

Loyalty to Digital Celebrity: Roles of Emotional Engagement, Cosmopolitanism, and Self Esteem

My-Trinh BUI¹, and Huong-Linh LE^{2*}

¹ VNU International School - Vietnam National University, Hanoi, 144 Xuan Thuy, Cau Giay, Ha Noi, Vietnam,
trinhbm@isvnu.vn

² VNU International School - Vietnam National University, Hanoi, 144 Xuan Thuy, Cau Giay, Ha Noi, Vietnam

*Corresponding author: linhlh@isvnu.vn

Abstract

Fans and celebrities can communicate with one another in a variety of ways through digital social platforms. Therefore, marketers and digital celebrities have seized this opportunity to advertise products and services to consumers and fans. This study explores how behavioral loyalty predicts fans' purchase intentions by examining the effect of emotional engagement, cosmopolitanism, and self-esteem on behavioral loyalty and in turn on purchase intention. A survey was distributed to around 300 Vietnamese social network users who follow digital celebrities, and valid data was examined using quantitative modeling. Using the SMART PLS 3 model, the results show that lower levels of self-esteem, emotional engagement, and cosmopolitanism are linked to higher levels of behavioral loyalty and purchase intention.

Research purpose:

This study aims to explore how emotional engagement between followers and digital celebrities, cosmopolitan and social self-esteem affect fans' behavioral loyalty. Additionally, this study examines whether fans' behavioral loyalty can enhance the positive effect of their purchase intention on goods and services suggested by digital celebrities.

Research motivation:

With the rise of social media, new forms of digital celebrity groups, such as bloggers and "insta-celebrities," have arisen but there is a paucity of studies on the impacts of their social network advertising despite the growing commercial power of digital superstars. This study tries to fill this gap.

Research design, approach and method:

A survey was distributed to around 300 Vietnamese social network users who follow digital celebrities, and valid data was examined using quantitative modeling with the SMART PLS 3 model.

Main findings:

This study found that the behavioral loyalty between followers and their digital celebrities positively affects followers' purchasing intentions. Moreover, cosmopolitans did have a positive impact on fans' behavioral loyalty, conforming with our hypothesis. Finally, people who believe they have virtual friends on the internet are more prone to become emotionally involved with them and, as a result, develop behavioral loyalty.

Practical/managerial implications:

Marketers should consider internet superstars to be long-term collaborators rather than short-term sales boosters. They should also create initiatives to nurture digital celebrities as the brand's representatives. Efficient communication between digital superstars and their fans is also critical for increasing behavioral loyalty. Digital celebrities may also personalize their fan approach to promote behavioral loyalty.

Keywords: *Emotional engagement, Cosmopolitanism, Self-esteem, Behavioral loyalty, Purchase intention*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, people began to idolize an artist or character they saw on TV, heard on the radio, knew and obtained access to through social media such as Facebook, YouTube, or TikTok, and more. The media plays an important role in the parasocial relationship between a fan and their idol. This way of connection becomes more important these days because fans cannot meet their idols in person due to COVID-19. Digital celebrities, as opposed to traditional celebrities, are ordinary people who become famous through online blogging, vlogging, or social media. With the rise of social media, new forms of digital celebrity groups (Chahal, 2016), such as bloggers and "insta-celebrities," have arisen. Because of their high number of followers, digital celebrities have been identified as persons with perceived social influence (Jin and Phua, 2014). The fans will then seek to meet the idol's needs by constantly following the idol whenever they appear on TV, radio, film, or other media. There is a paucity of studies on the impacts of their social networking service (SNS) advertising despite the growing commercial power of digital superstars.

Audiences develop specific psychological responses as their viewing and interactions with others expand, such as desired identification with digital celebrity live-streamers and emotional engagement with other viewers. The study of how viewers interact with media celebrities has sparked a lot of interest among academics (Cohen, 2013). Albert Bandura (2001)'s social cognitive theory helps explain viewers' desire to be like their favorite streamer and their emotional engagement with other viewers during live streaming. This is because such motives assist individuals in achieving their objectives and desired outcomes while also offering some benefits and gratification, such as social connection, enjoyment, a feeling of community (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018), and tension relief (Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017).

