



THE RISE OF K-POP FANS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: FANATICISM OR SELF-DISCOVERY?

Saidahyana Sarabity¹, Petrus Ana Andung^{2*}, and Maria Yulita Nara³

^{1,2,3} Nusa Cendana University (Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Nusa Cendana University, Kupang, Indonesia)

*Corresponding Email: petrusanaandung@staf.undana.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The diverse features provided by the social media platform Instagram significantly enhance its appeal, establishing it as an attractive medium for users to develop social networks. This includes facilitating parasocial interactions between fans and their idols, who are often public figures such as actresses. A prominent example is the boy band Bangtan Boys (BTS), whose official Instagram account enables global fan interactions without temporal limitations. This study aims to elucidate the communicative acts within virtual spaces and their associated meanings, while also analyzing the underlying motives that drive fans to engage in parasocial interactions. Employing a qualitative methodology with a virtual ethnography approach, the study utilized virtual observation and interviews as data collection techniques. The findings reveal that ARMY members actively engage in parasocial interactions through the official BTS Instagram account. These interactions give rise to distinct communication behaviors among fans, categorized into groups such as ARMY shippers, ARMY solo stans, ARMY defenders, ARMY Positive Vibes, ARMY Emoji, and ARMY Akgae. Additionally, the observed communication behaviors result from the construction of meaning through symbolic exchanges. The symbolic meanings embedded in these interactions include representations of balance and completeness through paired interactions, the portrayal of idols as role models, expressions of intense devotion, and the symbolism of fans as approachable and empathetic. Finally, the parasocial interactions of BTS K-Pop fans, apart from showing their fanaticism towards their idols, can also be interpreted as a process of self-discovery for adolescents.

Keywords: (a) Parasocial interaction, (b) ARMY fandom, (c) Communication Actions, (d) Social media, (e) Virtual ethnography, (f) Self-Discovery

1. INTRODUCTION

By the end of 2023, the growth of internet users in Indonesia has been remarkable. The number of internet users between 2022 and 2023 increased to 215.63 million, indicating a significant expansion (Anonymous, 2023). With the total population of Indonesia estimated at 278.6 million in 2023, approximately 77.4% of the population are internet users. This growth highlights the extensive integration of internet usage in the daily lives of Indonesians. Among these users, a substantial 60.4%, equating to around 167 million individuals, utilize social media through various digital devices (Riyanto, 2023). The prevalence of social media usage demonstrates its importance as a platform for communication, information exchange, and entertainment. The increasing number of internet and social media users reflects a broader digital transformation in Indonesia, shaping the country's technological landscape and influencing

Saidahyana Sarabity, Petrus Ana Andung, and Maria Yulita Nara

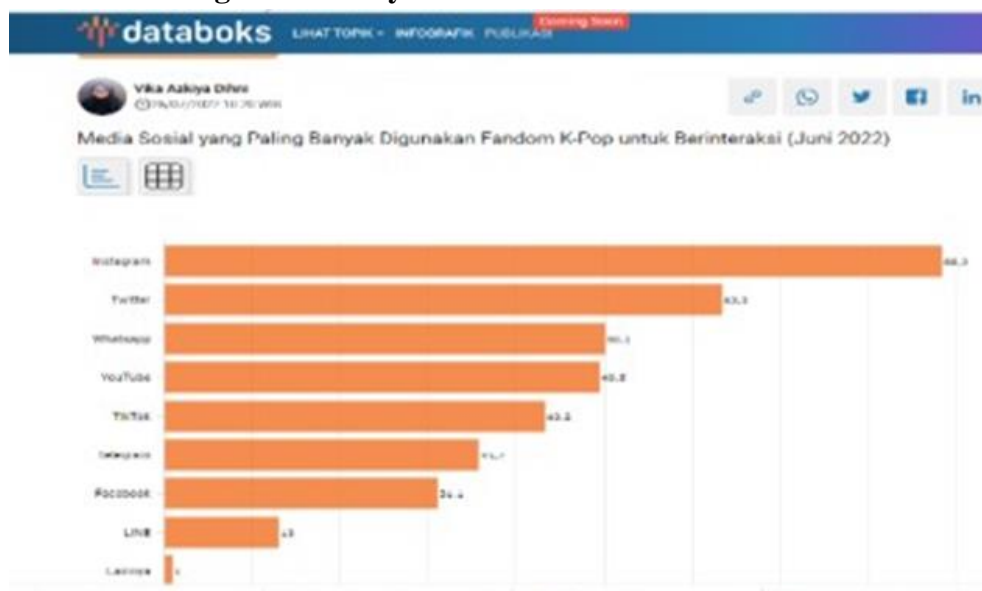
Cendana International Conference on Social and Political Science:

Global Knowledge Production from the Southern Region in Social Science 2024



various aspects of societal interaction and engagement. One of the most popular social media platforms, especially among the younger generation, is Instagram. It has emerged as a highly favored social media platform among a diverse demographic. This platform is recognized as a premier public medium, engaging users across the globe through its easily accessible internet interface. Instagram facilitates the sharing of photos and videos, allowing followers to engage with content directly in their feed. The platform boasts several innovative features, including an integrated camera equipped with captivating filters, editing capabilities, and options for adding captions to facilitate sharing. Moreover, the comment section offers a translation function, enhancing the ease with which users can communicate across linguistic barriers. Instagram's broad array of functionalities encompasses various activities, including the interaction of users who idolize K-pop artists or specific groups. K-pop, as one of the music genres coming from South Korea, has now become a social phenomenon that is engulfing the younger generation in Indonesia (Handoko, Rahaju, & Siaputra, 2024). A survey conducted among K-pop fandom respondents on social media is presented in the subsequent figure 1:

Figure 1. Survey Results of Social Media Users



Source: Databoks, (2022)

The survey results reveal that 88.35% of respondents identified Instagram as the most preferred social media platform among K-pop fandoms. These findings underscore Instagram's substantial influence on interactions within the K-pop fandom. In the realm of K-pop, fandoms wield significant influence. Nearly every K-pop boy band has its dedicated fandom (fan clubs), each characterized by unique names and traits. A prominent example is the A.R.M.Y, an acronym for "Adorable Representative M.C for Youth," which also translates to "army" in English. This fanbase is devoted to BTS, a K-pop boy band formed on June 13, 2013, under Big

Saidahyana Sarabity, Petrus Ana Andung, and Maria Yulita Nara

Cendana International Conference on Social and Political Science:

Global Knowledge Production from the Southern Region in Social Science 2024



Hit Entertainment, now rebranded as HYBE Labels. BTS has ascended to become one of the most prominent South Korean groups, particularly noted for its extensive social media footprint and numerous accolades, both national and international, attesting to their expansive global fandom (Indriani & Kusuma, 2022).

Social media serves as a conduit for ARMY members to connect with their idols, fostering an atmosphere reminiscent of interpersonal communication. BTS maintains a dynamic social media presence, regularly updating their accounts with content that includes direct engagements with the camera, simulating face-to-face interaction with their audience. This phenomenon aligns with Hartmann's assertion (as cited in Sagita & Kadewandana, 2019) that individuals in media direct their social and communicative behaviors towards their audience in ways akin to interpersonal interaction, including greetings, eye contact, winks, and direct communication through multiple modalities.

The continuous interpersonal communication approach employed by idols engenders a perceived closeness among fans. BTS's Instagram account, replete with daily activity posts, enhances this perceived intimacy between fans and their idols. However, this sense of closeness is largely illusory and one-sided, a phenomenon known as a parasocial relationship.

The concept of parasocial interaction was first introduced by Horton and Wohl, describing an emotional connection that fans establish with their idols, particularly celebrities. This relationship is characterized by fans experiencing a sense of familiarity and closeness to their idols. Despite these feelings of attachment, this relationship is merely a fantasy and an illusion, lacking the mutual acknowledgment and interaction typical of genuine relationships (Rahmawati & Hermina, 2024). A parasocial interaction or relationship describes a social phenomenon where an individual invests considerable energy, emotions, interest, and time in a figure who does not reciprocate this attention.

Through a preliminary virtual observation, the author identified the top eight K-pop boy bands based on their Instagram followings: GOT7 with 1.3 million followers, Wanna One with 2.9 million, Astro with 4.8 million, Monsta X with 6.6 million, EXO with 10 million, Seventeen with 11 million, NCT with 15.5 million, and BTS with an astounding 71.7 million followers. This overwhelming number evidences BTS's position as the group with the largest global fandom. Examination of the Instagram account @bts.bighitofficial reveals that ARMY members express their emotional investment in the band through various interactions, including an average of 3,832 comments per post, alongside likes and tagged posts. "These methods represent how fans convey their admiration for their idols or biases," commented @susan_cassandra, a BTS fan and follower of @bts.bighitofficial, during a virtual interview conducted by the author.

A virtual observation conducted by the researcher uncovered that on June 9, 2023, BTS's official Instagram account featured three posts commemorating their 10th anniversary, followed by nine posts on June 15, 2023, announcing a celebratory event on June 17, 2023, in Yeouido, South Korea. These twelve posts elicited substantial engagement from ARMY members, with comments surpassing 20,000 on certain posts. "BTS's official account serves as the epicenter for



ARMY worldwide, providing the most current updates on BTS," stated @susan_casandra, highlighting the pivotal role of BTS's official Instagram as a central hub for ARMY interactions and emotional expressions.

Numerous prior studies have explored this topic. The first study, titled "K-Pop Fanaticism Through Social Media: A Study on the Boyband iKON Fanpage Instagram Account," reveals that fans exhibit intense love and admiration through their fanatic behaviors on social media (Wishandy, Loisa, & Utami, 2019). The second study, titled "The EXO-L Community in Yogyakarta City," reports that K-Pop fans demonstrate a considerable level of fanaticism (Juwita, 2018). The third study highlights that K-Pop fans in Surabaya manifest their fanaticism by engaging with groups on social media, attending fan meetings, participating in fan projects, and creating symbolic meanings associated with their self-identity (Dewi Rahma & Machfud Fauzi, 2023). However, these previous studies have not thoroughly examined the underlying motives behind fans' engagement in parasocial interactions. This gap in the literature underscores the need for this research.

The research questions to be addressed are as follows:

- 1) How do parasocial interactions among K-Pop fans manifest in virtual spaces?
- 2) How are cyber communication actions among K-Pop fans enacted within these virtual environments?
- 3) What is the significance of the symbolic messages derived from the cyber communication actions of K-Pop fans in virtual spaces?

Based on these research questions, this study aims to elucidate the communicative acts within virtual spaces and their associated meanings, while also analyzing the underlying motives that drive fans to engage in parasocial interactions.

This study utilized the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism as originally proposed by George Herbert Mead. Symbolic interactionism fundamentally revolves around the unique human practices of communication and the exchange of symbols laden with meaning (Mulyana, 2013). According to Blumer, a key advocate of this theory, people exist in a realm of symbols to which they continually ascribe meanings, guiding their actions. Thus, the production, perpetuation, and mediation of symbolic meanings occur through social interactions (Roth, 2021). Symbolic interactionism is concerned with the process of meaning-making that leads to action. It focuses on generating, conveying, or communicating the meanings associated with symbols relating to objects, individuals, and events (University, Anthonia, & Nyanayon, 2022).

