

Parasocial Interaction K-Pop Idol Fandom: ARMY BTS on Twitter

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Abstract

Fans' devotion towards their idols encourages the growth of social behavior, namely parasocial interactions: imitation behavior and imaginary relationships that produce various social and personal consequences for fans. ARMY is a fans group of BTS: Boyband from South Korea, which builds interaction and communication with fellow members and disseminates information regarding BTS via Twitter. ARMY's behavior on Twitter can be seen as a pseudo-friendship that encourages fans to do things for their idols and a sense of companionship. This study explains how heart-warming fans build these parasocial interactions and draws patterns of verbal and non-verbal communication in uploads on the ARMY Fandom Twitter account @btsarmyinaamino. Affection Exchange Theory and case study methods are used to analyze how affection generates motivation, and communicate it verbally on Twitter to fulfil the individual's own need for affection and attention. The use of symbols that are closely related to ARMY and BTS identities is also seen to be used intensively as an attempt to translate the imaginary relationship between fans and their idols so that fans believe that what they do is noticed and appreciated by their idols, and in the end makes them feel comfortable.

Keywords : Parasocial Interaction, Affection Exchange Theory, Twitter, BTS, ARMY

Introduction

Fans or Fandom is a term used to describe a group of people who have the same interests from various aspects (Haenfler, 2016; Zhao, 2022). Modern fan culture originates from the Star Trek fandom in the 1960s (Hellekson & Busse, 2006) which shows how a group of people are emotionally involved and become part of a larger group (fandom). Jenkins (2006) provides an interesting statement about fannish behavior as a convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006) which is built based on collective information in the fandom.

The unique characteristic of fandom is the emergence of an exceptional identity belonging to the fandom which can be used by fans who are members as a tool to identify each other and build engagement between fandom members. (Busse, 2011). By utilizing today's communication and information technology, fandom moves responsively and anticipates changes by being part of these changes. One of the fandom responses relates to the behavior of spreading information and their various creations through fanzine which are carried out using social media and the internet so that more people are interested in the community. With the internet and social media, fandom has become more widely known and easily accessible (Haenfler, 2016).

The internet and social media have become comfortable spaces for fandoms. Fandoms formed after 2000 are classified as cyber fandoms by optimizing the use of the internet in

their activities (Gooch, 2008). Interactivity is one of the factors that allows the internet to move more dynamically, this can also be interpreted as the degree to which participants have control over their roles, in mutual participant dialogue in the communication process (Severin & Tankard, 2005; Coyle & Thorson, 2001) as well as the exchange of information that crosses the boundaries of roles and message recipients, such as social media Twitter (Yumma, Sabila, & Fadhillah, 2020).

Twitter for K-Pop fandom is a medium with high interactivity making it easy for fandoms to improve and grow fandom communities (Ambronsius & Rahman, 2022; Ahdiat, 2022). There were 7.8 billion Tweets about K-Pop in 2021 with Indonesia as the first place with the most volume of tweets discussing K-Pop on Twitter (Kim Y. J., 2021; Rizaty, 2022).

Twitter is a social media platform that is commonly used by fandoms to spread idol activities, such as inviting to watch streaming comebacks when idols enter their promotional period (Julianti, Rey.id, 2023) to increase the number of views of his idol's music video. The form of tweets used contains words of encouragement, predictive analysis of opportunities to win competitions, and holds giveaways so that more people watch their idol's music videos (Fadhila, 2021).

The use of social media does not stop only for fandoms. For anti-fans (a term for groups that are in the opposite position or hate certain idols) social media is also an effective tool for spreading hate speech using harsh words, vulgarity, and misleading visualizations (Ambronsius & Rahman, 2022). This became one of the factors that ultimately led to reactions of mutual blasphemy and mutual hatred between fandoms known as fans-wars as an effort to "defense" their idols who were attacked on social media.

Aggressiveness, fanaticism, and imitation are things that are often associated with the behavior of fans to identify themselves as fandoms. How to dress, how to speak, hairstyle, make-up, and parts of the face are trying to be imitated (Lathifah, Herman, & Yusaputra, 2018; Razi, Siregar, & Zulkarnain, 2018) and have an impact on impulsive behavior buying identical things (Kam, 2019), plastic surgery to resemble their idols (Lenthang, 2022) and so on. We can see another interesting example in the behavior of fans hunting for the BTS Meal, a marketing product from McDonalds in 2021 which generated a wave of trends in 50 countries including Indonesia. The behavior of fans in hunting for items related to their idols is part of the fans' efforts to identify themselves with their idol fandom and in some cases this activity seems to prove the loyalty of fans to their idols (Yuniarti, 2015; Riona & Krisdinanto, 2021).