Consumer behavior has shifted as a result of globalization. The term cosmopolitans refers to intellectuals who are comfortable in both their own and other people's cultures (Konrad et al., 1984). Cosmopolitans desire to be immersed in many cultures and have the ability to do so. The influence of cosmopolitanism on consumer behavior in different parts of the world has yet to be determined. As a result, the link between cosmopolitanism and customer behavioral loyalty is investigated in this study.

According to the sociometer hypothesis, self-esteem is a measure of social relationship efficiency (Leary et al., 1995). Escalas and Bettman (2015) describes the need to belong as a drive to create and sustain acceptable interpersonal interactions. Prior research shows that when fans have a strong identification with celebrities, such as athletes (Pan and Zeng, 2018) and YouTubers (Tolbert and Drogos, 2019), they are more likely to be influenced to mimic them (Fraser and Brown, 2002). How people use their social ties in the social media setting, according to (Pittman and Reich, 2016), should be investigated. To address this issue, the current research focuses on the

impact of poor self-esteem on social media followers' behavioral loyalty to digital celebrities.

Fans form close bonds with celebrities as a result of their exposure in the media (Bane et al., 2010; Stever and Lawson, 2013). Viewers tend to perceive a vlogger (i.e., a creator of video blogs) as a trustworthy information source after repeated exposures since frequent exposures assist develop comparable emotions of connection enhancement as in conventional media (Lee and Watkins, 2016). Users' purchasing intents are favorably influenced by celebrities' parasocial interactions with users, as well as a celebrity's reputation (H. Kim et al., 2015). Celebrities' endorsement of particular goods and services has a favorable influence on their followers' purchasing decisions for such goods and services (Y. Kim et al., 2011).

This study aims to explore how emotional engagement between followers and digital celebrities, cosmopolitan and social self-esteem affect fans' behavioral loyalty. Additionally, this study examines whether fans' behavioral loyalty can enhance the positive effect of their purchase intention on goods and services suggested by digital celebrities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social cognitive theory (SCT)

The social cognitive theory (SCT) is based on the idea that human behavior is caused by the interaction of personal (e.g., beliefs, self-efficacy, performance expectancy), environmental (e.g., others' behaviour patterns, responses), and behavioral (e.g., social behaviour) factors, which is known as relational mutual causality (A. Bandura, 1984). SCT asserts that human behavior is purposefully led by cognized objectives and managed by exerting some control over internal cognitions and behaviors, as well as external influences (Bandura, 2001). Bandura's insights of social dissemination of new patterns of behavior in the SCT of social media and digital platforms, which encompassed the attainment of information about novel behaviors, their adoption in practice, and the social networks through which they spread and are sustained (Bandura, 2001). Viewers of digital celebrity shows learn the norms of certain conduct and change their actions based on what they observe in the digital environment. As a result, games and shows have a role in the social spread of new forms of behavior. Virtual platforms and networking may provide a flexible way of building dispersion mechanisms to suit certain goals, growing their membership, geographically spreading them, and abandoning them when they no longer serve their purpose.

Despite the widespread worship of idols and other celebrities among today's youth, the impact of idol worship on identity achievement is unknown (Yue and Cheung, 2000). Nowadays, idols serve as icons and fictional comparisons for young people. They spend a lot of money, time, resources, as well as their efficiency,