Symbolic interactionism is based on several key assumptions: individuals initially respond to situations in their environment—comprising both physical entities and social behaviors—based on the meanings embedded in these environmental elements. Responses to situations are not automatic or dictated solely by external factors but are shaped by the specific social interactions encountered. Consequently, each person is seen as actively shaping their environment. Meaning, as a product of social interaction, is not inherent in objects but is negotiated through language. This negotiation is possible because humans have the capacity to name not only tangible objects,



actions, or events but also abstract concepts. Furthermore, the meanings individuals derive can evolve over time, reflecting changes in their social interactions. Such shifts in interpretation are feasible because individuals can engage in cognitive processes, interact with others, and envision or plan future actions (Mulyana, 2013).

This research offers significant contributions on both theoretical and practical fronts. Theoretically, the study enhances the academic body of knowledge within the field of communication science, particularly in advancing symbolic interaction theory. It posits that social action is not solely derived from the meaning of symbols exchanged through tangible, real-world interactions but also incorporates elements from the virtual realm. Practically, the findings are invaluable for the community, particularly for families and educational institutions, as they provide insights into the behaviors of the younger generation in the digital age. This understanding serves as a foundational reference for devising effective educational strategies and approaches tailored to this generation.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

Research Paradigm and Type of Research

A paradigm constitutes the foundational belief system underpinning scientific thought, encompassing ontological, epistemological, and methodological dimensions. Philosophically, a paradigm serves as an initial framework that delineates, clarifies, and refines an individual's cognitive orientation. This framework bears practical consequences for behavioral patterns, cognitive processes, interpretative approaches, and policy decisions regarding issue selection. Paradigms provide a fundamental, simplified representation of complex viewpoints, thereby facilitating informed decision-making (Rustanto, 2015). This study is grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which conceptualizes social reality as holistic, complex, dynamic, and imbued with meaning, characterized by reciprocal interactions.

This study is part of qualitative research. This approach aims to reveal the unique characteristics of individuals or groups in daily life with detailed, comprehensive, and scientifically credible insights. Qualitative research prioritizes understanding phenomena from the participants' perspectives through flexible and interactive methods, thereby offering an in-depth exploration of social phenomena from the participants' viewpoints (Moleong, 2012).

Research Method

This research employs the virtual ethnography method, which is utilized to investigate social phenomena occurring among users of internet-based new media. Consequently, this approach allows ethnographers to extract data directly from online users (Nasrullah, 2018).

The criteria for selecting a virtual community suitable for virtual ethnography include:

- 1) High levels of interaction within the community, such as views, likes, and comments on posts among members.
- 2) A diverse range of discussion topics, providing sufficient material to capture emerging issues from comments on posts.



Research Object

The research object is intrinsically linked to the focal issue or subject of investigation. This study examines the Instagram account Official BTS @bts.bighitofficial as a medium for parasocial interaction within the Army fandom. The focus is on the official BTS Instagram account, chosen for its unique role as the only verified platform where BTS fans can engage in virtual interactions. This account serves as a central hub for fan communication, making it an ideal object for studying parasocial relationships and community dynamics within the fandom. The data was collected from June 1 to 30, 2023, for several reasons. Firstly, this period coincided with the release of BTS's new album, "Take Two." Secondly, June marked the tenth anniversary of BTS, a milestone likely to intensify parasocial interactions between BTS fans and their idols.

Data Collection Techniques

1) Virtual Observation

Observation is a research technique that involves the systematic recording of phenomena or behaviors in daily life, whether individual or group-based. In this research, virtual observation is employed to analyze the dynamics of parasocial interactions within the Army fandom via the Instagram account @bts.bighitofficial.

2) Interviews

Interviews are a qualitative data collection technique aimed at obtaining information regarding individuals related to specific events or occurrences. This research employs online interviews to validate data collected from the Instagram account @bts.bighitofficial. The interview subjects are BTS fans or ARMY members and followers of the Instagram account, focusing on the parasocial interactions within the ARMY fandom on this platform.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Findings

The Profile of Instagram account @bts.bighitofficial

The Instagram account @bts.bighitofficial serves as the official digital platform for the South Korean boy band, 'Bangtan Sonyeondan' or BTS. As of June 15, 2023, this account has garnered a substantial following of 73.6 million users and maintains its network by following the six members of BTS along with four supplementary official BTS accounts. The account's activity is reflected in its 1,323 posts. The bio section on Instagram explicitly confirms the account's official status as the official BTS account, providing information on their latest musical release, "Take Two." It includes a designated hyperlink, [BTS ingrv.es/TakeTwo](https://bts.ingrv.es/TakeTwo), which directs users to nine pre-selected platforms for streaming the song.



Figure 2. Official BTS Instagram Profile



(Source: <https://instagram.com/bts.bighitofficial>)

Virtual observations conducted by the researcher reveal a predominance of purple across the official BTS account, aligning with the official color of their fanbase, ARMY, since November 2016. This chromatic choice draws inspiration from a statement made by Taehyung, also known as “V” of BTS, who declared, “I purple you,” at the conclusion of a performance. V elucidated from the stage that purple, being the last hue of the rainbow, embodies love, and conveys a message of eternal trust and affection.

1) Instagram Feed

The account's Instagram feed is characterized by intermittent updates, which are contingent upon the occurrence of specific activities such as photo shoots, new album launches, solo member album releases, and milestone celebrations like their recent tenth anniversary. The frequency and volume of posts are inconsistent. The researcher's observation indicates that each update may consist of a minimum of three posts and a maximum of nine, adhering to a format that segments posters to fit Instagram's visual dimensions. Occasionally, singular posts are presented but are grouped in threes to preserve the curated aesthetic of the feed. Each post is meticulously crafted to ensure visual engagement.

