to religious teachings that emphasize justice and solidarity. Boycotts are viewed not only as a political stance but also as part of an act of worship and demonstration of faith. Additionally, informants B, C, and D highlighted that humanitarian concerns have become a primary motivation for participating in the boycott movement, especially after witnessing civilian casualties depicted on social media.

2. Unfollowing Strategy as Symbolic Protest

As a form of protest, informants A and C, who share the same background as students, adopted the unfollowing strategy as a boycott movement against NCT's social media account. In a related study by John & Agbarya (2021) exploring the phenomenon of "unfriending" on Facebook by Palestinians against Jewish Israelis illustrates that disconnecting on social media can serve as a symbolic strategy in the context of political conflict. This action can also be performed on Instagram by unfollowing brands or individuals associated with Israel. Many viewed this act as a powerful way to distance themselves from any engagement with the collaboration without physical confrontation. It serves as a statement of disappointment without direct involvement in the conflict.

3. Parasocial Understanding and Work Context

Informants B and D, sharing the same background as workers, adopted a more pragmatic view. This is where the parasocial relationship plays a critical role in decision-making. In this context, individuals tend to attribute blame to external factors (rather than the individual) for negative events or actions. They place responsibility on the agency or work contract, rather than on the idol itself. Although they did not unfollow NCT on social media, they still participated in the boycott by refraining from purchasing any collaboration-related products or sharing related content online. Their responses illustrated a negotiated position, balancing personal disappointment with a rational understanding of the entertainment industry's structure. Research by Pitopili & Pratamawaty (2024) supports this finding by showing that personal connection fans feel towards idols can encourage social activism behaviors (such as boycotts or online protests) without necessitating a severance of ties with the idols.

4. Market Awareness and Business Strategy

Informant B, who has been involved in the K-pop Industry for a long time, recognized that collaborations with major brands are a strategy to enhance the popularity of K-pop groups. Respondent B views the collaboration between NCT and Starbucks as part of a broader business strategy by SM Entertainment to expand NCT's brand globally while still participating in the boycott movement. This is also discussed in Rizqita & Nurhaqiqi (2024) journal, which indicates fans understand the collaboration between NCT and Starbucks as part of an industrial strategy.

This study mirrors the findings about negative reactions from fans towards the collaboration between NCT and Starbucks, while specifically identifying the underlying reasons for this negativity and the positive responses to the boycotts based on the four key findings outlined above.

4. Conclusion

This research shows that the encoding and decoding process by Stuart Hall results in two out of the three forms of position: dominant hegemonic position and negotiated position. The dominant hegemonic position shows they fully agree with the boycott narrative and support and voice boycott actions due to religious values, particularly related to Islamic teachings and solidarity with Palestine. Meanwhile, the Negotiated Position accepts most messages, such as understanding that the collaboration was retrieved by the agency and aims to increase popularity and sales. However, they can also modify and express dissatisfaction with the decision for ethical or social reasons, such as Starbucks' support for controversial issues. Respondents in this study understood the message of the collaboration but modified certain aspects based on their background or experiences. Which is why they did not take part in the unfollowing NCT's social media movement but are still boycotting the collaboration, as informants in this position have the same background as workers, so they see this from a working perspective, knowing they are in the same position as NCT, who is also working. So, fans' reception can be different depending on the perspective from their background or experiences, which influence fans' attitudes towards boycotts.

The interviews with the informants also showed that fans' attitudes towards the boycott were not only influenced by individual sentiments but also by community dynamics on social media. The widespread boycott campaign on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok accelerated the process of collective opinion formation among fans. Moreover, the study found that the duration of the boycott's impact can vary. Some fans may follow the trend temporarily, while others change entirely their consumption preferences as a form of solidarity with a particular social issue. This indicates that fan reactions to collaborations and boycotts are not static but can evolve along with the development of the underlying issue. This can be seen from the fans' response who experienced changes in supporting NCT. They stated that there has been a decrease in the level of hype and support for NCT's activities.

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