commodities, and activities, with other fans. Young people's indulgence is predicted to have an impact on their academic and intellectual progress, identity, emotional growth and interactions (Schultze et al., 1991). An idol can be a hero, a celebrity, or a role model (Maltby et al., 2004), and is most typically a pop star who is an artist or an athlete (Cohen, 2013). Celebrity idol adoration, particularly for music and movie stars, has recently become a hot topic of research owing to its popularity, social pressure, and probably negative impacts on youth development. Idol worship, on the other hand, is becoming more popular among today's youth (Giles and Maltby, 2004). More specifically, idol worship may provide relief for deficiencies in psychosocial development, cognitive development, bonding insufficiency, companionship, social networking, and romantic relationships, as well as other problems. The compensation model also believes that when a fan has a lot of something, he or she will want to idolize something else. As a result, when a fan is satisfied with something, he or she seems to be on the looking for new experiences that are unrelated to what is fulfilling. The approach was useful in identifying low or weak self-esteem, poor social bonding, and repetitive experience as factors of idolatry.

2.2 Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement can influence behavioral loyalty by incorporating both a sense of emotional connectedness (Guo, 2018; Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018) and emotional speech (Lim et al., 2015). Emotional connectedness is a psychological situation in which customers believe they are emotionally linked to other viewers and the streamer of a live-streaming show. The fast-paced live chats with other users, in which they answer each other's comments and queries - some of these chats contain sincere messages for the streamer - develop an emotional link. Another type of emotional interaction is generated through emotional expressions employing emotes, which are designed to trigger instantaneous emotional responses in the streamer and other users, such as surprise, enthusiasm, delight, happiness, or sadness. Live streamers frequently employ a variety of techniques to give the idea that they are responding to their viewers' questions and comments (for example, having bots automatically answer viewers' inquiries). One of the most crucial user interactions while viewing a live-streamed channel of idols is the sense of emotional connectivity that the user feels while reading and reacting to other users' remarks.

H1. Emotional Engagement has a positive effect on behavioral loyalty

2.3 Cosmopolitanism

The term "cosmopolitan" refers to a set of qualities shared by some people, including a propensity to engage with others (i.e., diverse cultures) and a degree of proficiency in dealing with extremely alien cultures(s). People who supply points of entrance into truly other quite territorial societies are typically referred to as cosmopolitans (Hannerz, 1992, p. 251), which is rather significant for the most part. Contrary to common belief, the concept also

encompasses all intellectuals who feel comfortable in both other people's and their own cultures (Konrad et al., 1984, p. 209). The cosmopolitans are people who provide points of entry into other definite territorial societies for all intents and purposes (Hannerz, 1992, p. 251). They are also known as cosmopolites, which means they want to be immersed in different cultures and have the skills to do so.

H2. Cosmopolitanism has a positive effect on behavioral loyalty.

2.4 Social Self-esteem

As previously stated, the sociometer theory, which is based on evolutionary psychology, argues that self-esteem is a measure of social achievement and that self-esteem helps to minimize relational devaluation rather than promote self-esteem (Leary et al., 1995). According to this view, people need to be a member of social communities to live in an evolutionary psychological sense; humans have an intrinsic need to form and maintain social connections (Leary, 1999). Self-esteem is a reflection of one's capacity to fit in and be accepted (Leary, 1999). Previous research has demonstrated that self-esteem acts as a moderator among several psychological variables. Low self-esteem fans are more nervous and have poor self-perception, which leads them to focus on relationship-oriented practices and knowledge. Therefore, people with low self-esteem seek outside help (such as brand names) to enhance their self-esteem and deal with interpersonal problems (Shah and Swaminathan, 2008). When it comes to SNSs, self-esteem can function as a moderator of the link between SNS use and social capital (Steinfeld et al., 2008). Participants who have poor self-esteem appear to benefit more from Facebook use than those who have strong self-esteem. According to social cognition theory, a viewer's behavioral loyalty to a media persona may be influenced by their emotional engagement with the character. These behavioral inclinations toward media personalities are modeled emotional experiences gained by viewers through their emotional engagement with the show (Bahn et al., 2021). Mood and sentiments produced through contact with other audience members can also assist viewers to establish a connection to their preferred live-streaming channel, in addition to observational learning from a streamer. The degree to which an audience member feels linked to other audience members is a key predictor of behavioral engagement with a live-streaming presentation (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018). Emotional engagement is required to form connecting ties with a channel and to be a devoted audience member (Sutton et al., 1997)

H3: Follower's low social self-esteem has a positive impact on behavioral loyalty.

