

Indonesian K-Pop fans: The relationship between ARMY-BTS identity and their demographic

Yayah Cheriyah

Department Korean Language, Faculty of Linguistic, Universitas Nasional, Indonesia

Email: yayahchan@gmail.com

Amanda Rochima Hadi

STIKES Insan Unggul Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: araroch08@gmail.com

Abstract

This article analysed the fans' identity among K-Pop fans in Indonesia, especially BTS fans. The study aimed to explore how these fans express their identity as fans both internally and externally despite negative stereotyping of loyal K-Pop fans. Using a quantitative method through online surveys based on the fans-identity scale approach, the research surveyed a total of 243 BTS fans in Indonesia. Results showed that BTS fans had a positive tendency toward overall fans characteristics. None of the characteristics showed a negative score. It indicated that there was a high loyalty among the fans. Almost all six-behaviour dimensions observed correlated with all seven fans-identity characters. "Specific social media accounts followed" showed no correlation with "enjoyment" and "identity" respectively. However, high loyalty and a large number of fan-based did not translate into monetization for official merchandise. Results showed a low number of purchases for official merchandise and global membership package.

Keywords: *fans identity scale, K-Pop, fanaticism.*

Introduction

Nowadays, Korean culture is the most spread and popular culture across the world including its dramas, movies, music, animation, and even games. The spread of South Korean pop culture is often referred to as the Hallyu Wave considering the wave-like spread. The jargon itself has existed since 1999 with young people in China as the instigators (Park, 2021). Among its elements, one of the most well-known parts of the Hallyu wave is the culture of K-Pop (Korean Pop); a music genre that is characterized by cheerful rhythm, fast tempo, bilingual lyrics, energetic dances, and attractive outlook of its singers.

For years, the fans of Hallyu are increasing significantly. According to The Korea Times, in 2018 alone there were 89.1 million fans across the world. This number increases by 22% compared to the previous year. In 2019, it grows by 11%, or equals 99.32 million fans worldwide. These significant numbers caused a large expansion of distribution routes and an increase in the consumption of Korean content through social media platforms. A number that is predicted to be multiplying in the coming years as the fandom kept growing by minutes (Ji-Soo, 2022).

In K-Pop, singers are usually grouped into soloists and girl/boybands. One of the leading K-Pop boybands is Bangtan Sonyeondan (방탄) or better known as BTS. Bangtan Sonyeondan means "Bulletproof Boy Scouts". Based on KTO (Korea Tourism Organization) survey in August and September 2019, BTS is the most sought Hallyu boyband. About 36.1 of respondents voted BTS as their favourite boyband followed by EXO with 10.4% and Super Junior with 8.2%. Boyband group rank is then followed by female soloists/groups with IU and SNSD with each voted by 2.7% of respondents (Intan, 2020).

A survey conducted by the ARMY (Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth), a name associated with BTS fans around the world, in 2020 showed that 86.4% of fans were female and the rest were male. The survey was filled by 402,881 fans across 100 countries who were mostly aged under 18 years old (50.3%). In Asia alone, Indonesia made up a fraction of 20% of fans, which made the largest number of BTS fans. This number was followed by Mexico with 10.6%, while South Korea ranked 8th with 3.7%. This fairly large number showed the massive influence of BTS as popular culture, especially in Indonesia (BTSARMYCensus, 2020).

K-pop fans tend to have a relatively high fanaticism level. Prior studies on fanaticism behaviour showed that there is negative and positive behaviour resulting from idolization varying from mild to obsessive idolization. The former tends to give negative stereotyping to the relationship between fans and their idols, such as excessive obsession with stalking (Thorne & Bruner, 2006; Vinney et al, 2019; Kloet and Zoonen, 2007). Negative stereotyping in fanaticism was also seen among K-Pop fans in Southeast Asia (Williams & Ho, 2015; Chansanam. W et al, 2020; Smutradontri & Gadavanij, 2020). In Indonesia itself, BTS Army was likely associated with a bad stereotype, ranging from rude behaviour towards non-fans, and unpleasant actions, to harming others (Rahmayani, 2020; Lestari, 2021; TribunNews, 2021). These negative stereotypes and harsh press critics often drove K-Pop/BTS fans to reluctantly admit that they like the group or the music (CNN Indonesia, 2019; Nursalikhah, 2020; Astriningtias, 2020). This reluctance would be affecting fans' psychosocial well-being. Several studies revealed that there were positive aspects, where media fiction narratives or idols could provide, from idolizing or fanaticism (Laffan, 2020; Lozano Delmar et al, 2020). These acts of reluctance would certainly be creating a negative impact on fans' psychological and social life. Thus, it is very important to describe the behaviour of K-Pop fans in Indonesia, in this case, the BTS fans or Army, concerning their identity as fans and how they represent it socially.

The purpose of this study is, first, to see the generic overview of K-Pop fans' identity specifically BTS fans in Indonesia. Second, the study sought to find this generic overview concerning its demographic data. Third, the study sought to find the relationship between the fans' identity and their demographics.

Methods

Previous studies on fans' experience and their reactions toward popular culture had established a set of scales to measure overall fans' identity. The fans' identity scale is used to classify fans based on enthusiasm, social behaviour, and meaningful interactions with an idol (objects/persons). In addition, the fan identity scale also assesses how fans translate idols' values into their lives. It indicates how their identity as fans affects them internally (affective, cognitive) to externally (social, participatory) (Vinney et al., 2019, Lozano Delmar et al., 2020).

