

Exploring Marketing Strategies in the Idol Industry: The Case of NCT127 Idol Groups

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Abstract: With globalisation and the popularity of mobile internet, the Korean idol industry has made remarkable achievements in the field of global idol industry. However, the competition in the global entertainment market is fierce and the problem of product homogenisation is emerging. In order to cope with this problem and assist in the development of China's idol industry, this paper focuses on the management and communication of cultural industry. Focusing on the intersection of cultural industry management and communication studies, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the fan base of NCT127, a male idol group under the South Korean company SM, through the research method of interviews, and encodes the content of the interviews to collect and analyse their views and experiences of NCT127's marketing strategy. Through the effective information they fed back, the strengths and weaknesses of NCT127's marketing strategy and the areas that can be improved are countered to provide an indicative contribution to the healthy and long-term development of the idol industry.

1 INTRODUCTION

With the acceleration of globalisation and the popularisation of the Internet, the Korean idol industry has made remarkable achievements within the scope of the global idol industry. The success of the Korean idol industry cannot be separated from its perfect industrial system of content manufacturing and mature model of fan economic realisation.

The outstanding performance of the entire industrial chain, from product planning to music industry to visual design, shows that the Korean idol industry has already formed a relatively mature and complete industrial system (Wang, 2017). Multiple departments work together to provide positioning services for idol groups; at the same time, through record sales, audio sales, concerts, DVD sales, peripheral derivatives and advertising endorsements, and other forms of marketing in parallel, shaping a variety of merchandise forms, so that fans can continue to consume repeatedly over a period of time, so that the Korean idol industry uninterruptedly realise the realization of the emotional investment (Ai, 2021).

However, while learning how the Korean idol industry designs product marketing through inquiry, it also faces a series of core challenges.

The marketing strategy of the Korean idol industry involves a number of aspects, such as brand positioning, market segmentation, product planning, publicity and promotion. This determines that the success of a product is also affected by a variety of factors such as the market environment, consumer psychology, and cultural differences (Hu, 2021). As market competition intensifies, the problem of product homogeneity in the idol industry is gradually surfacing (Zhang et al., 2023). How to meet market changes and fan demands while maintaining individuality and achieving sustainable development is also an important challenge for its marketing design.

In order to study the marketing strategies of the idol industry, NCT127 was selected as a case study to be analysed in this paper, and the interview method was used to conduct interview activities with four fans of NCT127. The contents of their interviews were coded and processed to collect and analyse their perceptions and experiences of NCT127's marketing strategies. The effective information from their feedback is used to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of NCT127's marketing strategy and what can be improved.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

At present, regarding the product marketing design of the Korean idol industry, scholars have already conducted in-depth studies on the realisation mode of its fan economy and the business logic and operation mechanism behind it.

Scholars have conducted in-depth analyses of the marketing strategies of the Korean idol industry from various angles, including brand positioning, market segmentation, product planning, publicity and promotion. At the same time, some scholars have also conducted in-depth research on the fan economic realisation mode of the Korean idol industry, revealing the business logic and operation mechanism behind it (Wang, 2022). These research results provide useful references and lessons for us to further explore the product marketing design of Korean idol industry (Mao, 2022).

However, there are some shortcomings in the existing research. Most of the current research focuses on overall control at the macro level, such as qualitative analyses of marketing strategies in the Korean idol industry (Kim, 2023). Secondly, the perspective of the studies is relatively homogeneous, with scholars analysing from the single perspective of business administration or economics, and lacking a comprehensive interdisciplinary perspective with media studies or cultural industry management. Furthermore, the analyses of the studies remain at the surface level and do not explore in depth with personalised examples.

To address the shortcomings of existing research, this paper will select NCT127 male idol group as a case for qualitative analysis, and adopt the empirical research methods of literature review, case study method, interdisciplinary research, and interviews to explore the product marketing planning of the Korean idol industry (Qiu, 2024). It aims to fill in the shortcomings of existing research and provide useful theoretical support and practical guidance for the sustainable and healthy development of the Korean idol industry (Lee, 2023).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this paper, the research method of interview was adopted and four NCT127 fans were selected to be interviewed (Lee & Lee, 2018). It collects and analyses what kind of views and experiences they have on NCT127's marketing strategy as an audience group, and counterparts the NCT127 group's

advantageous points and areas that can be improved on the marketing strategy through the feedback.