2.5 Behavioral loyalty

Celebrity brand choices are influenced by both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty (Yeh, 2016). Behaviorally loyal followers continue to buy and utilize the products of celebrities for a long time. Two components of this

loyalty are rebuying and recommending others. It's defined as a desire for amount chasing, long-term engagements, and advertising production focus. Safarzadeh et al. (2011) discovered that scales of follower behavioral loyalty have a larger influence than scales of change, and changing brand on young followers as recognized as consumers purchasing intention. Porral and Lang (2015) also discovered that behavioral loyalty influences the link between perceived quality and consumer purchase intent. Ahmad et al. (2016) also proved the impact of brand loyalty on repurchase intention.

H4: Followers' behavioral loyalty to digital celebrities has a positive impact on their purchase intention.



Fig. 1. Sua, digital celebrity, Unity Korea (S. Kim, 2020)

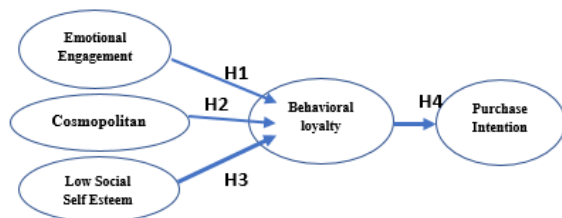


Fig. 2. Research model

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data collection and measurement

An online survey, created using Google Docs, was collected from young Vietnamese from different high schools and universities who were invited to participate in the survey and each school has an average of several thousand students. The survey is created for people who are actively using social networks. These questionnaire sections were adapted from relevant literature to ensure the content validity of the constructs. During the study, the results of 300 report samples revealed that they were interested in a certain idol group. Before distribution, students who were fluent in both Vietnamese and English properly translated the questionnaire into Vietnamese.

The online survey was conducted using Google Doc and personal Facebook accounts from December 2020 to

March 2021. Because personal Facebook accounts have a limited number of friends and followers, the online survey was also distributed through other social media platforms as well as Microsoft Teams classrooms to ensure an adequate sample size. A total of 300 replies were obtained after gathering responses from a variety of high schools and universities. There are no answers that have been rejected. As shown in Table 1, the sample had a higher proportion of females (68.6%) than males (29.9%), with the remainder (1.5%). The majority of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 25 and used SNS actively.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents (N=300)

Demographic characteristic	N	%
Gender		
Male	87	29
Female	208	69.3
Others	5	1.6
Age		
18-20	118	39.3
21-23	154	51.3
24-25	9	3
Others	19	6.6
Education Level		
High school	25	8.3
Undergraduate	260	86.6
Graduate	15	5
Income		
From parents	205	68.3
Having job	73	24.3
Other	22	7.3

Note: N is based on the respondents who have reportedly had their favorite idol at least once out of the total of 344 responses.

3.2 Data analysis

We tested our proposed model (see Figure 1) and hypotheses employing mediation analysis using structural equation modeling (SEM). Using SMART PLS3, we performed the analysis in three steps. First, we used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the measurement model to ensure the construct validity of the latent variables. Second, we took the SEM approach to test the structural, complex relationships between independent

variables and dependent variables. Finally, we analyzed the direct and indirect effects of exogenous variables on the endogenous variable to measure the proposed mediation hypotheses.