Vinney et al (2019) in their research summarized these identity characteristics into 7 main characteristics namely enthusiasm, enjoyment, appreciation, personal, self-definition, social interaction, and participation. From these 7 characteristics, Vinney et al (2019) further broke it down into 54 statements to describe each characteristic. These statements itself was an adaptation from previous similar studies that focused on different countries (most countries in the United States and European countries) and field of study. The latter was mostly a study on fans of sports, movies, and fictional stories. This study adapted 47 sets of statements taking into consideration cultural differences. Respondents were then asked to rank each statement using a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

In addition to the fans' identity scale, the questionnaire was also equipped with demographic and behavioural questions. The aforementioned questions covered questions on respondents' age, domicile, gender, and occupation. Meanwhile, questions on fan behaviour include ownership of BTS albums, frequency of watching BTS live and online concerts, time spent for an online update on everything related to BTS, and how long one has become an Army BTS.

A quantitative method was implemented using an online questionnaire as the tool. The link to the questionnaire was randomly distributed through social media channels targeting BTS fans. A total of 243

BTS fans became respondents in this study. The entire data taken was then processed analyzed further using a correlation and descriptive approach to provide a complete overview of the fanaticism of BTS fans in Indonesia.

Results and Discussion

The validity of the questionnaire was measured using the Data Reduction Test with a Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) value of 0.956. The result shows the validity of the instrument with the value meeting the 0.50 limit. The result of Cronbach Alpha is 0.977.

Tabel 1: Demographic Table (N=243)

Item	Mean	Std Deviation
Gender	Male	1.2
	Female	98.8
Age	<18 years old	9.5
	18-24 years old	49.4
	25-29 years old	19.3
	30-39 years old	15.6
	> 40 years old	6.2
Occupation	Students	52.3
	Working in private sectors	30.0
	Freelance	11.9
	Civil servants	2.9
	Professional	2.1
City	Jabodetabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi)	63.8
	Surabaya	6.2
	Bandung	9.5
	Sulawesi	4.9
	Others	15.3
Know BTS from	Friends, family	37.9
	Radio/Streaming/Non-streaming platform	32.5
	Media (<i>online/offline</i>)	15.6
	TV	8.6
	Social media	2.9
	(Tiktok, Instagram, Twitter)	2.5
How long have you become fans	Less than 1 year	18.1
	1-3 years old	36.6
	4-6 years old	32.1
	More than 7 years old	13.2
Ownership of BTS album	None	46.5
	Less than 3	29.2
	4-6 pieces	15.2
	More than 7	9.1

Item	Mean	Std Deviation
Watching live	Never	93.4
BTS concerts	1 time	5.3
	2 time	0.8
	More than 2	0.4
	Watching online	Never
live concerts	1 time	10,7
	2 time	18,2
	More than 2	55,8
	Time spent	Less than 1 hour
on fangirling	1-3 hour	37.0
	4-5 hour	19.3
	More than 5 hours	25.5
	Social media	None
followed	1-3 accounts	15.5
	4-5 accounts	11.9
	More than 6 accounts	67.9
	BTS Global	Yes
Official	No	79.4
Membership	Yes	60.5
Merchandise	No	39.5
ownership		

Based on the demographic data above, the number of respondents within the range of 18 – 29 years was striking at 49.4%. It was roughly twice more than other age groups, which predictably made the majority of the BTS fans were students (52.3%). About 155 out of the total 243 respondents are living in Greater Jakarta (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi).

Most respondents were introduced to BTS through “friends/family/girlfriends” and “radio/streaming platforms/YouTube” with 37.9% and 32.5% respectively. Most of them had been fans for more than 5 years (45.3%). This means that they had been supporting their idol since their debut year in 2010. Although most of them were loyal fans, most of the fans were less motivated to own a physical album. Only half of the respondents (53.5%) claimed to have a physical BTS album. Even more, only 6.6% of respondents had seen a live BTS concert although BTS has held concerts in Indonesia twice, which was in 2015 and 2017.

This low buying behaviour on albums and ticket concerts was most likely influenced by how young the fans’ age group is. Since more than 50% of fans were students ranging from high school to university students, the likelihood of them being financially dependent was high. The price of physical albums and concert tickets was considerably expensive. In 2017, a ticket for the BTS concert was sold for a minimum of Rp. 1,000,000, while the average price for a brand-new physical album is about Rp. 300,000 depending on the package chosen (Kistyarini, 2017). A price range that was quite premium for most students. Aside from the price, streaming services as an alternative to enjoying BTS songs also affected fans’ decision to buy physical albums. Currently, there were countless music online streaming and non-streaming services that provide easy access for users to enjoy music without actually buying an album. The platforms ranged from Spotify, AppleMusic, and even video streaming services like Youtube.

Even though most fans were reluctant to buy albums or attend live concerts, more than 60% of them admitted to having watched BTS online concerts and have owned merchandise. From 2020 to 2021 BTS held several online concerts, where each concert consists of 2 consecutive event days. Tickets for this online concert

were priced at Rp. 370,000 for Global BTS membership members and about Rp. 500,000 for non-membership (Pratiwi, 2020). Comparing the online live concerts and live concerts' prices, online concerts seemed to become more affordable options. It came as no surprise that this option was more popular among fans. The recent pandemic situation was also another factor driving this high percentage aside from its affordability. Fans might feel safer watching online concerts in the safety of their home while keeping their social distance; more than 70% of respondents claimed that they bought and watched the online concert more than twice.

In terms of purchased merchandise, this study limited its scope in defining official merchandise as any merchandise that was officially marketed by BigHit Entertainment. It included but was not limited to albums, DVDs, tour/concert merchandise; T-shirts, hoodies, hats, light sticks, BT21, plush toys, and more. It did not however include BTS Meals by McDonald's or BTS drink packages from ChaTime. Approximately 60% of respondents claimed to own official merchandise despite the premium price range. The increase of good quality counterfeit merchandise in the market might be one of the driving factors in this claim. Since the quality of counterfeit/unofficial merchandise was good, fans could pass it as the official one (Octovie, 2019). Compared to official merchandise, unofficial merchandise was cheaper and had more variations. Unofficial merchandise usually were small items such as idols' photos, posters, key chains/mobile phones, and others. Thus, the price could be cheaper compared to the official one. The prices started from Rp. 15,000 depending on the type of goods. In this sense, the number of claimed official merchandise owned by fans might be lower in reality.