2) Highlights

The BTS official Instagram profile features a collection of 12 highlights. Through virtual observation, the researcher noted that these highlights contain snippets and



behind-the-scenes insights from the members' solo albums and BTS songs, enabling followers (ARMY) to access these posts without temporal limitations.

3) Instagram Stories

According to the virtual observations, the BTS official Instagram account does not provide daily updates via stories. Stories are updated in response to noteworthy announcements such as new album releases or solo member albums and other BTS-related activities. These stories can vary in number, ranging from a maximum of 16 posts to a minimum of three pertinent notifications. This study engaged five informants, whose profiles are delineated below:

Actions of communication among the ARMY Fandom

Drawing from virtual observations conducted through a virtual ethnography method on the official BTS Instagram account, @bts.bighitofficial, coupled with interviews, the research identifies various actions of communications engaged by ARMYs on this platform. Predominantly, these interactions are facilitated by Instagram users operating cyber accounts. The study has also delineated several terminologies frequently employed by K-Pop enthusiasts, as substantiated through the observations and interviews. Key among these terminologies are:

ARMY Shipper

According to data gathered from interviews with various informants, the term "ARMY Shipper" denotes ARMY members who frequently engage in speculative matchmaking among the BTS members. This sentiment was articulated by informant Andi Puja, who stated:

"We ARMYs often refer to ourselves as 'shippers,' a term well-known within the K-pop community. ARMY shippers are those who not only idolize a particular BTS member but also enjoy speculating romantic pairings between members."

This perspective was further corroborated by Dea Anisa, who remarked:

"In the comment sections, I've noticed references to ARMY shippers, a group known for their frequent matchmaking among the members. Personally, I perceive ARMY shippers as potentially detrimental to BTS, as they can come across as overly assertive and insistent."

The concept of 'shipper,' as expounded by the informants, is further evidenced by the presence of shipper accounts on the official BTS Instagram. These accounts typically idolize one member and their preferences are manifest in the comment sections, as depicted in the following documentation.

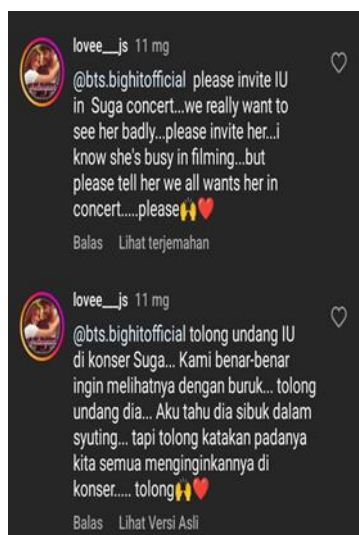


Figure 3. Parasocial Interaction of ARMY Shippers
(Source: <https://instagram.com/bts.bighitofficial>)

ARMY Solo Stan

The term "ARMY solo stan" describes fans who concentrate their admiration on a single group member, devoid of any animosity towards the others. This terminology was elucidated through interviews, including an account by Gatri, a dedicated BTS fan:

"I'm aware of the 'solo stans' among BTS fans, individuals who devote their admiration to just one idol. From my observation, their interactions in the comments sections across various media platforms remain positive."

Dea Anisa, an ARMY member and follower of the official BTS Instagram, reinforced this observation:

"I've come across the term 'solo stan' within K-pop fandoms, including ARMY. The comments from solo stans that I've encountered appear respectful, thus, they don't seem to align with the behavior of other toxic fans."

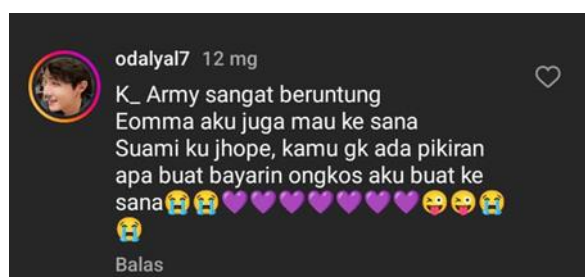


Figure 4. Parasocial Interaction of ARMY Solo Stan
(Source: <https://instagram.com/bts.bighitofficial>)



ARMY Defender

The designation "Defender" was formulated by the researchers based on meticulous observations. This label is apt, as these ARMY members are known for their fervent defense against disparaging comments targeting their idols in the BTS official Instagram comment sections. ARMY Defenders are consistently present, upholding their idols against criticism from detractors.

This phenomenon is substantiated through documented evidence as follows:



Figure 5. Parasocial Interaction of ARMY Defenders
(Source: <https://instagram.com/bts.bighitofficial>)

Through the medium of social media, particularly the official BTS Instagram account, ARMYs freely channel their emotions, one avenue being the defense of their idols from negative commentary. As illustrated in the preceding documentation, ARMY Defenders typically counteract negative remarks directed at BTS. These responses are independently composed by BTS fans, not the official BTS account.

Additionally, the virtual observations disclosed that certain ARMYs populate the comment sections with BTS song lyrics. For instance, one documented account provided the complete lyrics to "Butter," while others included lyrics from "Fake Love," both BTS songs. This mode of interaction represents a unique form of parasocial engagement where ARMYs strive to overshadow negative comments by showcasing their support through BTS lyrics.

Tasya Kefi, an ARMY member and follower of the official BTS Instagram, reflected on this phenomenon:

"Within the official BTS account's comment section, hate comments from detractors are inevitable. We ARMYs often respond with an array of emojis, positive remarks, and even BTS song lyrics, aiming to submerge the hate."

Gatri further articulated:



"Negative remarks from BTS critics are interspersed within the official BTS Instagram comment section. In response, ARMYs employ various strategies, including the transcription of BTS lyrics, to obscure these negative comments."