Confirmatory factor analysis and measurement model fit

Before performing the SEM analysis, we tested the measurement model by employing a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Table 2 presents the measurement model results including the scale items. First, the results of factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha indicate the evidence of convergent validity among all measures of Emotional Engagement (EE), Cosmopolitanism, Self-esteem (SE), Purchase intention (PI), and Behavioral loyalty (BL). All indicators loaded significantly on the latent variables that they were intended to represent. For the internal consistency of measures, the reliability coefficients confirmed inter-item consistencies among items. The discriminant validity was tested by average variance extracted (AVE) and average shared squared variance (ASV). The AVE of each latent variable exceeded a 0.50 benchmark (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) and was larger than ASV (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 2. Discriminant Validity Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Cronbach Alpha α	CM	EE	SE	BL	PI
Cosmopolitanism	0.898	0.875				
Emotional engagement	0.865	0.605	0.844			
Self esteem	0.910	0.299	0.383	0.829		
Behavior loyalty	0.858	0.680	0.704	0.397	0.837	
Purchase intention	0.912	0.600	0.648	0.463	0.740	0.890

Note: BL=Behavioral loyalty; Cosmopolitanism= CM; Emotional engagement= EE; Purchase intention= PI; Self-esteem= SE, A diagonal Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value should be greater than all its horizontal and vertical values. In this table, these indicators are satisfactory.

Table 2 presents the reliability discriminant validity of the constructs investigated in this study. The Pearson-correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between all constructed measures. Our correlational analysis confirmed that there are significant and strong, positive relationships among all measures. The results suggest that higher levels of hopeful identification PR are linked to stronger behavioral loyalty and purchasing intention, according to the findings.

Test of the structural model with mediation analysis

H1 predicted that emotional engagement has a positive effect on their behavior loyalty. Consistent with the prediction, emotional engagement showed a significant positive effect on behavior loyalty [$\beta = 0.422, p < 0.001$]. Therefore, H3 was supported. H2 predicted that cosmopolitanism has a positive impact on their behavior loyalty. As predicted, cosmopolitanism showed a

significant positive effect on behavior loyalty [$\beta = 0.388, p < 0.001$]. Therefore, H2 was supported. H3 predicted that follower's low social self-esteem has a positive impact on their purchase intentions. As predicted, self-esteem showed a positive relationship with purchase intentions [$\beta = 0.121, p < 0.001$]. Therefore, H3 was supported. H4 predicted that behavior loyalty has a positive impact on their purchase intentions. The result yielded a statistically significant positive relationship between behavior loyalty and purchase intention [$\beta = 0.740, p < 0.001$]. Therefore, H4 was supported.

Table 3. Smart PLS Path Coefficients

Paths	Coefficient path	SD	T-value	P-value	VIF
CM → BL	0.388	0.050	7.805	0.000	1.590
EE → BL	0.422	0.051	8.315	0.000	1.698
SE → BL	0.121	0.034	3.553	0.000	1.183
BL → PI	0.740	0.036	20.751	0.000	1.000

Note: BL=Behavioral loyalty; Cosmopolitanism= CM; Emotional engagement= EE; Purchase intention= PI; Self-esteem= SE, Variance inflation factor = VIF < 5, p-value < 0.001