"Ownership of BTS album" or "the frequent times of watching live concerts" might be the only parts to roughly measure fans' loyalty level. Other aspects that could be factored into the level of fans loyalty were "time spent for fangirling activity" and "BTS Global membership owned". Most of the respondents (56.5%) had been spending more than 4 hours per day keeping up with the latest update on their idols on social media. This activity included reading the latest news on their idols, checking idols' latest posts, enjoying online fan arts/videos, or just browsing through videos featuring their idols. This number seemed reasonable considering the number of BTS-associated accounts that they had followed. About 67.9% of respondents followed more than 6 social media accounts associated with BTS or even the BTS' official account itself. Even more so, there was about 49% of the respondents claimed to own a fan account dedicated to posting anything related to BTS. BTS itself has accounts on almost all social media platforms. It ranged from YouTube (Bangtan TV), Twitter (@bts_bighit), to Instagram (@bts.bighitofficial). Furthermore, recently each BTS member established their own personal account on Instagram.

In terms of official fan membership, BTS through Bighit Entertainment has launched a fan membership package called BTS Global Official Membership. This official membership provided fans with some exclusive access and priorities including purchasing concert tickets, offers and discounts on concert tickets, and even opportunities to purchase limited-edition merchandise. Despite all those privileges, only 20.6% of the total respondents had bought the BTS Global Official Membership. The price of the membership could be one of the main concerns of the fans. In 2021, a membership would cost a fan ₩25.000 or equal to Rp. 300,000 excluding taxes and shipping costs from South Korea (Allforarmy, 2020). Aside from the registration cost, recurring members needed to pay renewal costs each year to maintain their membership. Fans often feel that there was too much hassle in acquiring the membership through the official sites. They felt that the price and the efforts to acquire it did not commensurate with the benefit of having a BTS Global membership.

Fans' Characteristics

The standard deviation results, as a statistical tool to test data distribution concerning the mean value, showed a fairly small number. This indicated that the data clustered closely in the mean value range. Across the 7 characteristics, the mean value calculated showed an estimate of 5.00. Since the Likert scale used was in the range of 1 to 7, this score meant that in general, all respondents felt positive to express their identity as fans. They were inclined not only to internalize their idols' values and values of being BTS fans but also to externalize them.

Tabel 2: Characteristics of Fans Identity Scale (N=243)

Item	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Enthusiasm	2	7	6,38	0,947
Enjoyment	2	7	6,64	0,808
Appreciation	1	7	6,20	1,204
Personal	1	7	5,86	1,198
Self-Definition	1	7	5,11	1,669
Social Interaction	1	7	5,96	1,124
Participation	1	7	5,31	1,348

In general, fans showed a positive response toward BTS works and personas. They enjoyed BTS works immensely considering the top three characteristics with the highest mean were “enthusiasm”, “enjoyment”, and “appreciation” respectively.

The characteristic “enthusiasm” represented the overall level of fondness they felt towards their idols. The higher the mean, the more they show their interest and inquisitiveness in all things related to their idols. This characteristic included statements like “how much do you love BTS” to “how excited you are about BTS and their works”. Out of 5 statements in “enthusiasm”, “how much do you love BTS and their works” had the highest mean value (6.58), while “how important BTS for you” had the lowest mean value (5.90). This high number was not surprising since all 243 respondents were BTS fans who had mostly become fans for more than 3 years. The latter in return created loyalty and higher enthusiasm toward BTS.

As for the characteristics of “enjoyment”, it represented fans’ level of enjoyment not only toward BTS works (music, videos) but also their members’ achievements, credentials, and even anything that happened in their personal life. This characteristic included statements such as “listening to BTS songs/watching their music videos is enjoyable” to “reading news about BTS/its member is a good way to pass the time”. The statement “BTS is fun” ranked highest (6.71), while “reading news about BTS/its member is a good way to pass the time” ranked the lowest (6.37). This high number corresponded with the fact that most of the respondents (56.5%) had been spending more than 4 hours per day keeping up with the latest update on their idols on social media. They felt that listening to BTS music and fangirling activities as soul-charging and relaxing activities.

“Appreciation” represented how BTS works and the image meant for their fans. It included statements like “BTS is meaningful” to “BTS makes me feel like I am part of something bigger”. The highest mean score was on the statement “BTS helps me think about the things that I value” and “BTS has helped me grow as a person” with both having a mean score of 6.33. “BTS was relevant to my life” scored the lowest (5.88). These high mean scores showed how valuable BTS is for their personal life. They viewed BTS and their works as their main emotional support system since it resonated with their personal life.

The pandemic situation also highly contributed to the high proportion of mean scores. During the pandemic, fans were forced to spend more time at home. Moreover, most outdoor activities, that were carried out before the pandemic, were eventually turned into online-based activities. These then lead to a rise in recent online social media usage as well as other online channels. This phenomenon made it easier for fans to enjoy BTS songs since the majority of BTS works were online and streaming-based. Fans could easily listen to the songs while doing homework, working, and even during the downtime/relaxing time. It was reflected in the data that showed that 90 out of 243 respondents admitted that they spent time doing online fangirling for around 1 to 3 hours per day. Additionally, 25.6% of the respondents said to spend more than 5 hours per day on the internet for this purpose.