ARMY's Positive Vibes

In the course of this research, the ARMY, the dedicated fanbase of BTS, has been highlighted for their distinct approach to online interactions, particularly in the context of responding to negative comments. Unlike the typical reactionary behavior often observed in digital spaces, the ARMY's positive vibes members consciously refrain from retaliating with hostility. Instead, they cultivate a positive atmosphere within the comment sections of official BTS social media accounts. Their engagement is characterized by politeness, courtesy, and the frequent provision of motivational and affectionate messages directed towards the group. These behaviors were systematically documented during virtual observations conducted on the official BTS Instagram account (@bts.bighitofficial), providing empirical support for the community's constructive online presence.

ARMY Emoji

The term "ARMY Emoji" refers to a subset of BTS fans who predominantly use emojis as a means of expressing their sentiments within the comment sections, engaging in what can be described as nonverbal communication. Virtual observations conducted by the researchers revealed that these ARMY members, labeled as "ARMY Emoji," often engage in parasocial interactions by exclusively using emojis to convey their thoughts and emotions in comments. This phenomenon is illustrated in the following figure:

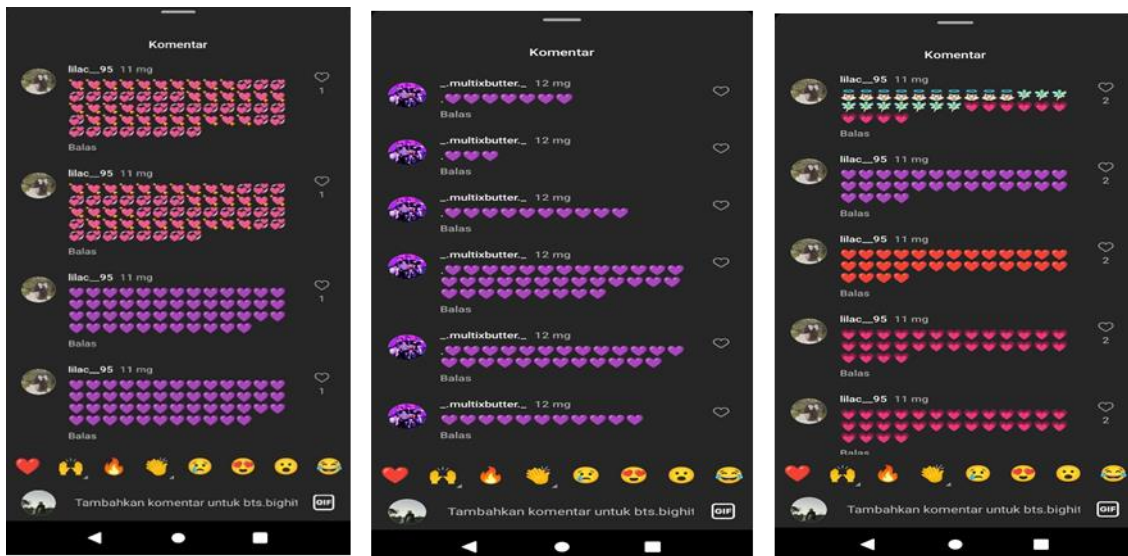


Figure 6 ARMY Emoji Parasocial Interaction
(Source: <https://instagram.com/bts.bighitofficial>)

ARMY Akgae

Virtual observations conducted by the researchers have identified distinct characteristics associated with ARMY Akgae within the comment sections of the official BTS Instagram account. These individuals often express their views in a direct and unfiltered manner, and are known to disparage other BTS members or fellow ARMYs who hold differing opinions.



The nature of ARMY Akgae was further elucidated through an interview with informant Tasya Kefi, who stated: “In ARMY, there are, of course, individuals who can be described as a thorn in the community. These ARMY members are disruptive and are referred to as ARMY Akgae. Similar to ARMY sasaeng and solo stans, ARMY Akgae only idolize one member and disregard the others, even going so far as to perceive the other members as obstacles to their favored idol's career.”

This perspective was corroborated by informant Gatri, who remarked: “I do not consider ARMY Akgae to be true ARMY. In my view, ARMY are fans who support and love all seven members of BTS. However, ARMY Akgae focus solely on their preferred member, disregarding the others, and often engage in inappropriate behavior such as disparaging other members and the official BTS account.”

The symbolic meaning of the cyber communication actions of K-Pop fans in virtual spaces

The ARMY shippers utilize the comment section of BTS's official Instagram account as a medium to express their desire to pair their favorite idols. In the comment section, ARMY shippers, often disregarding the opinions of other ARMYs, enthusiastically provide suggestions to their preferred idols. This type of fan seeks to assert their identity as a collective that values equilibrium, positing that a life lived in pairs represents a form of completeness. They strive to demonstrate that their fan engagement is rooted in this principle of balance.

ARMY solo stans also engage in parasocial interactions on the official BTS Instagram account. Through comments filled with praise and heartfelt confessions, these solo stans express their emotions and admiration within the comment sections. The symbolic meaning derived from the comments on Instagram is that these types of fans are keen to manifest their profound admiration for their idols. They elevate the idols to the status of exemplary figures, worthy of emulation and adulation. Through their interactions, fans not only express their affection but also underscore the influence of the idols as role models, shaping the behavior and attitudes of their followers.

The third group, ARMY defenders, participates in parasocial interactions by countering negative comments directed at BTS on the official Instagram account. In their defensive comments, they often incorporate words of adoration for the BTS members, thus contributing to the parasocial interaction phenomenon. This type of fan aims to communicate that they are heroes prepared to defend and enhance the idol's image positively. Whenever negative comments arise from netizens, these fans are ready to counter with supportive comments, ensuring that their idols are consistently portrayed in a favorable light. This protective stance underscores their dedication and commitment to safeguarding the idol's reputation, positioning themselves as steadfast advocates within the fan community.