Relevant interview questions were designed according to the research purpose, and the questions covered the opportunities and reasons for fans to like NCT127, the overall features and advantages of NCT127, the points that attracted fans the most, the use of social media platforms, consumption, activities and interactions participated in, and the evaluation and suggestions on marketing strategies.

We recorded and transcribed the entire interview process, and by comparing, coding and analysing the content of the same interview questions, this paper draws out the successes and areas for improvement of NCT127's marketing strategy.

3.1 Coding and Analysis of Interview Content

Firstly, we initially organised the interview content provided by several interviewees, filtering out irrelevant content information while retaining content related to the NCT127 marketing strategy. Subsequently, we coded the contents of the interviews that required further analysis and research, grouped similar or related contents into the same category, labelled them, and assigned corresponding coding labels according to the rules. Finally, the coding labels were organised and categorised to form a systematic coding framework. Present the coded content in tabular form as shown Table 1:

Table 1. Coding framework.

Interview keyword number	Interview keyword	Content Interpretation
1	Fan Preference Opportunities	Opportunities for fan groups to fall in love with NCT127.
2	Features and Benefits of NCT127	Describe the features and advantages that make NCT127 stand out from other idol groups.
3	Most Attractive Points for Fans	Describe what attracts fans to NCT127 the most, such as product planning, music output, and visual design for music videos and albums.
4	Use of Social Media Platforms	Describe the social media platforms through which fans follow NCT127 and

		how these platforms fulfil their needs.
5	Consumption	Describe the items that fans spend on NCT127 and their decision-making process.
6	Activities and Interactions	Describe the NCT127 events or interactions that fans have participated in, and the emotional impact of these events and interactions on the fanbase.
7	Marketing Strategy Evaluation	Describe fans' evaluations and perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of NCT127's marketing strategies, including effective strategies and areas for improvement.
8	Emotional value	Describe the emotional experience and emotional value that NCT127 has brought to fans.

3.2 Coding Results and Analysis

3.2.1 Fan Preference Opportunities

During the interviews, several interviewees mentioned the opportunity of their liking for NCT127.

Interviewee A fell further in love with the group because he had the idea of wanting to learn more about the group to which this member belonged after interacting with member Lee Taeyong on Lysn, a specific communication software developed by SM.

Respondent B, on the other hand, became interested in NCT127 member Kim Jungwoo after swiping his dance challenge on the TikTok platform and decided to participate in the offline event after getting to know the member better over a period of time. After watching NCT127's offline concert in Macau, he further deepened his love for the group.

3.2.2 Characteristics and Strengths of NCT127

During the interview, interviewee A thought that NCT127's conceptual plan was very "NEO"-style,

with philosophical and literary abstraction. Emphasis on new concepts such as "dream, water droplet, and empathy" made the audience interested in the concept of a worldview that is independent of the current subgenre but not detached from real life. Such concepts are not common among Korean idol groups at the same time, and are even unique, making NCT127's distinctive team colours leave a deep impression on the audience.

Respondent C believes that the diversity of nationalities of the members of NCT127 has enabled their audience to be more international, and their audience size is at a high value as a result. Their music, including samples of Western classical music and other regional styles, allows fans of all nationalities to appreciate the artistry of their music.

In addition, NCT127 has demonstrated a unique and avant-garde style and innovation in dance and visual design, making it stand out from other idol groups.

3.2.3 Points of Greatest Appeal to Fans

During the interview, several fans mentioned NCT127's musical output and choreography as the points that attracted them the most.

Respondent A described NCT127's music as diverse and avant-garde and experimental. Both the title track and the album's title track have different styles, but the central theme is very clear. The albums often contain a variety of music, such as Neo Soul, Tropical House, Synthpop, Contemporary R&B, Complexxtro, etc. The albums are also very diverse, as the songs are arranged in such a way as to make them more accessible. As the arrangements of NCT127's songs are innovative and highly researched, there are many arrangers who professionally evaluate and explain NCT127's albums, uploading such videos to social media platforms such as YouTube or bilibili. This, in a way, also raises the artistic value and level of NCT127.

Respondent D felt that all of their dances had a high difficulty index and were not homogenised dance moves and styles from the same period, giving the fan base an excellent audio-visual experience.

3.2.4 Use of Social Media Platforms

It was learned through the interviews that the specific social media platforms used by several respondents to follow NCT127 are similar. The main focus is on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Weibo, which fans can use to follow NCT127's official account and the personal accounts of their favourite members. In this way, they can be the first

to get information about NCT127's movements, pictures, videos, etc. that are posted.