This frequent visit to idols’ online channels certainly affected how the related channel read their algorithm. The more they spent time enjoying BTS music videos or related online fan art and/or fiction, the higher probability the channels suggested similar postings. Thus, leading the fans to enjoy more idols’ videos, music, and/or related fan art. One prominent example could be seen in BTS’s official YouTube channel or

BANGTANTV. It had recorded 63.8 million subscribers with Butter’s official MV (Music Video) being seen for more than 692 million up to February 2022, while the rest of BTS MV (Music Videos) also reached the threshold of a million as a trickledown effect.

The other four characteristics, which showed lower mean scores, still have a considerably high mean score with an average score of above 5.00. This suggested that all respondents were passionate fans who highly valued BTS and enjoyed their works very much.

The lowest mean score characteristic was “self-definition” with a score of 5.11. These characteristics were expressed using 3 statements such as “I wouldn’t be the person I am today if it was not for BTS” (5.15), “BTS is part of who I am” (5.12), and “being a fan of BTS is important to my identity” (5.16). The majority of fans felt that their status as Army BTS was a crucial part of their identity. Most of them went as far as making their idols’ photos their profile picture on personal social media accounts. By doing so, they felt that they had shown their love and loyalty toward their idols.

“Personal” characteristic, on the other hand, was representing how fans felt attached to their idols despite the lack of personal interactions. The statement “I think about the success story behind BTS” had the highest mean score of 6.24, while the statement “I feel that my life had something in common with what BTS had been through” scored the lowest with 5.37. This score showed that fans had an emotional bond through BTS songs/ lyrics. They felt that their life was represented through BTS songs/lyrics and even the struggle that each BTS member had been through. BTS works and personal experiences had become the connecting link between the idol and the fans.

Fans were not only invested in BTS and its works emotionally but also projected their admiration externally through social interaction. “Participation” and “social interaction” characteristics as the external characteristic of the fan’s identity showed a considerably high mean score above 4.00. However, one statement in particular still fell below the 4.00 threshold. “I enjoy writing fan fiction about BTS” scored lowest with 3.37. “I enjoy creating fan art about BTS” scored the second lowest with 4.08. The latter include not only fan fiction, but also mashed-up videos, Instagram reels, song compilations, or even a collection of short picture/video clips on the idols.

Table 3: Correlation Table between 7 Characteristics of Fans’ Identity (N=243)

		Enthusiasm	Enjoyment	Appreciation	Personal	Self-defini- tion	Social Inter- action	Participation
Enthusiasm	Pearson Cor- relation	1	.773**	.750**	.761**	.567**	.675**	.685**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000
	N	243	243	243	243	243	243	243
Enjoyment	Pearson Cor- relation	.773**	1	.694**	.677**	.468**	.602**	.550**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000		0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000
	N	243	243	243	243	243	243	243
Apprecia- tion	Pearson Cor- relation	.750**	.694**	1	.825**	.730**	.749**	.680**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000		0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000
	N	243	243	243	243	243	243	243

		Enthusiasm	Enjoyment	Appreciation	Personal	Self-defini- tion	Social Inter- action	Participation
Personal	Pearson Cor- relation	.761**	.677**	.825**	1	.750**	.812**	.751**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,000		0,000	0,000	0,000
	N	243	243	243	243	243	243	243
Self-Defini- tion	Pearson Cor- relation	.567**	.468**	.730**	.750**	1	.727**	.716**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000		0,000	0,000
	N	243	243	243	243	243	243	243
Social Inter- action	Pearson Cor- relation	.675**	.602**	.749**	.812**	.727**	1	.769**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000		0,000
	N	243	243	243	243	243	243	243
Participa- tion	Pearson Cor- relation	.685**	.550**	.680**	.751**	.716**	.769**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	
	N	243	243	243	243	243	243	243

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation test above calculated with the aim to see how strong was the relationship between each character. The absence of negative correlation from calculated data strengthened the previous findings on the fans' identity scale; each characteristic affected each other linearly that can be used to describe other fans' characteristics.

The largest correlation value was between the characteristics of “personal” and “appreciation” with a score of 0.825. The high positive correlation score indicated that fans' “personal” and “appreciation” came hand-in-hand, where the more they feel appreciative of what BTS and BTS' works had done for them, the stronger they feel an emotional attachment towards BTS. This was also part of the underlying reason why fans spent much time updating news or anything related to BTS. They believed by doing so they could not only become part of something big and important but also strengthen and spread BTS's presence in the world. It created a strong sense of belonging for fans, which in return strengthened their identity as fans.

The smallest correlation value is between the characteristic's “pleasure” and “identity” with a score of 0.468. Compared to other relationships that scored more than 0.5, this correlation figure was rather small. However, it still gave a fairly strong relationship. Similar to the previous supposition, listening to BTS songs, watching BTS MVs (Musical Videos), or reading news about BTS provided a certain pleasurable feeling as well as relaxing feelings for fans. The more they feel appreciative of BTS works, the more they have the urge to spread this knowledge within their social circle. The latter is also part of the reason why fans felt the need to contribute to establishing BTS' global presence.