The ARMY Positive Vibes frequently engages in parasocial interactions on the comment sections of BTS's official Instagram account. The ARMY Positive Vibes members overlook any ongoing issues within the comment section and remain focused on the BTS members, continuously supporting and prioritizing the members' well-being in their comments. This group seeks to project an image of being peace-loving K-pop fans. Their symbolic communication reflects this intent through a consistently neutral, positive tone, avoiding any form of derogatory or inflammatory language. During virtual observations, the researchers identified the ARMY Emoji group. These fans express their affection solely through emojis, using them as a means of parasocial interaction on BTS's official Instagram account. This category of fan seeks to

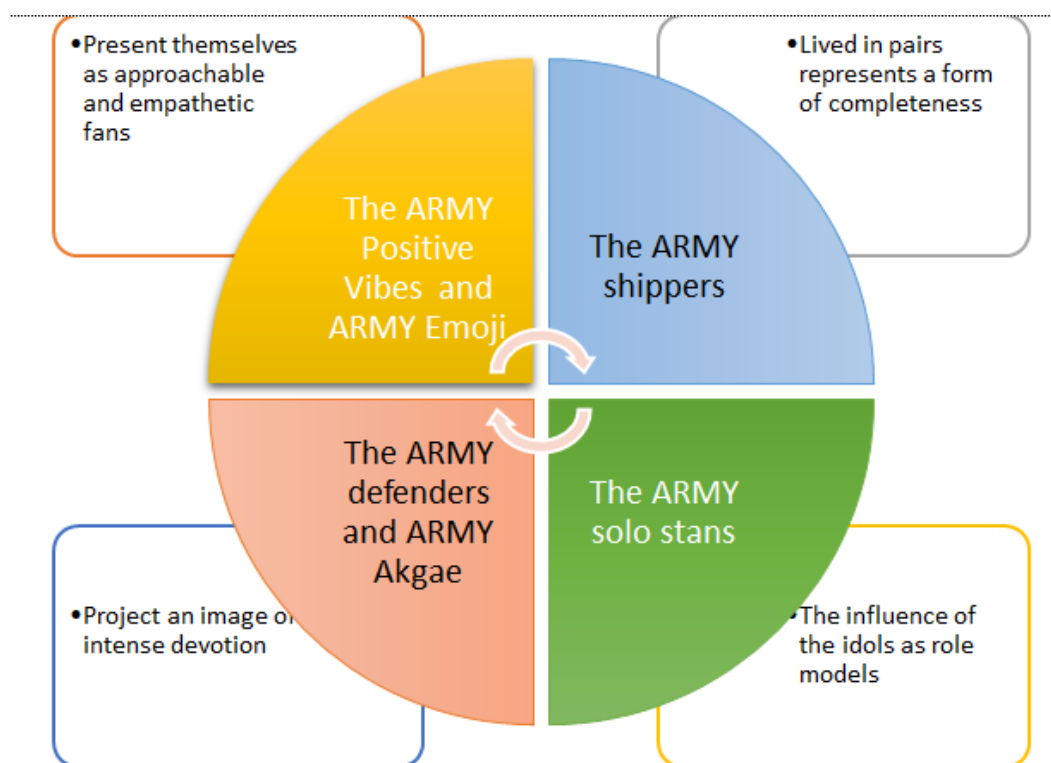


cultivate an impression of alignment with the communicative energy expressed by fellow enthusiasts. Such individuals aim to present themselves as approachable and empathetic, thereby fostering a sense of camaraderie and ease in interpersonal interactions within the fan community.

The final group, ARMY Akgae, consists of fans who are intensely obsessed with their favorite idols. The researchers found that ARMY Akgaes engage in parasocial interactions on BTS's official Instagram account in a rather extreme manner. When their favored idol is perceived as overlooked, they offer suggestions and defend the idol with impolite and confrontational comments. This type of fan aspires to project an image of intense devotion, characterized by a readiness to confront other fans in response to any perceived threats or disparaging messages directed towards their idols.

The overall symbolic meaning reflected in the communication messages developed during the parasocial interaction process among BTS K-pop fans can be visualized in Figure 7.

Figure 7. The Symbolic Meaning of the cyber communication actions of K-Pop fans



Source: author's own work



Discussion

The findings of this study elucidate the significant influence of new media rooted in social networks on individuals' lives. The widespread adoption of social media, particularly Instagram, creates a constructed environment where human activities increasingly shift from the physical realm to the digital sphere (Piliang, 2012). This transition enables the creation of virtual communities wherein individuals, despite lacking personal acquaintance, interact as they would in traditional, physical communities. The emergence of these virtual communities consequently leads to the development of a unique virtual culture (Illahi & Aditia, 2022).

The findings of this study reinforce the conclusions drawn by previous researchers. Specifically, this study validates the research of Wishandi and colleagues, which illustrates that the devotion of teenagers who identify as K-Pop BTS fans is reflected in their everyday behaviors, including their idolization of their favorite artists and the demonstration of their fanaticism through social media platforms (Wishandy et al., 2019). Similarly, the second study, titled "The EXO-L Community in Yogyakarta City," substantiates that K-Pop fans exhibit their admiration for their idols through varying degrees of fanaticism (Juwita, 2018). As discussed in the preceding section, the fanaticism of BTS fans is manifested through diverse communication behaviors, including those of ARMY shippers, ARMY solo stans, ARMY defenders, ARMY Positive Vibes, ARMY Emoji, and ARMY Akgae.