Meanwhile, platform apps like bilibili and youtube are also widely used by the fanbase and have become important channels for the fanbase to watch NCT127's updated materials.

3.2.5 Consumption, Participation and Interaction

In the interview, fans' spending on NCT127 was divided into two parts: online and offline.

Online, it mainly includes the purchase of a large number of albums, peripherals and subscription to Lysn software, as well as the "casting" and "cutting" of sound sources during data events; offline, it includes attending concerts, fanmeeting, pre-recorded stages, and so on.

In addition, Interviewee B mentioned that they also incur hidden consumption such as air tickets, hotels, and clothing in order to watch concerts. These spending decisions arise mainly from the fans' love and support for NCT127, as well as the need to collect their physical products.

Several fans mentioned in the interview that they have attended NCT127's special concerts and platter concerts. These events allowed fans to experience the strength and charisma of the NCT127 members more intuitively, deepening their love for them.

Also, by participating in offline events such as concerts, fans are able to experience moments of warmth and deepen the formation of a powder chain relationship while interacting with all of NCT127.

3.2.6 Evaluation of Marketing Strategies

Several interviewees felt that they rated NCT127's marketing strategy highly, but that there were still some trouble spots that needed to be improved.

They believe that NCT127's marketing strategy is innovative and differentiated, able to attract fans through various types of post-production materials such as lifestyle vlog-type materials, practice room or studio behind-type materials, etc., and satisfy the needs of different types of fans; it also interacts and communicates with fans online in real time through diversified social media platforms such as Lysn and Weverse apps; at the same time, it can also help NCT127 enhance the stickiness of some audiences by producing music with unique styles and difficult choreography, as well as avant-garde visual designs to show the team's style and characteristics. At the same time, NCT127 can also help to increase the stickiness of some of its audiences by producing unique music styles, ornamental and difficult

choreographies, and avant-garde visual designs to show the team's styles and characteristics.

However, several respondents also suggested some improvements to NCT127's marketing strategy. For example, they would like to see the company step up its promotion of some of its non-hit songs. They felt that the selection of overly edgy title songs was not conducive to helping NCT127 expand its fan audience, while the promotion of equally high-quality and more poppy secondary title songs could optimise the structure of the album's song charting rate at a relatively low cost. At the same time, shortening the gap in activity and increasing the frequency of album releases will maintain NCT127's group exposure while increasing the points of exposure.

Among them, respondent B mentioned that it is difficult to collect all the albums due to too many styles, and hoped that SM can simplify the album versions in consideration of the longevity of the fans and users. Respondent A hoped that more attention would be paid to the Chinese market.

4 SUCCESS OF NCT127 MARKETING STRATEGY

4.1 Innovation and Differentiation

NCT127 has demonstrated a high degree of innovation and differentiation in its marketing strategies. For example, it has demonstrated the team's uniqueness and versatility from other groups through its avant-garde music style and experimental conceptual design; interaction and communication with fans through multiple social media platforms and exclusive software; realisation of the idol economy through a large number of peripheral designs and co-branded outputs; as well as multiple types of post-production material placement.

These innovative and differentiated marketing plans left a unique impression on the audience that NCT127 is different from other idol groups.

4.2 Precise Positioning and Market Segmentation

NCT127 focuses on precise positioning and market segmentation in its marketing strategy. It has developed a targeted marketing strategy by gaining a deep understanding of the needs and preferences of its target audience.

For example, when launching a global tour, market surveys will be conducted in advance to adjust

the concert track list according to the preferences of fans in the region; different versions of albums and different types of peripheral products will be launched to meet the diversified preferences of the audience; and different types of activities and interactions will be launched to cater for the needs of different groups of fans, and so on.

These precise positioning and market segmentation marketing strategies have enabled NCT127 to better meet the needs of different fan groups, increasing its market competitiveness and influence among its peers.

4.3 Emotion Marketing and Fan Interaction

NCT127 focuses on emotional marketing and fan interaction in its marketing strategy. It carries out in-depth communication and interaction with fans through social media platforms and offline activities to establish a close emotional bond.

For example, by subscribing to the Lysn software to communicate and exchange with fans in real time, the members share their lives through text, pictures, videos, etc., which greatly brings the distance between them and the fan base closer; face-to-face interactions and contacts with fans through concerts, fanmeeting, and other offline activities, etc., which deepen the emotional impression and can better maintain the connection with the fan base.