Relationship Between Fans’ Identity and Behaviour

Tabel 4: Correlation Coefficient between 7 Characteristics of Fans’ Identity and Fans’ Behavior

		Frequency of watching online concerts	Time spent fangirling	Official merchandise ownership	Local fan-based mem- bership	BTS-related social me- dia accounts followed	Owning a specific BTS-related account
En- thu- siasm	Correlation Coefficient	.165**	.431**	-.215**	-.319**	.233**	-.208**
Enjoy- ment	Correlation Coefficient	.157*	.370**	-.174**	-.220**	.178**	-0,092
A p- pre- cia- tion	Correlation Coefficient	.156*	.391**	-.168**	-.342**	.162*	-.172**
Per- sonal	Correlation Coefficient	.131*	.455**	-.153*	-.399**	.157*	-.211**
Self-Defi- nition	Correlation Coefficient	.128*	.415**	-.149*	-.406**	0,082	-.220**
Social Inter- action	Correlation Coefficient	.189**	.451**	-.169**	-.415**	.156*	-.275**
P a r - ticipa- tion	Correlation Coefficient	.182**	.459**	-.238**	-.538**	.187**	-.240**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Out of 11 behavioural variables, there were only 6 variables that were significantly correlated with the most of fans’ identity characteristics. The correlation relationships were ranging from positive to negative as well as strong to weak. The strongest positive correlation value was between “time spent for fangirling” and “participation”. This indicated that the more fans spend time doing online/offline fangirling, the more likely they participate in an online fan-based activity such as participating in online discussions, going to fans’ social conventions, or even buying and wearing BTS merchandise. Meanwhile, the strongest negative correlation value was between “local fan-based membership” and “participation”. Unlike the aforementioned relationship, the latter correlation indicated that the more fans applying for local fan membership, the least likely they would participate in an online fan-based activity.

The correlation value between the “frequency of watching online concerts” and 7 characteristics of the fans’ identity scale was positively ranging from 0.128 to 0.189. Although the relationship between the two was significant, the correlation value was fairly weak. Across 7 characteristics that correlated with the “frequency of watching online concerts”, “personal” had the smallest correlation value followed by “appreciation” and “enjoyment” respectively. In the meantime, “social interaction” and the “frequency of watching online concerts” had the biggest correlation value scoring 0.189. The positive correlation value between every 7 characteristics of fans’ identity scale toward the “frequency of watching online concerts” suggested that the more fans watching BTS online concerts, the more they would embed their fanatic tendency into their internal (cognitive and affective) and external (interaction and participation with their social circle).

Compared to the correlation between the “frequency of watching online concerts” and the 7 characteristics, “time spent fangirling” had a stronger relationship with the 7 dimensions though still considerably weak. The correlation values were ranging from 0.370 to 0.459. The fangirling activities could be in the form of checking the latest news on online/offline news channels or even simply checking the posts of BTS-related social media accounts. On one hand, “participation” scored the strongest relationship with 0.459 across the correlation scores between 7 characteristics of the fans’ identity scale and the “time spent fangirling”. This showed that the stronger respondent’s response toward “participation”, the more they were involved in activities relating to idolizing activities or any activities/value represented by their idols. This was clearly shown through their time spent keeping up with the latest news/trends on BTS or even any activities that their idols held. This activity included watching BTS online/live concerts. This reasoning corresponded with the correlation value between the “frequency of watching online concerts” and the 7 characteristics of fans’ identity scale explained previously.

The same phenomenon happened with the “social interaction” dimension. The more frequent the interaction with fellow fans and/or their idols, the greater their desire to watch their idol’s online concerts. Thus, the time allocated to watch BTS online concerts could be one crucial indication to determine the fanaticism level of fans. On the other hand, “enjoyment” scored the lowest with 0.370. The positive value across the whole 7 characteristics of the fans’ identity scale implied that the more respondents showed or admitted their identity as BTS fans, the more time they spent on fangirling activities.

The correlation value between the “official merchandise ownership” and 7 characteristics of the fans’ identity scale was a negative relationship with a range of (-0.238) to (-0.149). The value was quite weak though still considered significant. The negative value showed that the relationship between the two variables was inversely proportional. “Participation” had the strongest correlation value among the other 6 dimensions with (-0.238), while “self-definition” scored the lowest with (-0.149).

Meanwhile, the correlation value between “local fan-based membership” and the 7 characteristics of the fan’s identity scale was in the range (-0.538) to (-0.220). A stronger correlation value compared to the “time spent fangirling”. The strongest relationship was between “local fan-based membership” and “participation” with the value of (-0.538), while the weakest relationship was between “local fan-based membership” and “enjoyment” (-0.220). Both fans’ membership in the local fan-based groups and owning official BTS merchandise were negatively correlated to the 7 characteristics of fans’ identity scale. It showed that being a member of a local fan-based group and owning official merchandise did not immediately translate into a stronger identity scale score.

Indonesian fans buying power might be a crucial factor in affecting the inversely proportional nature of both relationships. The low buying power eventually limits their ways to express their love for BTS. In the end, they were more inclined to show their devotion toward BTS through social raving. Thus, the directly proportional relationship between “time spent fangirling” and the 7 characteristics of the fans’ identity scale. This was also coupled with the pandemic situation. The pandemic not only forced respondents to social distance and increased their use of the internet but also increased their stress levels.

Even before the pandemic situation, idolizing was one of the activities that had a relaxing effect as well as a way for social interaction, both toward fellow fans and the idols themselves. Similar to watching an online concert, “enjoyment” was not only the main driver and motivation but rather “social interaction” between fans and the idol himself. Sharing happiness, excitement, and joy when watching online concerts with fellow fans makes them feel attached to their surroundings (idols and fellow fans) as well as internally actualized (affective, cognitive). This emotional bond in social life most likely made them feel closer among fans who watch the same concert.

On March 12, 2022, BTS in collaboration with CGV Indonesia held a joint viewing event with the title “BTS Permission to Dance on Stage - Seoul Live Viewing”. In this event, the ‘Army’ watched the live broadcast of the BTS concert from Seoul in the movie theatre. This event is held simultaneously in all the theatres they work with. During 195 minutes, the audience was free to turn on the light stick, and fan-chant, as well as recreate the atmosphere of a live concert (Nur Saniyah, 2022). This became a different experience for fans. Watching the online concert in the movie theatre along with other fans created thrilling experiences. Moreover, the social

interaction between fans was more pronounced.