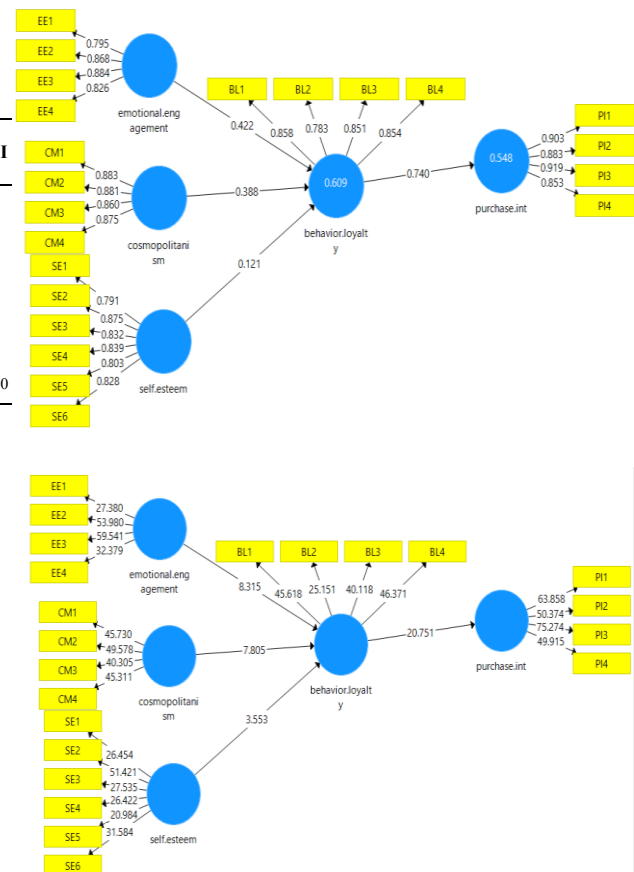


Fig. 3. Partial least squares (PLS) path modeling results

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The current study is based on social cognition theory shows how viewers' incentives to attain gaming objectives might explain the rising popularity of digital celebrity and their influence. EE, CM, SE become essential behavior

that may be linked to other forms of real behaviors like recurrent viewing, subscribing to the channel, giving to the digital celebrity via multiple platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Tiktok. The repeated viewing is a major dependent variable in this study because it demonstrates behavioral loyalty which can use to predict purchase behavior.

In the age of online or social media dominance, digital celebrities have become important opinion influencers. They influence followers' purchase intentions by inducing followers' wishes to own the same items through product evaluations or product advertising broadcast on social media sites and integrated into their everyday lives. Marketers have noticed the promotional power and efficacy of digital celebrities, and they have become important models of digital advertising. This reflects a shift in emphasis from traditional celebrity and media advertising to dynamic advertising with diverse ones. This study found that the behavioral loyalty between followers and their digital celebrities positively affects followers' purchasing intentions.

Moreover, this study investigated the factors influencing behavioral loyalty of fans and their digital celebrities. Emotional engagement positively influenced behavioral loyalty, consistent with the findings in (Guo, 2018; Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018), and low self-esteem positively affected behavioral loyalty of fans, supporting the findings in (Shah and Swaminathan, 2008). Moreover, cosmopolitan did have a positive impact on fans' behavioral loyalty, conforming with our hypothesis.

Our research is being conducted to investigate the links between emotional involvement and behavioral loyalty. Previous research has found that older consumers are more prone to form parasocial connections with media characters (Cohen, 1997) to compensate for feelings of loneliness and isolation (Perloff and Krevans, 1987). Younger consumers, on the other hand, are less likely to develop parasocial connections with media characters (Perloff and Krevans, 1987) since they may have more possibilities to participate in social activities and make friends. Respondents in our survey appear to be relatively youthful (18 to 23 years old) and regularly utilize online or SNS platforms to communicate with other users and follow their digital idols. People who believe they have virtual friends on the internet are more prone to become emotionally involved with them and, as a result, develop behavioral loyalty.

Despite prior research indicating that disclosure of advertisements or sponsorship in SNS and digital celebrities' blogs is becoming increasingly required, our study discovered that emotional engagement between digital celebrities and their followers has a positive effect on the associations between followers' behavioral loyalty and purchase intentions. As a result, marketers must encourage such emotional engagement by offering relevant information on advertised brands or items to digital celebrities when followers seek digital celebrities for a comprehensive brand or product information. When

digital celebrities provide helpful and reputable information on businesses or items in detail, followers will firmly consider the same digital celebrities as trustworthy information sources. As a result, marketers should consider internet superstars to be long-term collaborators rather than short-term sales boosters. They should also create initiatives to nurture digital celebrities as brand evangelists.