The phenomenon of fan fanaticism can be interpreted as a social indicator that precipitates various ancillary behaviors. Firstly, the intimate emotional connection between fans and their idols gives rise to mimetic behaviors, with fans readily adopting their idols' fashion sense, speech patterns, and desire to collect something related to K-Pop idols (Janah, 2014; Lathifah, Herman, & Yusaputra, 2019). Secondly, the fervor displayed by K-Pop fans contributes to the increased consumerist tendencies prevalent among adolescents (Hidayati & Indriana, 2022).

The communicative practices demonstrated by these largely adolescent fans can be comprehended as a means through which they seek to forge their genuine identities. Social media has played a pivotal role in connecting individuals with similar interests, thereby allowing them to construct and consolidate their identities as aficionados of the K-Pop group BTS (Janah, 2014). Given that fans congregate and engage on the same social networking platform, Instagram, the influence of peer groups in shaping their identity is notably profound (Asyia, Sinurat, Dianto, & Apsari, 2022).

The formation of adolescent self-identity in relation to intense fan behavior necessitates careful management and direction. Failure to provide adequate guidance may precipitate the emergence of adverse behaviors, such as symbolic violence, psychological abuse, verbal aggression, and other forms of virtual violence. Consequently, numerous teenage K-Pop fans are vulnerable to cyberbullying on social media, a risk heightened by their extensive online engagement (Andriani, Anwar, Akram, & Alimuddin, 2020). One of the triggers for cyberbullying is the emotional upheaval and indignation provoked by posts or tweets that denigrate and malign their idols on social media (Widya Sandrila & Wahyunengsih Wahyunengsih, 2023).

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism theory, the communicative actions of BTS K-Pop fans are intrinsically linked to the meanings they construct as fans. These meanings emerge from the exchange of symbols among fans through social interactions on Instagram. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes that the essence of social processes lies in the creation,



dissemination, and interpretation of meanings associated with symbols representing objects, individuals, and events (University et al., 2022). The meanings generated by these fans are further reinforced through parasocial interactions facilitated by Instagram. This is consistent with previous research, which suggests that K-Pop fans in Surabaya express their affection for their idols by generating symbolic meanings that represent both their individual and collective identities (Dewi Rahma & Machfud Fauzi, 2023).

Figure 8 illustrates the communication behaviors of K-Pop fans when analyzed through the framework of symbolic interaction theory.

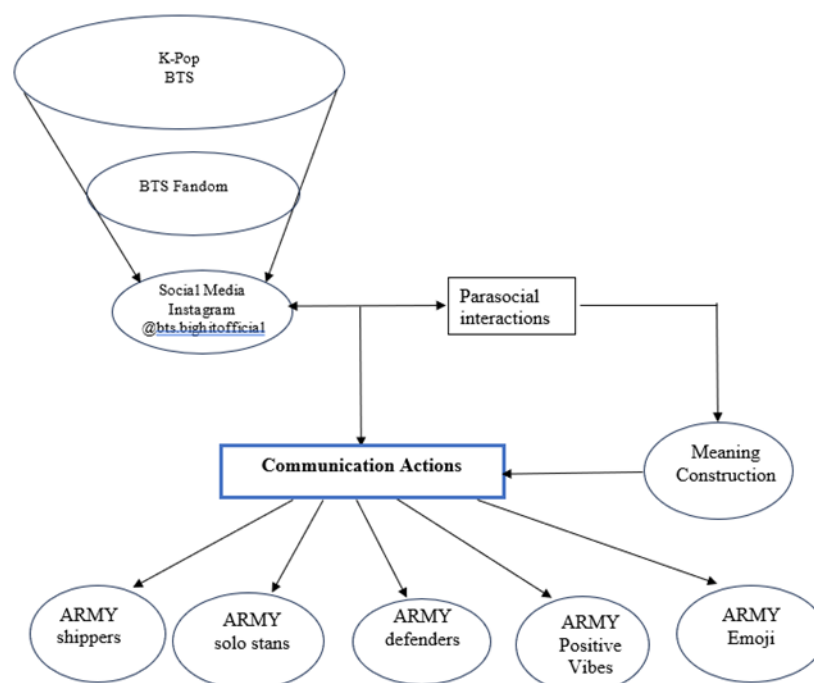


Figure 8. Communication actions of K-Pop fans

Source: Author's own work

The limitations of this research include the fact that interviews with informants were conducted online due to their geographical locations, which are dispersed across Indonesia. Consequently, these interviews were less comprehensive. Additionally, the research sample lacked variety and diversity. Future researchers are advised to narrow the scope and focus of their studies to allow for data collection that extends beyond virtual observation, incorporating face-to-face in-depth interviews. Moreover, ensuring a diverse range of informants is crucial for obtaining a broad spectrum of information.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this study are as follows: First, Instagram functions as a communication tool that facilitates parasocial interactions between K-Pop BTS fans and their idols. Second, these parasocial interactions lead to the development of distinct communication behaviors among fans, categorized into groups such as ARMY shippers, ARMY solo stans, ARMY defenders,



ARMY Positive Vibes, ARMY Emoji, and ARMY Akgae. Third, the communication behaviors observed are a result of meaning construction through the exchange of symbolic messages. The symbolic meanings underpinning these communication actions include the depiction of balance and completeness through paired interactions, the portrayal of idols as role models, expressions of intense devotion, and the symbolism of fans being approachable and empathetic. Finally, the parasocial interactions of BTS K-Pop fans, apart from showing their fanaticism towards their idols, can also be interpreted as a process of self-discovery for adolescents.