Although in general, the seven dimensions of fan identity had positive relationships with the behavioural variables, few relationships showed negative correlations values such as “official merchandise ownership”, “local fan-based membership”, and “BTS-related social media accounts followed”. The negative nature meant a proportionally inverse relationship between these variables. The stronger the 7 dimensions of fans identity scale did not translate into more official merchandise owned, joining a local fan-based group, or even the number of BTS-related social media followed. Respondents’ age might come into play in the negative nature of these values. Most of the respondents were school-aged fans with more than a half (58.9%) being under the age of 24 years old. Accordingly, they have limited buying power as well as a limited-time allocation for non-school activities, especially hobbies.

These phenomena were quite different compared to the relationship between “time spent fangirling” and the 7 dimensions of the fans’ identity scale. Even though younger fans might have a limited time allocation for non-school activities, they still had plenty of time for social media and online streaming. Social media and online streaming services offered more flexibility compared to other offline idolizing activities. These online activities could be accessed anywhere and anytime. More often than not, these online activities had become a necessity. About 37% of respondents admitted to spent for about 1 to 3 hours a day online fangirling. Furthermore, about 25% of respondents spent more than 5 hours a day online fangirling in the last 6 months. Consequently, it was not surprising that the correlation value between “time spent fangirling” and the 7 dimensions of the fan’s identity scale were positively high value.

Almost all the 7 dimensions of the fan’s identity scale had a positive correlation value with “BTS-related social media accounts followed” except for “self-definition”. “Self-definition” dimension was not significantly correlated with “BTS-related social media accounts followed”, which meant that the lower number of BTS-related social media accounts followed did not affect how they saw themselves as a fan. Instead of that, the number of BTS related social media accounts followed was more reflecting how they expressed their enjoyment and excitement on BTS works and personas. The more BTS-related social media accounts that they followed, the more they feel the joy and excitement of being BTS fans.

Fans’ life on the web were quite intense and high on traffic. However, fans seemed to agree that “owning a specific BTS-related account” did not immediately affect how they saw themselves as a true fan. On the contrary, the relationships between “owning a specific BTS-related account” variables and the 7 dimensions of the fan’s identity scale were inversely proportional. “Owning a specific BTS-related account” showed a non-significant correlation value toward the “enjoyment” dimension. As a matter of fact, creating and owning a fan account (a second account) seemed to reduce the enjoyment of being a fan. More often than not, the second account is used to disclose personal information or even the whole identity of the account owner. Yet, it seemed to be irrelevant for BTS fans. They preferred to show their pride in being BTS fans on their account. They showed it in various ways from the use of BTS members’ photos as a profile picture, BTS member wordplay for username, to social raving on anything related to BTS on their posts or reels.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed a high score on the fans identity scale among Indonesian BTS fans. Despite many negative stereotypes about K-Pop fans in general, BTS fans seemed unaffected. They were able to express and identify themselves freely as BTS within their social circle as well as internalize the values of BTS works and BTS personas.

There were few notable findings in this study. First, there was the positive effect of idolizing BTS on fans’ well-being. High scores in “enjoyment”, “enthusiasm”, and “appreciation” respectively indicated that admiring BTS could give fans relaxing effects, contentment, and even excitement. Although the rest of the dimensions were scored considerably lower, they still scored relatively high above the average threshold with a means value above 5.0. This implied that fans were able to internalize values learned from BTS works and even the values

that the members represented. Some of them felt that BTS were role model worthy, while others felt that their idols understand them due to similar experiences. They felt that BTS have gone through the same experiences. A feeling of camaraderie. This was further highlighted by the high score of “participation” and “social interaction”. The sense of camaraderie heightened a large fan base, creating a sense of belonging. It made them feel a sense of pride whenever they talked about their idols. It further motivated them to create social buzz about their idols’ achievements and their works.

Second, the high loyalty among BTS fans did not necessarily mean a high purchase of official merchandise. Previous research showed that generally in some countries, especially developed countries, a large number of loyal fans could be a strategic target market for merchandising products. The number of variants in merchandise also contributed to fans’ buying behaviour (Jang and Kim, 2019; Pratamasari, 2017). However, that was not the case for BTS fans in Indonesia. The most possible reasons behind this were the age range of BTS fans, who tend to be younger than 24 years old (68%). This relatively young market would certainly affect the market’s buying power. The seller would find it more difficult to sell merchandise at a medium to premium price like what they did in the US, European countries, or even in South Korea. The price standard was not the only problem, the number of counterfeit merchandise circulating in the market also contributed to the low level of sales (Octavie, 2019). Alternatively, merchandise sold at medium to low prices was selling well. Few local businesses like Mcdonald’s, ChaTime, and Kopi Kenangan had proven to create profitable business choices by doing so (Saleh, 2021; Sabandar, 2021).

Third, although the existing business potential for the merchandise market has its limitations, K-Pop fans or fandoms, especially the BTS group, have great potential to be part of the marketing strategy. They are a potential buzzer to increase sales through online engagement. In addition to being the fourth most populous country in the world, Indonesia ranked in the top 4 for the highest number of internet users in the world by 2022 (Statista, 2022). The average time spent by Indonesian netizens on the internet, in general, is 8 hours 52 minutes with Youtube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook as social media channels. most frequently used (Kemp, 2021). In addition, 49% of respondents claimed to have specific social media accounts, dedicated specifically to posting content about BTS. This number also coupled with the high number of respondents (67.9%) in this study that claimed to follow more than 6 special BTS fan-based accounts. This number is fairly large and has great potential as a marketing force.