These emotional marketing and fan interaction marketing strategies enable NCT127 to create a stronger powder chain relationship with its fan audience, enhancing fan loyalty and sense of belonging.

5 NCT127 MARKETING STRATEGY IMPROVEMENTS

5.1 Enhancement of Non-Hit Song Announcements

Although NCT127's hit songs are highly recognisable and influential in the market, they are also not all well received because of their experimental and avant-garde style. However, according to critics and fans of NCT127, the non-hit songs on the album have the same quality and potential.

However, the company's lack of promotion of these non-hit songs has resulted in these songs not receiving sufficient attention. As a result, NCT127 needs to step up its efforts to promote its non-

mainstream songs, weakening its stereotypical label of experimental and reflecting the artistic diversity of its work.

5.2 Optimising Album Styles and Peripheral Product Design

While NCT127's album styles and peripheral product designs are diverse and attractive, there are some problems.

For example, an excessive number of album styles and peripherals leads to aesthetic fatigue and a decrease in purchasing desire among the fan base. Audiences find themselves spending for a long period of time without acquiring any practical products, and are less likely to want to have additional expenditures.

Therefore, NCT127 needs to optimise its sales methods, reduce the frequency of selling peripheral products, and strengthen product quality enhancement and practicality. Conduct research on the purchasing supplies of the fan base in advance, and design products according to the preferences of the fan base, so as to increase the willingness to buy and satisfaction.

5.3 Balanced International Markets and Cross-Cultural Marketing

Although NCT127 has achieved some success in internationalisation, attention needs to be paid to the balance of its international markets.

The frequency of activities should be arranged to address the high and low regional sales during each event, not only in Korea itself. Launch products and activities that are more in line with local cultural characteristics and consumption habits for different regional fan bases. Strengthen exchanges and cooperation with other countries, or establish subdivisions in other countries to conduct more targeted regional planning for NCT127.

6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE MARKETING STRATEGIES OF NCT127

6.1 Adherence to Innovation and Differentiation

After market research, it is easy to find that NCT127's current fanbase is attracted by their unique conceptual plans and personal artistic style. For NCT127, sticking to their own path is an important means of

maintaining their creativity and differentiation. While maintaining their strengths, they continue to experiment with new marketing methods and approaches to stay ahead of the curve and stay competitive in the current idol market.

At the same time, while diversifying the marketing, but also to avoid the problem of product homogenisation, always maintain the group's unique and distinctive style characteristics.

6.2 Focus on the Chinese Market

Currently NCT127's main audience countries in Asia are Korea, Japan and China. However, the Chinese market is not well regarded compared to Japan and South Korea, and the Chinese fanbase has a large share of album purchases and offline event support.

NCT127 should increase the frequency of their overseas activities while maintaining their local publicity, and diversify their interactive activities in China. Not only should the number of tours and book signings be increased, but also activities with more benefits, such as NCT WISH's "One-Day Cafe Manager" activity, which is more cost-effective and interactive. This will enhance the experience of the fan base and the sense of return, and maintain the loyalty and sense of belonging of the solid fans.

6.3 Expanding Product Lines and Diversification

NCT127 should improve the design of its peripheral products, reduce the number of co-branded products with other divisions, and instead increase the number of collaborations with brands that have high visibility and good civic influence to enhance the originality of NCT127-related products.

At the same time, more personalised and customised peripheral products can be launched, and online questionnaires can be issued before the batch output to conduct in-depth research on the market situation in order to meet the fans' personalised and targeted needs, to improve the fans' purchasing experience and satisfaction, and to strengthen the powder chain relationship.

7 CONCLUSION

Through interviews with some of NCT127's fan groups, this paper finds that NCT127 has shown its good marketing strategy to its audience with its unique conceptual planning, avant-garde and innovative music style and diversified social media

marketing as well as comprehensive online and offline consumption mode.

These strategies have helped NCT127 to create a good brand image and attract a large number of fans' attention and love. However, there are still some problems with NCT127's marketing strategies, such as the lack of mass type of marketing approach as well as the unbalanced development of the international market.

This study provides a lot of valuable references for the future development of China's idol industry, and makes a good demonstration for the future development of the domestic idol industry in terms of brand positioning, market segmentation, product planning, publicity and promotion, etc. Future research should focus more on how to make the idol industry products develop healthily in the long run in the direction of in-depth investigation.

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