The intensity of media users using social media to see their idol figures can lead to parasocial relationships and interactions (Riona & Krisdinanto, 2021). The basic assumption of parasocial relationships is that characters (fictional or non-fictional) who appear regularly in the media will trigger social information processing in media users (Giles D. C., 2002). Parasocial interaction describes the closeness that the audience feels when they see their favorite figures in the media, even to the point of imitating the behavior or actions of their favorite figures (Theran, Newberg, & Gleason, 2010).

Parasocial interactions have both positive and negative impacts. The emergence of close and friendship relationships from parasocial interactions that can motivate fans, meet social needs, and be alone (Farrar, 2023; Jarzyna, 2021). Meanwhile, negative parasocial

interactions are in the form of feelings of antipathy, such as hatred and disgust for certain idols (Astagini, Kaihatu, & Prasetyo, 2017), to the point of causing anxiety and social isolation, especially when social media is involved (Farrar, 2023) and lead to unrealistic expectations of yourself and those around you (Pane, 2022).

Method

In this study, the method used is a case study regarding the fandom boy band from South Korea BTS named ARMY which is a hot topic in the realm of the music and entertainment industry. The research focuses on text interactions carried out by fans who are members of the ARMY fandom in Indonesia through Twitter social media. Data collection was carried out using selective coding techniques on re-tweets and the content shared by fans using the ARMY fandom Twitter account *@btsarmyinaamino*.

Results and Discussion

BTS and ARMY:

BTS (Bangan Sonyeondan) is a boy group originating from South Korea and debuted in the entertainment world in 2013 by a music company called Big Hit Entertainment. BTS has 7 members, namely Kim Namjoon (RM), Kim Seokjin (Jin), Jung Hoseok (J-Hope), Min Yoongi (Suga), Kim Taehyung (V), Park Jimin (Jimin), and Jeon Jungkook (JK)). BTS is known to the world since its emergence as an anomaly in the American music industry in 2017 by winning Top Social Artist beating Justin Bieber and topping the Billboard charts with only Korean songs. Forbes ranked BTS 5th Korea Power Celebrity, Next Generation Leader by Times. BTS' involvement with UNICEF in the "Love MySelf" campaign in 2017 had a significant impact not only for BTS but also for UNICEF.

BTS fandom later known as ARMY (Adorable Representative MC For Youth) is known as a very active fandom on social media. ARMY is growing very fast. As of 2023, BTS official Twitter has 43 million followers and 75 million subscribers on YouTube BigHit (now HYBE).

ARMY in Indonesia recorded themselves as many as 4 million fans. This figure places Indonesia as the 3rd (three) largest BTS fandom after South Korea and the United States. The majority of ARMY are active on Twitter and Instagram social media and not a few have a special Youtube channel for fans with varied content that touches all aspects and genres of entertainment.

Parasocial Interactions

1. Sense of Companionship ARMY towards BTS

The emotional relationship that exists between fans and their idols is a common thing that happens in various fan communities, sports, arts, music, films, and so on. Emotional connection is also one of the factors that drives ARMY's engagement with BTS to grow stronger (Handaningtias, 2023). Through various content shared by BTS on social media, ARMY obtains not only information but also more personal attention and closeness to each BTS member and ultimately builds strong engagement with fans (Handaningtias, 2023). The key to this engagement is the constant communication and interaction that BTS has with

ARMYs, thus ARMYs are in an imaginary attachment that they are close to BTS and become part of BTS's daily life.

There are several factors that encourage the growth of a sense of companionship ARMY towards BTS, namely: 1. The urge to find out more quickly and the latest information about BTS, 2. The urge to always watch content related to BTS, 3. The urge to be part of BTS, 4. The encouragement to meet in person, 5. Encouragement to follow BTS's suggestions and recommendations, 6. Encouragement to create a comfortable or safe space for fellow ARMYs, 7. Encouragement to share information, ideas, or content related to BTS, 8. Encouragement to see BTS as old friends or best friends.