Fourth, there were a few behavioural variables that could be used as parameters to identify fans’ fanaticism namely “frequency of watching online concerts”, “time spent fangirling”, and “BTS-related social media accounts followed”. These behavioural variables had strong correlation values toward the dimensions within the fan’s identity scale. The stronger these 3 behavioural variables, the more respondents showed or admitted their identity as BTS fans. However, different nature of relationships occurred for “official merchandise owned”, “local fan-based membership”, and “BTS-related social media accounts followed” variables. These 3 behavioural variables had inverse proportional correlation attributes. Moreover, some characteristics within the 7 dimensions of the fan’s identity scale were not significantly correlated with the latter behavioural variables.

There are several suggestions for further research on K-Pop fans in Indonesia, especially BTS Indonesia. First, is the expansion of the scope of the research whether it is in terms of a larger geographical area or larger sample number, considering how diverse the Indonesian population is. In this sense, a fan’s behaviour not only can be well mapped but also can be used as a solid parameter toward other countries. Second future research on the price sensitivity of merchandising and membership as part of monetizing efforts for the entertainment business, since this area was a rather promising business venture with a large market.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the Universitas Nasional for providing the support so that this research can be carried out. We also thank our fellow fan group administrators who are willing to provide the opportunity to share our research link.

References

- Allforarmy., (2020). *Army Membership*. [Online] <<https://allforarmy.com/more/for-army/army-membership/>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- Anggara, R., Kristiana, F.K., (2017). Pengalaman Fanatisme Pada Penggemar Akhbar (AKB) Grup. *Jurnal Empati*. 6(2), 91-97
- Astriningtias, Jihan., (2020). Menyoal Fanatisme K-Pop dan Dampak Psikologisnya. *Ketik Unpad*. [Online] <<https://ketik.unpad.ac.id/posts/388/menyoal-fanatisme-k-pop-dan-dampak-psikologisnya>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- BTSARMYCensus., (2020). *2020 Results*. [Online] <<https://www.btsarmycensus.com/2020-results>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- Chansanam, W., Tuamsuk, K., Kwicien, K., Sutthiprapa, K., & Oh., S., (2021). An analysis of the Korean popular culture on social media: examination of the Thai fandom through Twitter in Thailand. *Journal of management Information and Decision Sciences*, 24(7), 1-16
- Chin, B., & Morimoto, L. H., (2013). Towards a theory of transcultural fandom. *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 10(1), 92-108.
- CNNIndonesia., (2019). Bahaya di Balik Fenomena Candu K-Pop. *CNN Indonesia*. [Online] <<https://www.cnnindonesia.com/hiburan/20190202171900-227-365989/bahaya-di-balik-fenomena-candu-k-pop>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- CNNIndonesia., (2020). BTS Masuk Hall of Fame Guinness World Records 2022. *CNN Indonesia*. [Online] <<https://www.cnnindonesia.com/hiburan/20210903061820-234-689112/bts-masuk-hall-of-fame-guinness-world-records-2022>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- Dong-Woo, Chan., (2020). Let's live on: BTS urges the world's youth to persevere in pressing times of COVID-19. *YonHap News Agency*. [Online] <<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20200923013200315>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- Hassan, F., (1981). *Kamus Istilah Psikologi*. Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.
- Hofer, M., (2013). Appreciation and Enjoyment of Meaningful Entertainment. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 25(3), 109-117. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000089>
- Intan, Putu., (2020). Turis Datang ke Korea karena K-Pop, Indonesia Mau Tiru? *Detik Travel* [Online] <<https://travel.detik.com/travel-news/d-5097322/turis-datang-ke-korea-karena-k-pop-indonesia-mau-tiru>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- Jang, Y. S., Ko, Y. J., & Kim, S. Y., (2016). Cultural correlates of national innovative capacity: a cross-national analysis of national culture and innovation rates. *JOITmC*, 2, 23
- Ji-Soo, Kim., (2022). K-Pop Hallyu Continue Global Rise. *The Korea Times*. [Online]. <<http://m.koreatimes.co.kr/pages/article.asp?newsIdx=281957>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- Kemp, Simon., (2021). *Digital 2021 Indonesia by Hootsuite We Are Social*. Hootsuite [Online] <<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-indonesia>> Retrieved 17 Februari 2022
- Khairunnisa, D., (2019). *Budaya K-pop dan Kehidupan Sosial Remaja (Studi Kasus Pada Mahasiswa Jurusan IPS Fakultas Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta)*. [Comprehensive Paper]. Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta
- Kistayarini., (2017). Tiket Konser BTS Ludes, di Calo Ditawarkan Rp 9 Juta. *Kompas*. [Online] <<https://entertainment.kompas.com/read/2017/04/07/101134910/tiket.konser.bts.ludes.di.calo.ditawarkan.rp.9.juta?page=all>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- Kloet, J. D. & Zoonen, L. V., (2007). Fan Culture: Performing Difference. In Eoin D., *Media Studies: Key Issues and Debates*, 322-341. London: Sage Publication.
- Laffan, D. A., (2020). Positive Psychosocial Outcomes and Fanship in K-Pop Fans: A Social Identity Theory