According to the findings of this study, followers' poor social self-esteem has a favorable impact on the formation of behavioral loyalty. However, in the long run, reducing followers' social self-esteem is ineffective. People with a poor social self-esteem lack confidence in their physical interactions with others. When people with low self-esteem feel at ease and secure talking with digital celebrities, their behavioral allegiance is reinforced. As a result, people with poor social self-esteem may be able to regain their self-esteem. Furthermore, followers who have a high level of empathy with digital celebs have a favorable impact on behavioral loyalty. Active contact between digital superstars and their fans will increase empathy among their followers. Therefore, efficient communication between digital superstars and their fans is critical for increasing behavioral loyalty.

Communication between followers and digital celebrities is no longer hampered by boundaries in the digital age. As a result of the different information flows, fans who consider themselves cosmopolitans may reach their digital celebrities more readily. Marketers must cope with cultural variations and vary their strategies for giving information to digital idols, as well as arrange events tailored to different areas and interests, to assist digital idols in reaching followers in diverse geographical places. Digital celebrities may also personalize their fan approach to promote behavioral loyalty.

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Appendix 1. Summary of confirmatory factor analysis results for all measures

Factor & Items	Factor Loading	CR	AVE	VIF	Mean	SD
<i>Emotional engagement (EE)</i>		0.908	0.712			
You quote or comment on what idol your idol says when he/she says something nice (EE1)	0.795			1.806	5.08	1.707
You are display on the life of the active of the spirit or normal discussion in the live chat (EE2)	0.868			2.576	5.32	1.64
When participating in a live-streaming chat with an idol, you feel an emotional connection with the users (EE3)	0.884			2.78	5.12	1.687
You can understand your idol's feelings even before they send messages on social media (EE4)	0.826			1.916	4.737	1.701
<i>Social self-esteem (SE)</i>		0.929	0.687			
You have felt a lack of people who can understand your interests (SE1)	0.791			2.587	3.76	2.039
You often feel isolated in social situations (SE2)	0.875			3.56	3.173	2.007
You worry about whether you are perceived as a success or a failure in society (SE3)	0.832			2.932	3.833	2.099
You are worried about what people think about you as a fan (S4)	0.839			5.269	3.86	2.049
You feel anxious about the impression you are making (SE5)	0.803			4.202	3.99	1.984
You worry about looking like an idol dumb person (SE6)	0.828			2.216	2.93	2.076
<i>Cosmopolitanism (Cumbers et al.)</i>		0.929	0.765			
You are interested in learning about people and culture of the country where idols live and work (CM1)	0.883			2.678	5.383	1.644
You like to go to restaurants that serve traditional and famous dishes from your main active idol country. (CM2)	0.881			2.637	5.017	1.83
You tend to make friends and communicate with the people who come from idol's country (CM3)	0.86			2.386	4.593	1.906
If you have a chance to travel, you probably choose the country in which idols are living and working (CM4)	0.875			2.556	4.957	1.939
<i>Behavior loyalty (BL)</i>		0.903	0.701			
You feel more attached to idol post than others (BL1)	0.859			2.076	5.187	1.574
It will be difficult to a fan of another idol (BL2)	0.783			1.751	4.183	1.982
You will increase the amount of time you spend watching idol posts (BL3)	0.849			2.078	4.413	1.839
You consider you are a huge idol fan (BL4)	0.854			2.092	4.547	1.864
<i>Purchase intention (PI)</i>		0.938	0.792			
You feel interested in the products that idols recommend, PR through a social network (PI1)	0.903			2.076	4.933	1.725

You feel confident in the quality of the products that idol recommend (PI2)	0.883	1.751	4.883	1.69
You will buy products that idol recommend (PI3)	0.919	2.078	4.435	1.708
You will buy products made specifically for PR, increase sales for your idol at all costs (PI4)	0.853	2.092	3.963	2.01

Notes: SD= Standard Deviation; CR= Composite Reliability>0.7, FL=factor loading>0.7, Variance inflation factor=VIF< 5, Average Variance Extracted AVE > 0.5, p-value<0.05