The urge to find out more quickly and the latest information about BTS results in ARMY's behavior to continuously watch content related to BTS through various platforms, not just Twitter. This behavior also indirectly encourages ARMY to create their own content that contains information and news related to BTS, and directly disseminates this content through their social media accounts. This is in line with the drive to create their own information and news content related to BTS according to ARMY's passion and imagination.

The inclination to create their own content has been shown by BTS since the beginning of its debut. As a new group, BTS didn't have many opportunities to appear on television shows, and from here BTS started to create their own entertainment content for the army (Run BTS, BTS in the SOOP, Bon Voyage) on social media. The content became a trend and the Army was not left behind. Various contents are created according to ARMY's needs, imagination, and fantasy as fans of their idols, and furthermore as messages about BTS that can be accessed widely without being bound by broadcast time and capital.

The yearning to continuously watch content or information related to BTS by ARMY is part of the sense of companionship that arises in a person as a result of socializing and spending time with other individuals. Army generally spends 5 hours a day looking for information related to their idol BTS on Twitter. Moreover, the need to be part of BTS, related to ARMY's belief that they and BTS are comrades in arms. As revealed by ARMY through documentation edited by fans (XCeleste, 2019; Bangtan, 2023), that the journey of BTS music which is not easy and full of challenges in the music and entertainment industry is the same as ARMY's own struggles in introducing BTS music to various groups. The same thing was also expressed by BTS in various interview opportunities. This seems to provide an emotional attachment that BTS and ARMY are a unit that fights together.

The urge to meet BTS in person brought ARMY into an imaginary world that what ARMY is doing will bring them to BTS one day. This behavior is manifested by purchasing goods bearing the logo of BTS or BTS affiliates (Tiny Tan, BT21, etc.) as normal behavior. And this brings us to the next factor, namely the inclination to follow BTS' recommendations, suggestions, or words so that various products that are promoted by BTS or not promoted by BTS are sold out (Hanifah & Kania, 2019; Thurs, 2019).

Thereafter is the push to create a comfortable space for ARMYs to share stories, information, or editing content that they create to realize ARMY's fantasies and imagination about BTS. For fans, this can be a safe zone from criticism and blasphemy from other people who are considered not to understand the hobby or passion that exists within a fan towards their idol. Likewise what happened to the ARMY. Blasphemy and criticism of the biggest fandom in the world no longer makes ARMYs feel comfortable. Therefore Twitter is

managed by fellow ARMYs and interactions that only take place on ARMY's social media accounts can provide a sense of security and comfort. This experience encouraged ARMY to create more safe zones for other ARMYs and in the end it made ARMY the fandom with the fastest and fastest growth of social media accounts.

Consequently is the end result of all ARMY's imagination towards their idol, namely that they are good friends. As good friends, communication, interaction, attention, affection, and mutual sacrifice are the conditions for a lasting relationship. ARMY interactions on social media are of course virtual, imaginary interactions and are included in pseudo-friendship which are often present in all parasocial interactions.