REFERENCES

- Andriani, Anwar, C. R., Akram, N. F., & Alimuddin, N. A. (2020). Cyberbullying among teenage K-pop fans. *Jurnal Psikologi Pendidikan & Konseling: Jurnal Kajian Psikologi Pendidikan Dan Bimbingan Konseling Volume*, 6(2), 9–16.
- Anonymous. (2023). Survei APJII Pengguna Internet di Indonesia Tembus 215 Juta Orang. Retrieved from Bisnis.com website: <https://apjii.or.id/berita/d/survei-apjii-pengguna-internet-di-indonesia-tembus-215-juta-orang>
- Asyia, A. D. N., Sinurat, G. D. N., Dianto, N. I. S. A., & Apsari, N. C. (2022). Pengaruh Peer-Group Terhadap Perkembangan Self-Esteem Remaja. *Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat (JPPM)*, 3(3), 147–159.
- Dewi Rahma, M., & Machfud Fauzi, A. (2023). Fanatisme Remaja Penggemar Musik Populer Korea (K-Pop) Pada Budaya K-Pop Dalam Komunitas Exo-L Di Surabaya. *Paradigma*, 12(01), 137–139.
- Handoko, F. A., Rahaju, S., & Siaputra, I. B. (2024). Fanatisme Penggemar K-Pop Indonesia: Identitas Fandom, Tipe Kepribadian, Dan Pemujaan Selebritas Pada Penggemar K-Pop. *Jurnal Psikologi Ulayat*, 11, 55–74. <https://doi.org/10.24854/jpu714>
- Hidayati, N., & Indriana, Y. (2022). Hubungan Antara Fanatisme Dengan Perilaku Konsumtif Pada Remaja Penggemar Kpop Di Semarang. *Jurnal EMPATI*, 11(1), 56–60. <https://doi.org/10.14710/empati.2022.33361>
- Illahi, N. K., & Aditia, R. (2022). Analisis Sosiologis Fenomena dan Realitas Pada Masyarakat Siber. *Jurnal Multidisiplin Dehasen (MUDE)*, 1(2), 75–82. <https://doi.org/10.37676/mude.v1i2.2217>
- Indriani, N., & Kusuma, R. S. (2022). Interaksi Sosial Fandom Army di Media Sosial Weverse. *Jurnal Komunikasi Global*, 11(2), 206–226. <https://doi.org/10.24815/jkg.v11i2.25397>
- Janah, M. (2014). Gambaran Identitas Diri Remaja Akhir Wanita Yang Memiliki Fanatisme K-Pop di Samarinda. *Psikoborneo*, 2(1), 34–40.
- Juwita, S. H. (2018). Tingkat Fanatisme Penggemar K-POP dan Kemampuan Mengelola Emosi Pada Komunitas EXO-L di Kota Yogyakarta. *Jurnal Riset Mahasiswa Bimbingan Dan Konseling*, 4(7), 276. Retrieved from <https://journal.student.uny.ac.id/ojs/index.php/fipbk/article/view/12568>



- Lathifah, I. N., Herman, A., & Yusaputra, M. I. (2019). Pengaruh Mengakses Korean Wave terhadap Perilaku Imitasi Remaja di Kota Palu. *KANAL: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 6(2), 111. <https://doi.org/10.21070/kanal.v6i2.1933>
- Moleong, L. J. (2012). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Mulyana, D. (2013). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif: Paradigma baru ilmu komunikasi dan ilmu sosial lainnya*. Bandung: Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Nasrullah, R. (2018). Riset Khalayak Digital: Perspektif Khalayak Media Dan Realitas Virtual Di Media Sosial Public Digital Research: Media Perspective and Virtual Reality in Social Media. *Jurnal Sosioteknologi*, Volume 17, 271–287.
- Piliang, Y. A. (2012). *MASYARAKAT INFORMASI DAN DIGITAL: Teknologi Informasi dan Perubahan Sosial*. *Jurnal Sosioteknologi*, 27(1), 143–156.
- Rahmawati, I. C., & Hermina, C. (2024). Interaksi Parasosial pada Penggemar K-Pop di Kalimantan Selatan. *Jurnal Psikologi*, 1(4), 15. <https://doi.org/10.47134/pjp.v1i4.2821>
- Riyanto, A. D. (2023). Hootsuite (We are Social): Indonesian Digital Report 2023. Retrieved from andi.link website: <https://andi.link/hootsuite-we-are-social-indonesian-digital-report-2023/>
- Roth, P. (2021). The symbolic costs of advice: how social situations explain the occurrence of unplanned knowledge sharing interactions. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 26(7), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJIM-08-2021-0381>
- Rustanto, B. (2015). *Penelitian Kualitatif Pekerjaan Sosial*. Bandung: Pt Remaja Rosdakarya.: Pt Remaja Rosdakarya.
- University, E. O., Anthonia, U. N., & Nyanayon, F. D. (2022). Distance Learning, Emergency Remote Online Teaching and Symbolic Interaction Theory During COVID-19: Implications for Education in Nigeria. *Direct Research Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies (DRJSSES)*, 10(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.26765/drjses16536478>
- Widya Sandrila, & Wahyunengsih Wahyunengsih. (2023). Motives of Cyberbullying Behavior by Teenage K-Pop Fans on Twitter Social Media. *Jurnal Riset Rumpun Ilmu Sosial, Politik Dan Humaniora*, 2(2), 190–196. <https://doi.org/10.55606/jurrish.v2i2.1351>
- Wishandy, W., Loisa, R., & Utami, L. S. S. (2019). Fanatisme Penggemar K-Pop Melalui Media Sosial (Studi pada Akun Instagram Fanbase Boyband iKON). *Koneksi*, 3(1), 133. <https://doi.org/10.24912/kn.v3i1.6156>

Organized by:



Supported by:



ISBN : 978-623-5644-10-3

Saidahyana Sarabity, Petrus Ana Andung, and Maria Yulita Nara

**Cendana International Conference on Social and Political Science:
Global Knowledge Production from the Southern Region in Social Science 2024**