- Perspective. *Psychological Reports*, 124(5), 2272–2285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294120961524>
- Lestari., (2021). Dianggap Bawa Pengaruh ‘Negatif’ di Pakistan, Iklan Billboard Ulang Tahun Jungkook BTS Dicapot. *Pikiran Rakyat*. [Online] <<https://pangandaran.pikiran-rakyat.com/entertainment/pr-102527234/dianggap-bawa-pengaruh-negatif-di-pakistan-iklan-billboard-ulang-tahun-jungkook-bts-dicapot>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- Lozano Delmar, J., Plaza, J. F., & Sanchez-Martin, M., (2020). An Approach to Defining the Identity of a Media Fan. *Palabra Clave*, 23(2), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.5294/pacla.2020.23.2.3>
- Nursalikhah, Ani., (2020). Dunia Fandom, Benarkah Penggemar K-Pop Berperilaku Buruk? *Republika* [Online] <<https://www.republika.co.id/berita/qeqwfa366/dunia-fandom-benarkah-penggemar-kpop-berperilaku-buruk>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- Nursaniyah, Fitri., (2022). CGV Umumkan Live Viewing Konser BTS Permission to Dance on Stage Seoul Hadir di Indonesia. *Kompas*. [Online] <<https://www.kompas.com/hype/read/2022/02/24/162310666/cgv-umumkan-live-viewing-konser-bts-permission-to-dance-on-stage-seoul?page=all>> Retrieved 22 February 2022
- Octavie, Delya., (2019). Lika-liku Berburu Merchandise BTS : Terlalu Antusias Sampai Rawan Tertipu. *Surya*. [Online] <<https://surabaya.tribunnews.com/2019/06/23/lika-liku-berburu-merchandise-bts-terlalu-antusias-sampai-rawan-tertipu>> Retrieved 22 February 2022
- Oliver, M. B., & Bartsch, A., (2011). Appreciation of Entertainment: the Importance of Meaningfulness via Virtue and Wisdom. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 23(1), 29-33. doi: 10.1027/1864-1105/a000029
- Park, H., (2021). *Understanding Hallyu: The Korean Wave Through Literature, Webtoon, and Mukbang*. Routledge
- Plante, C. N., Reysen, S., Roberts, S. E., & Gerbasi, K. C., (2016). *FurScience! A Summary of Five Years of Research from the International Anthropomorphic Research Project*. Waterloo, Ontario: FurScience
- Pratamasari, A., (2017). International Business Strategy in Selling Korean Pop Music: A Case Study of SM Entertainment. *Journal Global & Strategis*, 10(2), 221-234.
- Pratiwi., (2020). Harga dan Cara Beli Tiket Konser Online BTS Bang Bang Con the Live, Tonton Juga BTS Festa 2020. *Surya*. [Online] <<https://surabaya.tribunnews.com/2020/06/06/harga-dan-cara-beli-tiket-konser-online-bts-bang-bang-con-the-live-tonton-juga-bts-festa-2020>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- Rae, K. B., (2015). Past, Present, and Future of Hallyu (Korean Wave). *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 5(5), 154-160
- Rahmayani. (2020). V BTS Ultah, ARMY Indonesia Rayakan dengan Aksi Perahu Taehyung Bantu Nelayan. *Karawang Post*. [Online] <<https://karawangpost.pikiran-rakyat.com/regional/pr-1423354667/v-bts-ultah-army-indonesia-rayakan-dengan-aksi-perahu-taehyung-bantu-nelayan>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- Reysen, S., & Branscombe, N. R., (2010). Fanship and fandom: Comparisons between sport and non-sport fans. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 33(2),176-193
- Rubin, A. M., Perse, E. M., & Powell, R. A., (1985). Loneliness, Parasocial Interaction, and Local Television News Viewing. *Human Communication Research*, 12(2), 155-180
- Saleh, Tahir., (2021). Heboh BTS Meal, Siapa dibalik Investor McD Indonesia. *CNBC Indonesia*. [Online] <<https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/market/20210610095440-17-251968/heboh-bts-meal-siapa-di-balik-investor-mcd-indonesia>> Retrieved 17 February 2022
- Sabandar, Switzy., (2021). Setelah McD, Giliran Chatime di Yogyakarta Diserbu Penggemar BTS. *Liputan 6*. [Online] <<https://www.liputan6.com/regional/read/4789151/setelah-mcd-giliran-chatime-di-yogyakarta-diserbu-penggemar-bts>> Retrieved 17 February 2022
- Statista., (2022). Countries with the Highest Number of Internet Users as of February 2022. [Online] <Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262966/number-of-internet-users-in-selected-countries/>> Retrieved 22 Feb 2022

- Sugiyono., (2015). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta
- Smutradontri, P., & Gadavanij, S., (2020). Fandom and identity construction: an analysis of Thai fans' engagement with Twitter (Vol. 7, Issue 1). *Springer Science and Business Media LLC*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00653-1>
- Tartila, P. L., (2013). Fanatisme Fans K-pop dalam Blog Netizenbuzz. *Jurnal Unair*.
- Taqwin, Y. N., (2016). *Perilaku Penemuan Informasi pada Komunitas KPop "Ever Lasting"*. [Thesis]. Universitas Airlangga
- Thorne, S., & Bruner, G. C., (2006). An Exploratory Investigation of The Characteristics of Consumer Fanaticism. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 9(1), 51–72. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13522750610640558>
- TribunNews. (2021). BTS ARMY Indonesia Lawan Stigma Negatif Fandom K-Pop dengan Kampanye Kesehatan Mental. *TribunNews*. <<https://www.tribunnews.com/parapuan/2021/07/02/bts-army-indonesia-lawan-stigma-negatif-fandom-k-pop-dengan-kampanye-kesehatan-mental>> Retrieved 16 February 2022
- Vinney, C., Dill-Shackleford, K. E., Plante, C. N., & Bartsch, A., (2019). Development and Validation of a Measure of Popular Media Fan Identity and Its Relationship to Well-being. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 8(3), 296–307. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000188>
- Williams, J. P., & Ho, S. X. X., (2015). "Sasaengpaen" or K-pop Fan? Singapore Youths, Authentic Identities, and Asian Media Fandom. *Deviant Behavior*, 37(1), 81–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2014.983011>
- Yuanita, S (2012). *Korean Wave*. IdeaTerra Media Pustaka