2. ARMY Symbolic Affection (ARMY's verbal and non-verbal communication)

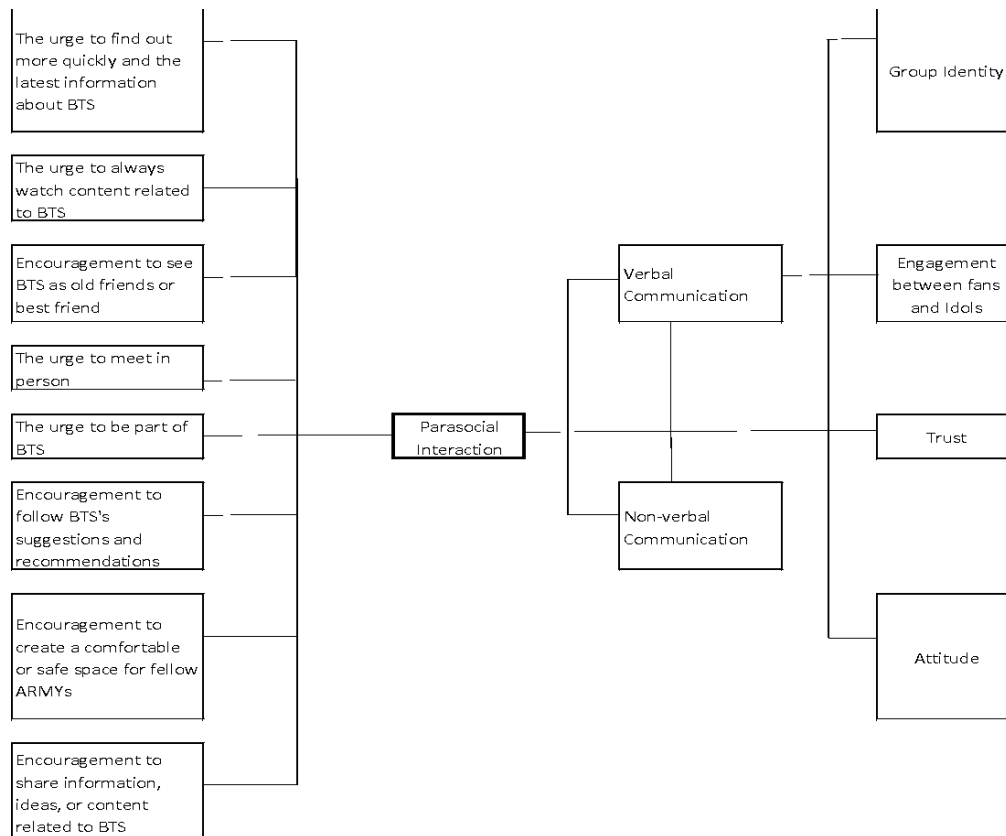
The symbolic affection built by ARMY is a form of fandom identification with their idols. The symbolic affection carried out by ARMY can be observed through verbal and non-verbal communication uploaded by ARMY on Twitter. Conveying feelings and thoughts with words of affection, 'husband', 'boyfriend', 'youngest', and various other intimate expressions via tweets illustrates how verbal communication is carried out as a form of conveying ARMY's affection for BTS. It can be understood how ARMY's twitter texts communicate affection and offer support for BTS both verbally and non-verbally (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017).

Nonverbal communication of affection is expressed through the actions that ARMY gives to BTS. Actions such as forming a special account for learning Korean, accounts for donations, watching events with BTS concerts, and various expressions that are symbolically expressed through tweets. Other forms of non-verbal support that can be considered are streaming BTS songs on various platforms to increase the rating or rank of the song on the charts (song charts), buying 'love yourself' merchandise as support for BTS and UNICEF campaigns, buying albums in various series, to humanitarian donation which is ARMY's main project around the world. All ARMY activities are informed through ARMY tweets, no matter how small, however simple, starting from just posting the latest album of RM, Suga, Jimin, or video editing fans on Jungkook's MV teaser, everything is still tweeted and re-tweeted.

Table 1. Element of Content and Action on Verbal and Non-verbal Communication ARMY's on Twitter

Verbal Communication	Non-verbal Communication
Intimate sentences build personal closeness	Watching BTS content builds emotional attachment
Informative sentences provide the same understanding and comprehension	Fan editing videos and other creative works (photos, sketches, animations, fan-pic) build the same imagination.
Words of support build confidence and the group	Donation activities, study together, group chat, watch movies together, build new experiences as part of a group.

Through this verbal and non-verbal communication, ARMY Indonesia builds their identity as part of the worldwide BTS fandom. This identity is not just a characteristic or attributes of the group, but more than that, fans feel that identity as a BTS ARMY gives them a sense of comfort and security, more confidence, and opens up opportunities to communicate and interact in the larger community. This interaction brought the ARMY fandom into a trusting relationship with the same beliefs and behavior. We can find out the pattern of this relationship in the image below:



Source: Research result

Gambar 1. ARMY's Parasocial Interaction Pattern on Twitter

Conclusion

ARMY's heart-warming parasocial interactions with their idol BTS are expressed through verbal and non-verbal communication. Building group identity; the involvement of the fandom and its idols; trust; and ARMY's behavior towards their idols is the result of verbal and non-verbal communication by Indonesian ARMY. Fans' affective relationships in the form of imitation behavior and pseudo-friendship are formed due to some encouragement or need, such as seeking information about BTS; encouragement to watch BTS related content; the need to be a friend or best friend of BTS; the need to meet directly with BTS; encouragement to be a part of BTS; encouragement to follow advice and suggestions from BTS; the need to create a safe and comfortable space for fans; and encouragement to share ideas, information and content about BTS on social media.

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